



KAKEHASHI Project (United States) Alumni Meeting (Chicago) Follow-up Project Report

1. Program Overview

【Objectives and Overview】 This program was conducted in Illinois (Chicago), U.S.A., on March 23, 2025, inviting past KAKEHASHI Project participants (alumni) to physically gather in support of alumni organizations/groups and to experience Japanese culture. The aim of the program was to stimulate their interest in Japan by introducing alumni activities, the JET Programme, the MEXT Scholarship, and having them participate in sake tasting, a matcha experience, and more. The main objective of the program was also to strengthen the alumni network by having alumni interact and ask each other questions.

【Participants】

Total: 21 participants from the U.S. (FY2015-FY2024 KAKEHASHI Project participants)

(Breakdown) 1 high school student, 5 undergraduate/graduate students, 15 working youths

1 guest: Ms. Marion Friebus-Flaman, Executive Director, Japan America Society of Chicago

【Location】

Japan Information Center, Consulate-General of Japan in Chicago, Illinois (Chicago), U.S.A.

【Schedule】

■ In-person Alumni Meeting: March 23 (Sun), 2025

1. Opening remarks

【Address】 Mr. Yuya Murata, Director, Japan Information Center, Consulate-General of Japan in Chicago

【Address】 Ms. Marion Friebus-Flaman, Executive Director, Japan America Society of Chicago

2. 【Presentation】 Presentation by two KAKEHASHI Project alumni

(1) Ms. Claudia Arleth Valencia (FY2017 Invitation Program for Hispanic Caucus)

(2) Ms. Eileen Joy Melad Calub (FY2024 Invitation Program for Asian American Youth (APAICS))

3. 【Presentation】 Presentation by one staff member from the Consulate-General of Japan in Chicago “The JET Programme and MEXT Scholarship”

Mr. Hiroshi Ohoka, Researcher, Japan Information Center, Consulate-General of Japan in Chicago

4. Commemorative photo

5. 【Ice Breaker Session】

6. 【Exchange】 KAKEHASHI alumni networking session

【Cultural Experience】

Matcha Experience (Chado Urasenke Tankokai Chicago Association), Sake tasting

7. Closing remarks

2. Program photos

	
【Opening Remarks】	【Presentation】
	
【Ice Breaker Session】	【Exchange】 Participants enjoying the exchange
	
【Exchange】 Participants enjoying the exchange	【Cultural Experience】 Matcha Experience
	
【Cultural Experience】 Sake tasting	【Commemorative Photo】

3. Voices from the Participants (excerpt)

◆ Undergraduate Student

I loved hearing about everyone's experiences in the KAKEHASHI Project. I especially enjoyed the matcha experience and hearing from the tea ceremony sensei.

◆ Working Youth

I thought the program had a good mix of presentations, networking, and cultural experiences. I thought it was well organized, and I appreciate the venue where it was hosted for being central and accessible. I had no idea other KAKEHASHI alumni would be from different, non-Japanese organizations (i.e. the Jewish group and the Hispanic nonprofit group), so it was fascinating to hear about other peoples' experiences.

◆ Working Youth

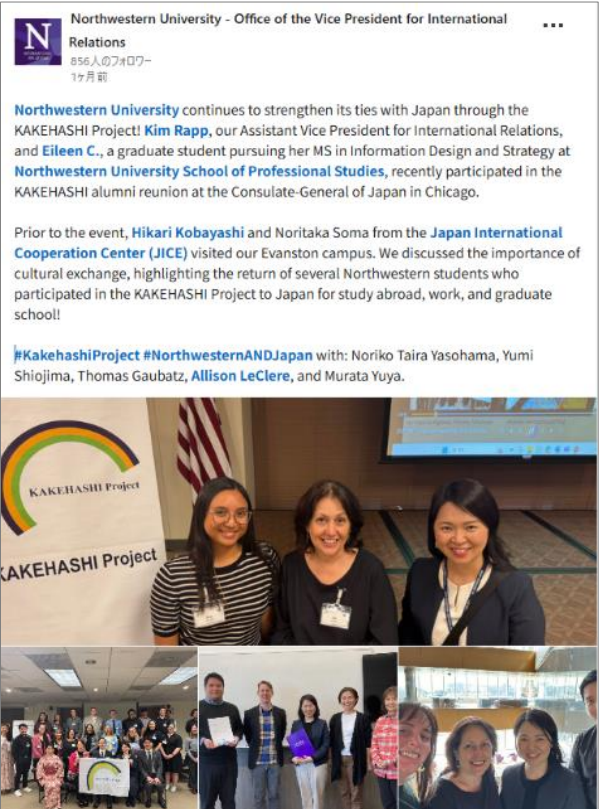
I very much enjoyed hearing about other groups that participated in the KAKEHASHI Program. I am also interested in applying for the JET programme. I enjoyed having the chance to learn about the Japanese matcha and the sake tastings. I enjoyed the Japan trivia, but I wish we got to talk to our group longer. I was happy to volunteer for the event and look forward to future events.

