



KAKEHASHI Project (United States)

Visiting U.S. Program for Think of Okinawa's Future in the United States (TOFU)

Program Report

1. Program Overview

【Objectives and Overview】

30 high school students, university students, and vocational school students, who will lead the future of Okinawa, were dispatched to Washington D.C. and New York in the United States as part of the “Think of Okinawa's Future in the U.S.” (TOFU) Program and were provided with educational opportunities to learn about various fields in English through opinion exchanges, various observations, and other activities with relevant parties. During their stay in the U.S., through visits to various institutions and mutual exchanges with students, the participants themselves deepened their understanding of Japanese politics, economy, society, culture, history, and foreign policy by looking at the Japan-U.S. alliance from a global perspective and reaffirming its significance rooted in a variety of hands-on experiences. The participants also shared the attractions of Japan and Okinawa with the people they met at the various exchanges during their stay in the U.S., as well as what they learned throughout the program and about Japan's foreign policy.

Participants】 Total: 30 participants from Okinawa (18 high school students, 2 vocational school students, 10 university students)

【Locations】 Tokyo / District of Columbia (Washington, D.C.) / New York City, New York

【Schedule】

■ Online Pre-study Program:

Feb. 24 (Mon) **【Pre-departure Orientation】** Project objective and mission, rundown of the schedule, overseas travel warnings, precautions of infectious disease, etc.

■ Dispatch Program:

Mar. 19 (Wed) **【Courtesy Call】**
Mr. ARIMA Yutaka, Director-General / Assistant Minister (Ambassador), North American Affairs Bureau, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
【Courtesy Call】
Mr. KUMAGAI Naoki, Deputy Director-General/ Deputy Assistant Minister, North American Affairs Bureau, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Mr. Aaron Snipe, Political Minister-Counselor, U.S. Embassy Tokyo
Mr. George B. Rowell IV, Brigadier General, Deputy Commander, United States Forces Japan
【Courtesy Call】 Chief Cabinet Secretary: Mr. HAYASHI Yoshimasa
【Courtesy Call】 Mr. IWAYA Takeshi, Minister for Foreign Affairs

Mar. 20 (Thu)	Departure from Haneda Airport Arrival at Washington Dulles International Airport 【Courtesy Call】 Staffers of Senator Mazie Hirono's office, Senator Tim Kaine's office, and Representative Jill Tokuda's office 【Observation】 U.S. Capitol 【Courtesy Call】 Mr. Robert T. Koepcke, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, U.S. Department of State
Mar. 21 (Fri)	【School Exchange】 Columbia Heights Educational Campus (CHEC) Bell Multicultural High School 【Courtesy Call】 Mr. YAMADA Shigeo, Ambassador, Embassy of Japan in the United States of America 【Lecture】 Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) Lecturer: Mr. Nicholas Szechenyi, Vice President of the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)
Mar. 22 (Sat)	【Observation】 Arlington National Cemetery 【School Exchange】 Georgetown University 【Observation】 Japanese American Memorial to Patriotism During World War II Travel from the District of Columbia (Washington D.C.) to New York
Mar. 23 (Sun)	【Observation】 Staten Island Ferry/ Statue of Liberty 【Observation】 National September 11 Memorial 【Observation】 Times Square 【Observation】 Intrepid Sea, Air & Space Museum 【Workshop】 Preparations for the Reporting Session (Summarizing program and findings and preparation of action plans)
Mar. 24 (Mon)	【Courtesy Call】 Mr. Joshua Walker, President & CEO of Japan Society 【Courtesy Call】 Mr. MORI Mikio, Ambassador, Consul-General of Consulate General of Japan, New York Ms. Susan McCormack, Vice President, Japanese American Association of New York Ms. Kay Makishi, Member of the US-Japan Council 【Courtesy Call】 Mr. Ito Koichi, Professional, Department of Operational Support, the United Nations 【Courtesy Call】 Mr. MIKANAGI Tomohiro, Ambassador Extraordinary & Plenipotentiary, Deputy Permanent Representative of Japan to the United Nations 【Courtesy Call】 Mr. Iriya Takayuki, Political Minister, Permanent Mission of Japan to the United Nations

【Observation】 Tour of the United Nations

【Workshop】 Preparations for the Reporting Session (Summarizing program and findings and preparation of action plans)

Mar. 25 (Tue)

Departure from John F. Kennedy International Airport (New York, New York)

Mar. 26 (Wed)

Arrival at Haneda International Airport

2. Program Photos

Dispatch Program

	
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March 19, 2025 【Courtesy Call】 Chief Cabinet Secretary: Mr. HAYASHI Yoshimasa	March 19, 2025 【Courtesy Call】 Mr. IWAYA Takeshi, Minister for Foreign Affairs
	
March 20, 2025 【Courtesy Call】 Staffers of Senator Mazie Hirono's office, Senator Tim Kaine's office, and Representative Jill Tokuda's office	March 20, 2025 【Observation】 U.S. Capitol



