



# Hi! from SAGA

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## Cultural Exchange in Saga

Our friend, a former Saga University student, started a study group "SAGA Global Study Group" for Japanese people and people from all over the world to get to know each other and exchange their cultures. We interviewed her and learned about her activity.



## Graduation Day

March 2022, Saga University held a ceremony of graduation and degree conferment. It's a day of farewell but also the beginning of new adventure. Find out how a student feels as a graduate of Saga University on that day.



## "International Exchange Associate" in Saga University

The Center for Promotion of International Exchange has the job position called "International Exchange Associate." We interviewed one of the associates who started working with the center this year.



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## Cultural Exchange in Saga

While me and another SUIA member came to Japan for the first time, we got to know one Japanese friend who were a member of Global Leaders, a student group that worked to promote international relationship within Saga University. Her name is Ms. UENO Mei. She was kind, friendly and enthusiastic about learning different cultures and language around the world. She loves to experience new culture so much that she went to work in Cebu, Philippines after her graduation. Now she is back in Saga, with her enthusiasm over exchanging culture with foreigners and Japanese people who like to explore different culture like herself, she started a group called "the SAGA Global Study Group!". Today, we got a chance to interview her. Let's find out about her activity in that group together.



### Please introduce a little bit about yourself and about the event you are holding

My name is Mei Ueno. I graduated from Saga University in 2018 with a bachelor degree of Culture and Education. After graduating, I had worked in a company's English education department for 4 years: 2 years in Saga and the other 2 years in Cebu, Philippines. I came back to Saga in February, 2022 and I started a weekly study group called "SAGA Global Study Group (SGSG)!" on Fridays. My vision with this study group is to "Normalize Diversity." I want this group to become a community that embraces diversity and helps people enjoy learning from each other.



### Since when have you become interested in foreign culture?

I believe it's my older sister who influenced me to like foreign languages and cultures. She went to study abroad when she was a high school student and I was in the 3rd grade in elementary school. While she was studying abroad, she would send me and my family some cards and snacks, and I remember being excited to see the colorful letter cards and weird snacks that you could

never see in Japan. Ever since, I have been interested in things foreign and other languages. Going to the school library and reading books about many different languages was one of my favorite things to do in elementary school.

### How did studying in Saga University helps you understand more about foreign culture?

The university offered students variety of opportunities to learn foreign cultures in both of its curricular and extra-curricular activities, which was very helpful. Although I wasn't a good student in class normally, I enjoyed English and Korean classes. Especially, I appreciate my English teacher, the late Mr. Terry Fellner, who taught us the core of English languages like pronunciation and practical reading in the International Study Abroad Curriculum (ISAC). He was the most passionate English teacher I have ever met. Besides classes, I made the most of it by using almost all of the learning offerings to study abroad such as the short-term and long-term study abroad programs, free gap year system and grant-type scholarship

### During your study in Saga University, did you do a lot of activities with foreign friends?

YES! I was with international students every day on campus. First of all, I was a member of the student organization "Global Leaders." I was in charge of the event called "Language Lounge" every week in Japanese and Korean with international students.



I also did a tutor to assist international student after they arrived in Japan. It was also fun to organize cultural exchange events as a member of the international exchange club "LIFE." I enjoyed interacting with international students as part of my daily routine. We also went out to restaurants, Karaoke and some trips together.

### I heard that you went to work abroad in the Philippines, could you tell us a little about your experience there?

It was amazing experience. I was relocated to the Philippine branch and worked with over 150 Filipino people for 2 years. My task there was to be a bridge between Japanese schools from elementary to high schools and Filipino English teachers. I managed their lesson schedules and contents. On my work days, I was working day and night like crazy, but on my days off, I often went out with my friends who are from the Philippines, Vietnam, Korea and China. Moreover, I got to meet someone who I can call my mentors, which helped me become more generous and understanding to other people. I also experienced some unexpected things like such as the long lockdown of the whole city as well as the huge typhoon that had damaged my area badly. After all, I think those experiences made me more diligent in my action, thinking and my way of living.

