

I am an exchange student at Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University, in the College of Management (APM). The timetable for courses at APU works by semesters or 2 quarters. So, semester classes will last the entire semester, and quarter classes are accelerated courses that start and end in either the first quarter or the second quarter. The first quarter is until their reading week (or quarter break) from April to May and the second quarter is from June to July. To help visualize, this was my schedule:

Course/Time	Semester	
	Quarter 1	Quarter 2
Legal Strategy in Business (Semester)	1x/week	1x/week
Tourism Development and Planning (Semester)	1x/week	1x/week
Career Design (Semester)	1x/week	1x/week
International Economics (Q1)	2x/week	--
Globalization and Law (Q1)	2x/week	--
International Law (Q2)	--	2x/week
Computer Literacy (Q2)	--	2x/week

It is not uncommon to not have any classes on Wednesday. Most classes are Mon, Tue, Thu, Fri. Wednesdays are reserved for seminars, which are offered to APS students but not APM students. If an exchange student is interested in the possibility of attending seminars, they should register for the APS college instead of the APM college. Other than the seminars, both college students can take any classes from either college.

The required number of credits is 14 (APU credits) in order to maintain full time student status and continue to be eligible for Japanese visa. Each class is two credits, and the language classes are four credits. 8. If you want to take a language course, it provides double the credits but interferes with a lot of available classes. For the quarter courses, classes are held twice a week, and for the semester courses, classes are held once a week. Each class is 100 minutes with a 10-minute break between classes. The course load depends on which classes are taken. Some classes, like Tourism Development and Planning rely heavily on group assignments, presentations, and exams. Meanwhile law classes are primarily weekly quizzes and final reports. International Economics follows a similar structure to Telfer Economic courses, with a midterm and a final only. All the courses that I took were lecture-based, and attendance is very heavily assessed (usually part of your grading scheme), and taken for every class. However, zoom attendance is permitted in case of illness or emergency with prior permission given from the student office. The teachers and teaching assistants are always there to help if ever the coursework gets too heavy, or you are not able to comprehend the lectures. There is also a student help office and an essay writing office managed by students to assist with homework.

The academic calendar at APU consists of four months. The following information is for the Spring semester (Winter semester for uOttawa). Our orientation started March 23<sup>rd</sup>. As such, apartment move in dates were March 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>.

The official start of the semester is on April 1<sup>st</sup>, course registration April 4<sup>th</sup>, and the first day of classes are April 8<sup>th</sup>. The first week of April consists also of orientations, such as how to enroll in courses, how to apply for Japanese paperwork, and residence card orientation. There is a lot of important information being transmitted during these sessions that will help with your exchange. They provide you with your university email, username and password to access all of your accounts. They also provide a student life guidance information session, where they present what it is like to live in Beppu, what near by activities people like to do etc. They also present the rules and basic laws that student should be aware of such as drinking limits, Japanese cultural do's and don't and university rules: such as registering your leave with the university if you are leaving the city to travel for a weekend and come back.

The registration date for the Spring 2024 semester was April 4<sup>th</sup>. Prior to the course registration date, the exchange staff provides a link to the list of courses that are eligible for exchange students, they also provide the syllabus and course information ([https://en.apu.ac.jp/academic/aps/subject\\_list/](https://en.apu.ac.jp/academic/aps/subject_list/)). The International Exchange Office provides Excel spreadsheets containing courses. They will inform you on how to register for the courses, and they will send out instructions on how to log in to their system and how to register for courses. Exchange students followed the 2017 curriculum this year. This link not only gives you the availability and course time, but also updates every few weeks with new courses or the course classroom location. The course registration is on a first come first serve basis, and the user interface is quite old. The website will crash, and you have to register for one course at a time. Some of the courses are very competitive, due to limited classroom space, which is why it is important to plan some backups to ensure you meet the required number of credits. They will tell you a strategy to bypass system failures, but it is also recommended to apply for preferred classes first and then back-ups later.

Final exams for the first quarter start on May 27<sup>th</sup> (there is a possibility that an exam date would be placed before this date as well). Quarter break starts on May 30<sup>th</sup>, students do not attend classes until the second quarter starts, which is June 5<sup>th</sup>. Second quarter/Semester exams start on July 25<sup>th</sup>, the last day of exams/classes is July 31<sup>st</sup>.

As exchange students living at AP House 4, there are Resident Assistants (RAs) that help you with your moving-in needs, and daily life questions that you might have. There is 1 RA per floor. The RAs also host orientations about moving-in procedures and security evacuation procedures. Due to the fact that AP house is by the water, tsunami evacuation procedures were also practiced as a natural side effect of earthquakes in the region. All communications are usually done within the LINE app, a communication application that is common in Japan. The International Exchange Office helps you with any questions you may have; they send out emails regularly to stay in touch and to ensure that the exchange students are aware of the procedures to follow.