4. Voices from the Receiving Parties (excerpt)

◆ Cooperating Organization (Cultural Experience)

Thank you for allowing us to be a part of the reunion. We truly enjoyed sharing tea with you and your group. Having the opportunity to meet you all was our pleasure.

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

	April 11, 2025 (Northwestern University - Office of the Vice President for International Relations' LinkedIn page) Northwestern University continues to strengthen its ties with Japan through the KAKEHASHI Project! One of our faculty members and a graduate student recently participated in the KAKEHASHI alumni reunion at the Consulate-General of Japan in Chicago. Prior to the event, Hikari Kobayashi and Noritaka Soma from the Japan International Cooperation Center (JICE) visited our Evanston campus. We discussed the importance of cultural exchange, highlighting the return of several Northwestern students who participated in the KAKEHASHI Project to Japan for study abroad, work, and graduate school!
---	--

Ok, it was a one-week program. Yes, I used all my PTO. 🙄

So grateful to the [Asian Pacific American Institute for Congressional Studies \(APAICS\)](#) for awarding me a Kakehashi Project 2025 scholarship and thank you to the [Japan International Cooperation Center \(JICE\)](#) for facilitating such an intensive and immersive program.

This was my first time in Japan and an invaluable opportunity for me to practice the Japanese speaking skills I'd been honing.

Most of the time, when people travel to Japan, they only stick to the big cities. While I did explore Tokyo, my favorite part of the Kakehashi Project was living with a Japanese host family in the snowy countryside of Akita prefecture.

I'll never forget the hospitality of my host family. Sleeping on futon, bathing in the onsen, cooking tempura, and sitting on tatami mats while watching the Dodgers play felt mundane yet special.

People-to-people exchanges have recently been the target of budget cuts, and far fewer participants have had the chance to experience the Kakehashi Project, but programs like this make a lasting impact. I will never forget my time in Japan and those who showed me such kindness.

When I returned to the U.S., I made a presentation about my experience at the Consulate-General of Japan in Chicago. Shoutout to [Kim Rapp](#), whom I met there and who helps encourage study abroad at [Northwestern University](#). I look forward to spreading more awareness of this amazing scholarship!

#kakehashiproject #apaicsleads



April 11, 2025 (LinkedIn)

Graduate Student

In 2025, I got the opportunity to go to Japan as part of the Kakehashi Project.

So grateful to the Asian Pacific American Institute for Congressional Studies (APAICS) for awarding me a Kakehashi Project 2025 scholarship.

This was my first time in Japan and an invaluable opportunity for me to practice the Japanese speaking skills I'd been honing.

Most of the time, when people travel to Japan, they only stick to the big cities. While I did explore Tokyo, my favorite part of the Kakehashi Project was living with a Japanese host family in the snowy countryside of Akita prefecture.

I'll never forget the hospitality of my host family. Sleeping on a futon, bathing in the onsen, cooking tempura, and sitting on tatami mats while watching the Dodgers play felt mundane yet special.

People-to-people exchanges have recently been the target of budget cuts, and far fewer participants have had the chance to experience the Kakehashi Project, but programs like this make a lasting impact. I will never forget my time in Japan and those who showed me such kindness.

When I returned to the U.S., I made a presentation about my experience at the Consulate-General of Japan in Chicago. Very grateful to the faculty member from Northwestern University, whom I met at the Consulate-General and who helps encourage study abroad at the university. I look forward to spreading more awareness of this amazing opportunity!

Implementation Agency: Japan International Cooperation Center (JICE)