

Growing up in a biracial (African American and Caucasian) household as a twin, I find that my life has been defined by an overall theme of duality. This continues in my college career at CSUMB, as I find myself caught between my two majors: Japanese and Business. I became interested in Japanese as a language and culture, and as I studied it, I found a desire to share my knowledge with others. This desire was reinforced during my time abroad at the University of Kitakyushu, in which I tutored both elementary through college-level Japanese students in English. For most of my adult life, I have lived with the goal of improving my language skills, both native and non-native, to increase the number of people that I can communicate with. Through this scholarship, I hope to continue in my academic endeavors and achieve cross-disciplinary proficiency in business administration Japanese despite any and all time or financial constraints currently placed on me.

When I reached my sophomore year of high school, I began to listen to Japanese music. The constant experience of hearing multiple languages throughout my day started my mind along the path of curiosity and ultimately desire to learn the hidden layers of both English and Japanese. Unfortunately, my music tastes were not, and to some extent, are not readily accepted by most people I meet. In high school, this manifested as forms of teasing and being the butt of several jokes. I also caught wind of people gossiping about me and putting me down because of my uncommon interests. Despite this, I have continually been intrigued by the forms of expression and creativity that can exist within a language that is so fundamentally different from English. In high school, I had a frequent substitute teacher by the name of “Mr. G”, and one day, he heard the Japanese music that I listened to during a music class. He then proceeded to regale me with tales of his college days at karaoke bars and how he learned to read hiragana (the basic syllabary alphabet of Japanese) because of

his love to sing. Unfortunately, Mr. G later passed away due to Leukemia, but the last words he said to me were, “No matter what anyone else says, don’t you ever stop listening to that Japanese music”. After being alone in my love for Japanese music for a long period of time, hearing such powerful words of encouragement from a man that I highly respected immensely impacted me. Japanese music gave me an avenue in which I forged an important and inspiring connection with someone; thus, I hold it close to my heart. As my music library and Japanese proficiency grew, my interest grew with it. Over time, I noticed that I enjoy dissecting language on a figurative level, in both English and Japanese; every word I hear becomes more material to examine and another route to understanding the mind of someone who grew up in a different world than me. Bridging the connection between these two worlds motivates me to continue my studies and push my abilities further. This desire of connecting across fields of knowledge continues into my business degree.

While my interest in business administration may not be as outstanding as my interest in Japanese is, I continue my studies in business because I value the knowledge it bequeaths me. Majoring in two different disciplines is not an easy task, but I find it to be extremely rewarding. Before enrolling at CSUMB, I planned to major in Japanese and minor in Business if my courses allowed the leeway necessary. However, as I spoke to family members and teachers, they urged me to switch my major and minor. According to them, majoring in business had higher job security. I refused to compromise my passion for Japanese to appease the people around me; I believe that one’s own interest is extremely important when selecting their desired path. Instead of ignoring their urges, I took them as a challenge. Instead of choosing one path to follow, I solidified the concept of duality in my college career by deciding to double major. I believe myself to be capable of not only

studying but mastering both of my fields of study with sufficient determination and time.

In the first section of my college career, I focused on my Japanese major, as reaching high proficiency in an Asian language takes a great deal of time for English speakers. Before studying abroad in Japan, I received straight As in my first two years of Japanese instruction at CSUMB. Therefore, I felt confident that I would perform well in Japan, and reach a high level of proficiency within a semester and return home after 6 months. However, upon arriving in Japan, the university's Japanese placement test results showed that I had the lowest Japanese proficiency among all of the exchange students. My confidence was shattered, and I wanted to return home. I then decided to endure my hardship to reach my desired proficiency; I increased the length of my time abroad since I knew that one semester was not sufficient to meet my definition of success.

During my year abroad at the University of Kitakyushu in Japan, I had many first time-experiences, but the most dramatic experience I faced was true independence. While the University assisted me in setting up my housing and meeting important deadlines, my year alone was the first time that I was independent of my family and friends for a long period of time. I became completely responsible for myself. It was my first time living alone, and my first time leaving the United States. Moreover, I was the only American exchange student studying at the university during that year. These first-time experiences culminated with culture shock and new social barriers which I struggled greatly to overcome, primarily due to a lack of knowledge of non-American cultures. By the end of my exchange, my Japanese proficiency increased dramatically; I became more independent, and I made friends across the world. My year abroad was the most difficult time period of my life to date. I believe that because of this, it was the most rewarding experience of my

life. By struggling through this unfamiliar environment, I found a principal ideology that I now live by, “adversity is the best means for progress”. The duality of language within my life was ultimately realized with this year abroad; Japan now feels like a second home to me.

When I returned to the states, I took part in a Service Learning course at CSUMB in which I taught Japanese language and culture to elementary school children. I served schools in the local Monterey area, focusing on schools with less opportunity to experience Japanese or other foreign cultures due to their financial situation. Many of the students came from marginalized backgrounds, such as Hispanic or African-American, and some did not speak English well. Being involved in this key stage of education allowed me to see different approaches for learning and gave valuable insight into the current situation surrounding the current generation of children. Duality continued as I served as a teacher and learned as a student. Through these experiences, I realized that while I enjoy expounding upon my own knowledge, I enjoy teaching because it allows me to learn while guiding others along the path of knowledge simultaneously. I enjoy assisting people with their own knowledge expansion, but I also enjoy creating bridges of understanding, be that subject matter or people. I intend on entering the Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme to return to Japan for translation work for 2-5 years. Upon my return, I want to apply to the Middlebury Institute of International Studies and seek a degree in simultaneous translation and interpretation for Japanese.