### How did you feel about being in the foreign country for work the first time? Do you think it is different from going for studying?

In my case, studying abroad and working abroad were totally different things. I believe working together as a



team in order to meet clients' needs, then grow together as a team is the goal in working while I consider individual learning and growth is the most important thing in studying abroad. My first year in the Philippines was tough. Everything didn't go as I planned since my Filipino co-workers had different culture and ways of thinking to mine, and I didn't know how to handle it at first. The tasks I asked them to do used to come back to me as unwelcomed surprises every day. Countless times, I thought "How easy would it have been if it had been with Japanese co-workers..." I had done some things hurtful to those Filipino workers by pushing my way of thinking several times. I regret it a lot now and feel sorry for them. Fortunately, it became a little better in my second year as I made some Filipino friends and started seeing and understanding Filipino culture. Eventually, I began to remind myself constantly that people of different cultures might not perceive information in the same way as mine. In the second year, I was able to enjoy working in a different way considering that the culture was different and accepting that. I think that was my first-time being able to understand different culture in a deep level.



### **Lastly, what is the near future goal you would like to achieve for the SAGA Global Study Group?**

My vision for this study group is to "Normalize Diversity." Each person has their own culture. I always love the feeling when you meet someone and discover something new, and I hope more people can have experience like that, too. It would be great if this group became one big community where people can feel free to express themselves and exchange opinions. I always say a language is just a tool, so it doesn't matter which language people use in my group. English conversation club is not what I want. I believe what's more valuable is beyond English language. There are so many Japanese people who want to meet foreigners but don't speak English at all. I want more people like them to come to the group, too.



My near-future goal for the group is to get Technical Intern Trainees to join from Vietnam, China and the Philippines because I know they account for a large percentage of foreign population in Saga. It's all over the news that Technical Intern Trainees tend to be treated unfairly in Japan as "cheap labor." I want to look for what I can do

to help them by making connections first. Also, I want them to be friends with many nice Japanese people in my group.

Eventually, I hope this group could have some influence on people to embrace differences more, so that Saga will become an even better place. Lastly, my passion is social justice and I couldn't be happier if more members from this group in the future started taking social issues personally and taking actions to solve them!!

That's all for today's interview with Ms. Ueno Mei. If anyone happens to be interested in the SAGA Global Study Group! Please check out the flyer. I also hope to see you guys at the study group.  
(Peemaphat)

## **Graduation Ceremony**

As human beings, we encounter many challenges and achievements that make up what is called "life". However, there is no doubt that "graduation" is one of those grateful moments in life that is recognized as a milestone.

I graduated from master's degree of "Graduate School of Advanced Health Science", Saga University. It was a rainy day, which is usually perfect for staying in bed with a cup of coffee and a movie. However, as it was a special day for me, I woke up early before the alarm went off. As an international student, this was the first time I could celebrate and learn about the culture of graduation ceremonies in Japan. Therefore, I was very excited to go. The graduation ceremony was divided into two sessions: ceremony at the Saga City cultural hall and ceremony of receiving degrees from lab professors at the University.

In the morning of graduation day, I went to the cultural hall with my friends who were graduating together with me. The air was cold, and the weather was raining. However, the surrounding environment was greener than ever due to the last night rain. When we arrived at the venue, I saw many graduating students happily taking pictures. Most of the Japanese girls were wearing traditional Japanese clothing as known as kimono and the boys were wearing suits. Despite of being early in the morning, everyone looked fresh and full of energy. During the ceremony, we've got a chance to hear the speech of University's president and to get to know the head professors of each faculty and graduate school.

This year, Sakura bloomed faster to greet Saga University students for their graduation ceremony. The graduation ceremony was held on 23rd March 2021 located in Saga City Cultural Hall. Students couldn't go there with any family members in this time, since it is one of the rules for corona virus prevention by Saga University. Everyone was really happy to know that there will be a graduation ceremony in this year, including me. I was the one of students who are lucky enough to enjoy the graduation ceremony in this year.

