IUB Student’s Love of Language Leads to Career in Japan

Unlike some recent Indiana University Bloomington graduates, Harvey Beasley, who graduated in December 2001 with a double major in Business Computer Information Systems and East Asian Languages and Cultures, has the next few years mapped out.

In July 2002, Beasley, a participant in IU’s 1999-2000 overseas study program in Nagoya, Japan, entered the Information Management Leadership Program (IMLP) of General Electric Japan in Tokyo. IMLP is a two-year training program, consisting of four six-month rotations throughout various GE businesses in Asia. After completing the program, Beasley hopes to be hired by GE into a permanent information technology management position in Japan.

Beasley’s interest in Japanese language started in high school in Iowa. “I was only planning to study it for two years really, just to meet the requirements to enter a university.” A dedicated and energetic teacher from Japan, Yuriko-Kanai Molloy, inspired Beasley to become a serious student of the language and its culture. He completed four years of Japanese in high school and a six-week cultural exchange program in Japan between his junior and senior years. “I still thank her today; she really had a strong influence on my life,” Beasley says.

It was the overseas study program in Nagoya that attracted Beasley to IU. “I was looking at a couple of other schools, but IU’s program seemed the most concrete,” Beasley says. “The fact that IU had a clearly visible exchange program with a solid history convinced me to choose IU. The business school and the quality East Asian Language and Cultures department were an added bonus.”

The Nanzan University program in Nagoya is similar to other programs in that students can pursue area studies courses that fulfill major or minor requirements. It differs from many programs, however, in its emphasis on language study. Each semester, students take 10 credits of classes that focus on reading, writing, speaking, and grammar. The language of instruction for all courses is Japanese. The program also allows students the opportunity to learn about Japanese culture. They can choose from several classes that present aspects of Japanese artistic culture, such as woodblock printing, flower arranging, and Japanese calligraphy. Outside the classroom, students are encouraged to stay with Japanese host families, which allows for more cultural interaction and language learning.

The city of Nagoya offers some advantages over studies in a city like Tokyo. Nagoya offers the “true Japan,” Paige Weting, IU study abroad advisor, says. “Though it is a large city, it’s manageable and has not been inundated with English.”

Before studying abroad, Beasley had the equivalent of three years of college-level Japanese, thanks greatly to EALC’s intensive summer program. “I learned how to speak Japanese during that intensive summer program. I learned how to live in Japanese while I was in Japan.”

“Studying with a structured program was also important,” Beasley says. “The courses I took gave me a solid foundation on which to learn,” he said. “I think that if I just went over and spent a year traveling in Japan, I would not have learned as much.”

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Beasley sometimes found it a challenge to use his Japanese. “There are plenty of Japanese college students, who, like me, love to study foreign languages,” Beasley said. “If you’re not careful, the English speakers will latch onto you. You can still learn a lot about Japan this way, but it won’t help your Japanese speaking ability.” To avoid using English, Beasley befriended Japanese students who studied German, French, or other non-English subjects. He also tried to keep English-speaking with Americans to a minimum.

“The Japanese students are willing to speak to the exchange students in Japanese, but only if they are spoken to in Japanese first,” Beasley noted. “They have to gain confidence in your language ability before most of them will really attempt to speak to you in Japanese. Once they realize that you have the hang of it, most students are patient and enjoy the opportunity to speak to an exchange student in their own language.”

While Beasley learned much from Japan, his presence was a lesson for some Japanese people. “Stereotypes abound,” Beasley said. “Many people I met had never spoken to an African American in their lives. People were very curious. I like to think that I made a good impression.”

Often, Beasley faced serious questions about U.S. actions during World War II. “I was asked about Hiroshima and Nagasaki many times. I was hanging around with college students, so they kept an open mind.”

Intercultural dialogue is a large part of Beasley’s life. During his sophomore year at IU, he started the English Conversation Club, a campus organization that connects international students with American students for English conversation practice. When he returned to the United States in 2000, Beasley continued his Japanese study and worked in the Office of Overseas Study’s Information Center as a peer counselor. After a few years working for GE, Beasley says he may pursue a tour in the Peace Corps and then look at graduate school.

Beasley was excited to return to Japan, looking forward to seeing his Japanese friends, eating Japanese food, and getting a Japanese cell phone. “I can’t wait to speak Japanese every day again,” he said. “I always say that everything is twice as much fun if you’re doing it in a foreign language.”

—Tracy Bee
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International Services’ staff spell out their appreciation for Kenneth Rogers (fourth from left) at the Dowling International Center reception.

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