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Patty Anderson

Iowa State University

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What's College Like in Japan?

by Patty Anderson
H. Ec. Soph.

WHAT would be the first thing you would learn in a foods course in Japan? You’d learn to steam rice, of course! Though home economics students at Iowa State don’t learn to steam rice in their first foods class, there are many similarities between Japanese and American college students.

There are now about two hundred universities in Japan, and to enter a student must first take an entrance examination. According to Mr. Yuichino Nishina, a Japanese graduate student at Iowa State, many students apply to one college with a difficult entrance examination and one where the exams are easier—just in case! Some students may go to preparatory school for a year to prepare for their entrance examinations. Mr. Nishina said there was some feeling in Japan that students in preparatory schools tend to study just for their entrance examinations instead of a general education.

Once a Japanese student has passed his entrance examinations, he is a student at the college. That is, he is a student for two years, for at many colleges at the end of two years of liberal arts the student declares his major and has to take more entrance examinations to be accepted into his major field of study. A Japanese girl would probably go to a women’s college, especially for home economics. However, there are a few co-educational schools in Japan.

Many Japanese colleges have uniforms that they wear not only to school but also to baseball games and parties. These uniforms help to create rivalry among the men, especially in athletics. The Japanese students enjoy baseball, soccer, hockey, and many other sports. In several Tokyo colleges the students have no class when the school plays a baseball game.

Other student activities include radio and theater groups, mountain climbing clubs, literature clubs, and student government. One difference between student activities in the United States and Japan is that student groups in Japan often have political arguments and debates and may even strike if they really object to something.

Most Japanese students live at home, or if they come from another section of the country they live in boarding houses or with relatives. Mrs. Sachiko Kuchitsu, a home management major at Iowa State from Japan, said that at the college she attended, Tokyo Christian Women’s College, some of the freshmen did not live in dormitories until they got used to life in Tokyo. The dormitories had nine o’clock hours on weekdays, too!

When a girl graduates from college in Japan she will probably work for awhile before she gets married. Introductions in Japan are arranged by family or friends since Japanese women have very little chance to meet men.

Mrs. Kuchitsu and Mr. Nishina noticed several differences between college life in Japan and the United States. Mr. Nishina mentioned all the social life students at Iowa State have and also the newness of the buildings. Mrs. Kuchitsu was surprised that students study as much as they do. Mr. Nishina felt that many college professors are very friendly and informal at Iowa State. When a student in Japan goes to talk to a professor he knocks on the door, bows several times, and speaks in a polite voice.

As you study for finals just remember that if you were a Japanese student you might be studying for a final covering a year’s work instead of a quarter’s work.

Two students at Iowa State who are thousands of miles from home are Mr. Yuichino Nishina and Mrs. Sachiko Kuchitsu from Japan. They find Iowa State college life different from that in Japan.