March 20, 2025 【Courtesy Call】
Mr. Robert T. Koepcke, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, U.S. Department of State



March 21, 2025 【School Exchange】
Columbia Heights Educational Campus (CHEC)
Bell Multicultural High School



March 21, 2025 【Courtesy Call】
Mr. YAMADA Shigeo, Ambassador, Embassy of Japan in the United States of America



March 21, 2025 【Lecture】
Mr. Nicholas Szechenyi, Vice President of the Center for Strategic and International Studies



March 22, 2025 【Observation】
Arlington National Cemetery



March 22, 2025 【School Exchange】
Georgetown University



March 24, 2025【Courtesy Call】Mr. Joshua Walker, President & CEO of Japan Society



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March 24, 2025 【Observation】 Tour of the United Nations	March 24, 2025 【Workshop】

3. Voices from the Participants (excerpt)

◆ University Student

Through the different observations and exchanges we had, I noticed that Japan's trust-building methods are attracting a lot of attention. I also realized that Japan could harness its unique strengths to build strategic partnerships. Even though it may be difficult to see the short-term effects of such partnerships, they can be very powerful over the medium to long term. It was a great learning experience for me to better understand the characteristics of Japanese diplomacy. It also gave me an opportunity to think about how and why it is important for Japanese youth to get involved in politics. It was a great learning experience for me to recognize the significant role that youth participation in politics will play in Japan's future.

◆ University Student

It was great speaking with graduate students majoring in International Politics and professors at Georgetown University during our visit. I genuinely enjoyed hearing their perspectives from an expert's point of view rather than from an administrative standpoint, and I was able to ask a lot of questions at CSIS, which helped me learn a lot on a personal level. It was also a valuable experience for me to hear from people involved in politics and administration, such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Chief Cabinet Secretary, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

◆ **High School Student**

During the exchange with immigrants from Okinawa, I learned that people with Okinawan backgrounds are playing active roles in the U.S., and this fact I feel has expanded my own possibilities. Also, when I saw people from all over the world working together to understand each other's situation to address a single agenda during our visit to the United Nations, I realized that I too would like to work on such initiatives in the future.

◆ **High School Student**

It was great that we could interact with the local students and deepen our understanding of each other's culture.

4. Voices from the Receiving Parties (excerpt)

◆ **Exchange School Faculty**

I was very impressed to see that some of my students, who had never participated in class or were usually quiet and reserved, voluntarily assisted Japanese students and actively participated. Everyone had a great time showing them around, and because the Japanese students gave many compliments, my students felt proud and grateful for our school even though they often complain.

◆ **Exchange School Student**

I loved how the students were very communicative and introduced themselves to us properly and explained the differences between their school and ours.

5. Disseminations by the Participants (excerpt), Articles, etc.



March 29, 2025 (Instagram)

University Student

I participated in the TOFU (Think of Okinawa's Future in the U.S.) program organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan.

I spent about a week in Tokyo and the U.S., exchanging views with government officials, bureaucrats, think tanks, and many others and learned more about Japan-U.S. relations, and in particular, security issues.

Throughout the program, I kept thinking about "Okinawa's role in the international community."

There are many challenges caused by the presence of U.S. military bases, but I felt that there are also government officials who are working hard to improve the situation.

Therefore, I strongly felt that we who live in Okinawa should not simply condemn the Japanese

government and U.S. military, nor silently accept everything, but should be more proactive and share the problems with people throughout Japan and in the U.S., and work together to come up with solutions. Nevertheless, as a pacifist by nature, I was genuinely heartbroken to see that the world is driven by the idea of realism (assuming the existence of enemies and preventing aggression by maintaining deterrence through armaments).

Having experienced the tragic Battle of Okinawa, I believe that Okinawa's role should be to continue to convey its desire for peace. This is something that neither Okinawa nor Japan should ever forget.

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The most exciting thing about participating in the TOFU Program was that I could candidly discuss base related issues and peace with other people of the same generation.

The experience of meeting people with different opinions, expressing our honest thoughts to each other, and thinking together about “what we should do” was incredibly meaningful.

I am also very grateful that I got the opportunity to meet such a wonderful group of people.

I met many people I respect, both older and younger than me. These last eight days have also helped me to realize how narrow my perspectives were and how poor my English skills still are.

I know that I need to do better. The U.S. was truly a lot of fun!



March 24, 2025 (Instagram)

University Student

I went to the Consulate-General of Japan in New York. I received awesome advice, and I was inspired. I'm feeling motivated to try new, challenging things. Also, I would like to cherish my hometown Okinawa. Thank you so much!



March 30, 2025 (Instagram)

High School Student

Through my participation in the TOFU program, I learned the importance of mutual understanding. By engaging in discussions with Japanese and U.S. government officials, as well as fellow program participants, I had a valuable opportunity to understand different perspectives and reflect on my own opinions. Building on what I have learned, I hope we can become a bridge connecting Okinawa and the United States.