I started that day by going to Saga station by bus to meet my lab mates there and then going to the venue together. The situation in the venue was so crowded, but it was safety since everyone was having the mask and implementing the physical distancing rules too, even we had to submit our profile data and seat number before the ceremony started.

The first ceremony started with the opening, singing the Japanese national anthem (Kimigayo), conferring graduation certificate, a speech from Saga University president, a word from students, the announcement of student award and then closing. I personally felt amazed when we were singing the Kimigayo with the flag of Japan and Saga University there surrounded by many beautiful Hakama (the kimono for graduation). I was about to cry remembering how hard to be here and finally I could make it happens. Thanks God.

The second ceremony was held in the university. In this ceremony, we were asked to come to the front of the hall one by one to get the graduation certificate by the chief of each department.

After the morning ceremony, I went back to my lab and greeted my professors. My professor gave me my master's degree. In Japan, graduation certificates are awarded by our respective professors. This is one of the cultures I've learned so far in Japan regarding university graduation. After receiving my diploma, I had a great fun time with my friends who graduated at the same time as me, and with friends who came just to cheer me up.



To sum up, graduation day is a day of excitement and accomplishment. However, it's not the ending, it is just the beginning of the life. If life is a boat, graduation certificate is the paddle to row the boat forward. After graduating, we have to take full responsibility for our lives. Therefore, we can say that graduation is one of the turning points of our lives.

Last but not least, I want to shout out to all my friends who are going to graduate – “You have been working hard enough and you deserve to reflect on this experience with pride!”  
(Myat Htoo San)

## International Exchange Associate

“An international exchange associate” is a Saga University student who works together with staff of Center for Promotion of International Exchange using a foreign language and Japanese language ability and also the knowledge and experiences of international exchange.

An international exchange associate is able to not only utilize your skill or experiences but also have a new experience working at a Japanese office and learn Japanese business culture and manner.

The appointment of student associates is aimed at fostering human resources who can play an active role internationally. The duties of this position include translating and preparing documents and other materials working with the Center for the Promotion of International Exchange, as well as providing support for the daily lives of international students. They also participate in official events such as international exchanges and forums with overseas universities. Currently, four international students from China, Vietnam, and Malaysia are enrolled as International Exchange Associates.

In this issue, we interviewed Mr. Lee Jin Yien, who is currently studying at Saga University from Malaysia. He is a first-year student in the Mechanical Systems Engineering course of the Graduate School of Science and Engineering.



He has been working at the Center for the Promotion of International Exchange as an International Associate since April this year.

Let's find out how he got this opportunity.

**LEE:** It all started with an e-mail from the Center for Promotion of International Exchange asking if he would be interested in working internationally and learning more about the Japanese office environment. Recruitment information is posted on the Center for Promotion of International Exchange's website and SNS, and they seem to recruit almost every year.

He told me before he liked intercultural exchange.

**LEE:** Yes. Therefore, by applying for the position, I thought I would be able to communicate with foreign students from different background, and that would give me opportunities to broaden my perspective internationally. Also, through this job, I am required to work alongside with Japanese people. As I am interested in working in Japan after graduation, I thought that this might be a chance for me to get used to Japanese working environment.

He described his job as follows.

**LEE:** I can get involved with a lot of tasks from different category. This helps me to learn more about Saga

University. Well, of course he does have some difficulties. Translating documents and sorting out document could be a headache sometimes but the joy of doing it is fulfilling.

Then, I asked him "Do you recommend this job to other international students?" He said "Yes!"

**LEE:** I can get to know about Saga University internationally as in what the university want to achieve internationally. Also, I can get involved in a lot of activity and this serve as a chance for you to communicate with people from different background. Furthermore, working with Japanese people can help us get used to Japanese working environment and might be an advantage for us during job hunting in Japan.

Lastly, he gave us a message related to this position.

**LEE:** For students who are planning to work in Japan, this might be a good chance for you to get used to Japanese working environment. You also get paid during the program so I think it's a great way to enjoy your life in the university while working. (Jevri).

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