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## Students Explore Japanese and Filipino Culture through Freeman Asia Program

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# Students Explore Japanese and Filipino Culture through Freeman Asia Program

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BLOOMINGTON, Ill. — A visit to a historic mountaintop shrine in Japan and a rooftop dinner in Manila with travelers from all over the globe are just a few of the rich cultural experiences gained by Illinois Wesleyan students who participated in the Freeman Asia Internship Program this summer.

A group of 23 students completed internship projects and became familiar with communities in Japan and the Philippines

during their two-month stay overseas. With all expenses paid by a grant from the Freeman Foundation, the program allows students to experience working in Asia through a truly immersive cultural and social experience.

Since its beginning in 2015, the program has sent 189 IWU students to various locations including Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, Thailand and the Philippines. Professor of Sociology Teddy Amoloza, who has served as director of the program, said she has seen students return from the trip more mature and confident after navigating life in a new country.

“They not only learned about the subject matter of their internships but also gained social skills; soft skills that served them well in the next stage of their career. The experience impacted the students and they also impacted and contributed to their internship sites in numerous ways,” said Amoloza.

Marketing major Evie Wilson '25 had no prior experience traveling outside the U.S., so she knew she wanted to study abroad in college — which she assumed would take place in Europe until she learned about the Freeman Asia Internship Program.



Directed by Professor of Sociology Teddy Amoloza, a group of 23 students traveled to Japan and the Philippines this summer to complete projects through the Freeman Asia Internship Program.



Liam Killian '25, left, and Evie Wilson '25, right, stand barefoot next to a rice field in Japan where they were invited to wear traditional farming clothing and plant rice by hand.

Wilson was assigned as an intern for the Shiro Oni Art Studio in Onishi, Japan, where she assisted with the archives, updating artwork and creating menus and guides in English for future artists who will study at the studio.

“It’s a location that pushed me outside my comfort zone and allowed me to learn so much more about the culture and country of Japan,” she said.

Stepping outside of that comfort zone allowed Wilson to participate in a local music festival and play Taiko drums. She also visited Kyoto, Hiroshima and the historic Myogi Shrine. Her favorite experience came during a trip to a nearby rice farm. Students were dressed in traditional rice farming clothing, complete with a straw hat to protect against the sun. Wilson recalled her feet sinking calf-deep in mud as she planted rice in the field for several hours — a process she said made her more inclined to finish every grain at the next meal.

The biggest gain from the trip was not necessarily her internship work, said Wilson, but the personal relationships and cultural education she received.

“I’ve found that people are people wherever you go. Hearing someone’s raw laugh is pure joy and laughing with them is even better. I’ve just made so many connections and learned to get out there and not be afraid to try everything that is offered,” she said.

Nursing major Lukas Wenz '25 also had college goals of studying abroad, but was worried his opportunities would be limited as a student-athlete. He said the summer aspect of the Freeman Asia Internship Program was a perfect fit, especially with the healthcare internship options that were offered.

"I knew it would be an awesome experience to gain perspective on how other parts of the world go about life, especially with regards to healthcare," he said.

Wenz was stationed as an intern with the Nutrition Assessment and Monitoring Division of the Food and Nutrition Research Institute in the Philippines where he learned about nutrition and issues with food insecurity in the country. His team traveled to various provinces collecting nutritional data and completing interviews to assist with a national nutrition survey.

On his days off, Wenz explored the white beaches and limestone cliffs of El Nido in Palawan; socialized with travelers from England, Australia and France; hiked to the top of Mount Binicayan; and enjoyed plenty of local cuisine.

"I've gained so much through simply being immersed in the Filipino culture and have gained insight to what truly matters in life and generates happiness," said Wenz. "From this experience, I believe everyone should be immersed in other cultures as it is truly eye-opening and generates self-reflection."

Read more about the adventures of Freeman Asia interns [through their blog posts here](#).

This trip marked the final year of the Freeman Asia Internship Program at IWU and its grant funding from the Freeman Foundation. Amoloza, who was instrumental in securing the grant totalling over \$1 million beginning in 2015, retired in July last year but remained to complete the final cycle of the program.

Describing the program's impact on students as alumni, she recalled a student who received nearly a full-ride to medical school after highlighting her Freeman Asia internship experience during interviews. Another student assisted the agency where she was assigned by writing a successful 50,000 euro grant proposal. Some students have even returned to Asia to start their careers after graduation.

While noting her regret that future students won't be able to experience this valuable opportunity at Illinois Wesleyan, Amoloza said that she is comforted by the knowledge that 189 students could count their Asia internship experience as a highlight of their undergraduate career. She added that she is profoundly grateful to the Freeman Foundation for the grant award over seven years that enabled IWU students to have impactful and transformative experiences.

Asia partners, internship placements and students who participated this summer include:

#### **Institute for Sustainable Energy Policies — Tokyo, Japan**

Joelle McMillan '25, environmental studies and physics major

Nathalie Romero '25, environmental studies major

#### **Japan Travel — Tokyo, Japan**

Farah Bassyouni '25, English writing major

#### **Soltito GSA International School — Tokyo, Japan**

Gabrielle Schwalm '25, computer science major

#### **Shiro Oni Studio — Onishi, Japan**

Liam Killian '25, history and political science major

Evelyn Wilson '25, marketing major

#### **Technos College — Tokyo, Japan**

Alexis Aranda-Hernandez '25, neuroscience major

Henry Moore '25, biology major

#### **World Friendship Center — Hiroshima, Japan**

Zoe Hovde '24, political science and international studies major

Hanh Nguyen '25, interdisciplinary educational studies and international & global studies major

#### **Food and Nutrition Research Institute — Manila, Philippines**

Kennady Estes '25, kinesiology & allied health and neuroscience major

Abigail Morris '25, nursing major

Lukas Wenz '25, nursing major

Hunter Kennedy '24, philosophy and psychology major

Chrishana Simon '25, environmental studies major

Semaj Young '26, environmental studies and theatre arts major

#### **International Rice Research Institute — Laguna, Philippines**

Hannah Asquith '25, biology and environmental studies major

Samuel Cohrs '24, biology major

Jessica Isaac '25, biochemistry major

Jessica Navarro '26, biology major

Julia McMahan '25, political science and English major

#### **Saint Francis Cabrini Medical Center and Cancer Institute — Batangas, Philippines**

Faith Burgis '24, nursing major

Samuel Ocker '25, biochemistry major (pre-med)



Abi Morris '25, Lukas Wenz '25 and Kennady Estes '25 were stationed as interns with the Nutrition Assessment and Monitoring Division of the Food and Nutrition Research Institute in the Philippines.