March 19, 2025 (Instagram)

High School Student

Today we went to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I met with my group members, too! Everyone was being proactive about asking questions. Those questions were mostly related to Okinawa's bases which made me realize again that America plays a big role in Okinawa. The most interesting part was when I was able to know how the Americans saw us and a new perspective of Japan. It was such a fulfilling day from the start!

「TOFU」参加の沖縄県の学生、ワシントンで専門家と意見交換…台湾有事など安全保障問題を議論

読売新聞 / 2025年3月22日 16時58分



米側の専門家と日米関係について議論する学生ら（米首都ワシントンの戦略国際問題研究所）→伊藤真司撮影

【ワシントン＝阿部真司】沖縄県の学生を米国に派遣する交流事業「アメリカで沖縄の未来を考える（TOFU）」プログラムに参加する学生が21日、ワシントンの政策研究機関「戦略国際問題研究所」（CSIS）で日米関係について専門家と意見交換した。

CSISのニクス・セーチャーニ・日本部1席研究員は会合で、「同盟関係の本質は信頼関係を築くことだ」と説明した。在日米軍基地が集中する沖縄県の特徴を踏まえ、台湾有事などの安全保障問題を議論したほか、地域経済の発展に向けた方策についても意見を交わした。

終了後、沖縄県立開邦高校2年生は「米国が日本と沖縄をどれだけ重要視しているかを理解できた」と語った。

事業は外務省主催で、沖縄県の大学、高校生ら30人が約1週間かけてワシントンやニューヨークと日米の政治関係等と面会し、国際社会での日本の役割について学んでいる。

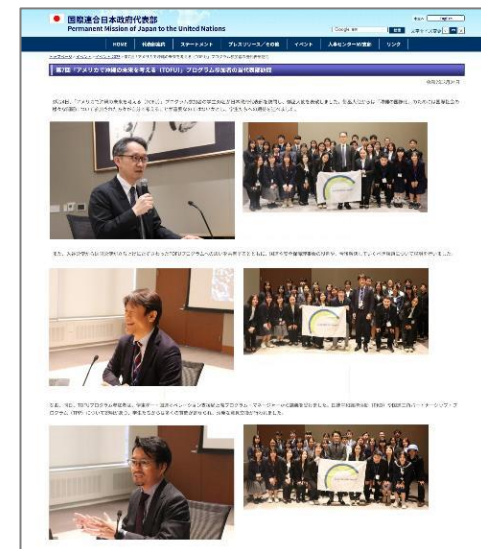
March 22, 2025 (Infoseek News)

“Okinawan Students Participating in ‘TOFU’ Exchange Views with Experts in Washington, D.C. - Discussions on a Taiwan Contingency and other Security Issues Unfolded”



March 28, 2025 (Yomitime)

“Students Participating in the ‘Think of Okinawa's Future in the United States’ Program Attend an Opinion Exchange Meeting”



March 24, 2025 (Permanent Mission of Japan to the United Nations' website)

“Think of Okinawa's Future in the United States (TOFU)” Program Participants Visit the Permanent Mission of Japan

6. Action Plans (excerpt)

Presentations by a total of 5 groups

Group 3		
【Results of the Program】 As an investment in the Global South through Japan-U.S. cooperation, we learned that the key to success in international cooperation is the strategic sharing of roles. For example, Japan can act as a bridge to countries with which the U.S. has not established sufficient relationships, and Japan's involvement can facilitate the acceptance of investments, making international contributions more effective than singular investments. There is a difference between “U.S. military bases for security” and “the perception Okinawans have of bases,” and we re-acknowledged the need to share awareness of the base issue with people outside of Okinawa, as well as the need for Okinawans to overcome the emotional issues they have with the bases. 【Action Plan】 1. Make proposals to the Prefecture or Board of Education about our approaches to such issues. 2. Hold an online meeting between people from various locations to exchange their local concerns. 3. Arrange an opportunity to hear the opinions of Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the high school research project on U.S. military-related issues.		
Group 5		
【Results of the Program】 The future of Okinawa is constantly changing, and this fact made us think hard about what we can do for the future. We feel that it is important to understand the Japan-U.S. alliance from both countries' perspectives. We learned that we need to think about what specific actions we should take, rather than just jumping to a conclusion in order to come up with an answer. 【Action Plan】 Approaches to understanding U.S.-Japan relations • Conduct roundtable talks with city council members and mayors (proposals for exchange projects with the U.S. military, opinion exchanges, etc.) • Give presentations to junior high school students – Have students deepen their understanding of the Japan-U.S. alliance and base issues. – Convey the importance of thinking from a global perspective (why there are U.S. military bases in Okinawa and the importance of the Japan-U.S. alliance).		

Implementation Agency: Japan International Cooperation Center (JICE)