

Business Communication (Spring)

Understanding Japanese Culture for Business Communication

Instructor: Prof. David Shea

Elective / Basic Subjects / 2 credits

In this course, we will study the customs and ways of thinking that influence communication in Japan, with the goal to promote successful interaction and cultural integration and understanding. Each week, we will read and discuss research dealing with such topics as work, leisure and play, gift giving, language politics, gender roles, the position of minorities, social hierarchies, and (of course) food. We will also talk about how worldviews are shaped by nationalism and class differences, and we will consider these issues from comparative angles, to better understand how similar trends are manifest in other countries as well. The course will be conducted as a seminar, entirely in English, and everyone is expected to participate actively, speaking out and engaging in the discussion each week. Enrollment is open to both students from Keio and from abroad. For international students, the course will help negotiate living and working in Tokyo, while for Japanese, the class will allow fresh perspectives on the familiar. Class activities will include Q&A, student presentation, small group work, and whole-class discussion. There will be few if any lectures, but there will be regular writing assignments along with a semester-final research paper, based on a chosen topic of interest.

Course Plan

- 1 Introductions & overview of key issues/approaches
 - 2 Getting along and fitting in: Hierarchies and worldviews
 - 3 Languages of the archipelago: Nihongo, gairaigo, & English as a lingua franca
 - 4 Pop culture: Manga, anime and brand nationalism
 - 5 Working for a living: Labor, shushoku, economic considerations
 - 6 Taking free-time seriously: Leisure and play
 - 7 Gendered roles: Housework and girly men
 - 8 Communication as community: Ethnic minorities
 - 9 Food and cuisine: Taste, aesthetics, identity
 - 10 Gift giving as social glue
 - 11 Cultural nationalism in a globalizing world
 - 12 Life on the margins: Homeless and the handicapped
 - 13 The ties that bind: Family matters
- Other Final presentations
Independent project: Reading and research

Method of Evaluation :

Evaluation will be based on class participation and completion of all assignments. Attendance (which is mandatory) and participation count for 50% of the course grade. Homework and essays count for 25% and the final project/presentation counts 25% as well.

Textbooks :

There will be no assigned textbook. All readings will be placed on reserve in the library or made available online at the <keio.jp> website. In general, we will read 1-2 articles (about 20-30 pages) per week. Students will also be responsible for collecting articles associated with their individual research projects.

Reference Books :

- Bestor, V.L., Bestor, T.C. & Yamagata, A. (Eds.) (2013). Routledge handbook of Japanese culture and society.
- Hirata, K. & Warschauer, M. (2014). Japan: The paradox of harmony New Haven: Yale.
- Iwabuchi, K. (2015). Resilient borders and cultural diversity. London: Lexington.
- Sugimoto, Y. (Ed.) (2010). The Cambridge companion to modern Japanese culture.

Lecturer's Comments to Students :

This class seeks to be challenging yet interesting and possibly even fun. Students are expected to be energetic, with a sense of creativity and curiosity, attentive and ready to express ideas in a respectful manner. Because discussion of the reading assignments is the central component of the class, everyone must do the reading and be prepared each week. Registration will be limited to 20 students (or so) to allow everyone the chance to participate. There will be a selection if the number of applicants exceeds the quota.

Questions/Comments :

Feel free to contact me by email, or speak to me before or after class. You can also make an individual appointment to talk at any time.