The Exchange takes care of all registration procedures, but 4 essential procedures are the Residence Card address registration, email logins + MFA and student ID registrations. The

residence card address registration is essential and don't through Japanese immigration. Upon arrival at the first Japanese airport, they land in, students must line up in to register for immigration. Rather than line up in the "foreign passport", they must line up in the residence card line, even if they don't have one. At the front of the line, they must show their Japanese visa and letter of acceptance from the university. The immigration officers will print them a Residence card that is missing a residential address. When going through immigration AND customs, the student will have to have the AP house 4 address on hand to show the officers the missing information. Upon arrival at the university, you must get your student ID registrations (done during orientation). During orientation, they will also get student email logins and passwords and set up MFA. Once everything is set up, students need to go to a different orientation to "officially register the address at the back of the residence card". You bring the residence card given by immigration officers, a city official comes to the university, has you fill out paperwork, and then stamps your address at the back of your card. This process MUST be completed within 2 weeks of your entry into Japan. If you miss this orientation, you must go to the nearest city hall of Beppu and get it registered. At school it takes an hour, at city hall it takes a week. You cannot leave or re-enter the country without this card, and it needs to have the address registered at the back. Any travel done during your exchange that requires you to leave the country requires you to fill in a disembarkation and re-entry card PRIOR to leaving.

Having your residence card registered is very important since once it is registered, your National student Health insurance card gets sent to your residence and your personal identifier number (their equivalent to a SIN number) is issued. You can then have access to medical services. You also need this card to register for a phone number in Japan. Sim cards can be purchased at university, or you can go to an AU store (right across from the residence) with a RA or during English speaking hours to register for a phone number. All exchange students are required to have National Health Insurance in Japan, even if you have travel insurance. The National Health Insurance plan needs to be paid for before departure. It took about 2 months to receive post-arrival. It is also important to show proof of financial stability before departure. I took a screenshot of my savings account and sent it to the International Exchange Office. It is also important to look at the vaccine requirements, the office provided us with a health questionnaire in December, which included vaccination questions.

Another important procedure was the health check-up, after you get your student card, you must do a health check up by the university including a urine sample, and a chest Xray for tuberculosis. Just like everything else, all instructions are provided by the exchange office.

Studying in Japan has been an incredible experience so far, but it is essential to manage your budget wisely. The airplane ticket costs around \$2500-3000 CAD for a round trip. Housing expenses may vary, but for AP House 4, the rent is for 4.5 months. There is a move-in fee, renter's insurance, and administrative fee. The total for the semester comes to 258,900 Yen, which can be converted to \$2249.84. The International Exchange office provides you with this information in advance, and there are also check-in and airport pick-up services for AP House 4. Daily travel costs are manageable, as APU is a 20–35-minute bus ride away from AP house 4. There are a couple of different ways to go about the bus expenses:

- A suica card = equivalent of Presto in Canada. You load up and tap on and off at buses. The advantage for suica is that it is nation-wide and you can use it for any bus company in Japan. It also acts as a prepaid card for convenience store purchases when you are in a rush.
- Cash = if using cash, you must take a ticket from the driver once you go on the bus to indicate the stop you got on, and when you get off, the ticket number will indicate your fare that you pay on your way out. The way from ap house to school costs around 550 Yen one way, so about \$10 a day to and from school.
- Triple tickets = these are tickets that come in sets of 3. They cover all expenses on the Oita Kotsu busses (the red busses), which can be used around Beppu. They cost 1200 yen for 1 set. The ticket covers a free bus ride regardless of the fare price.
- Student bus card = similar to uOttawa's bus card, this option is more cost efficient if you are staying for 1 year, as opposed to 1 semester, its costs upwards of 400\$ but covers all your school bus fees.

It is very common for students to go on vacations around Japan or outside of Japan during breaks or even weekends. For example, some popular trips are Tokyo, Kyoto/Osaka, Mt Fuji, and Okinawa for longer breaks, and fukuoka, oita, yufuin, kumamoto etc for shorter trips. Flights round trip, when booked early enough vary from 100 cad to 300 cad. And housing averages at about 50\$-70\$ a night. It is important to take that into consideration when budgeting for this trip, as travelling within Japan can also add up. Move in costs totalled to about \$200, and grocery averages 40\$ a week. Meals are relatively affordable, with most meals costing around \$10-\$20. Although, there are lots of places where you can buy meals for \$5. For example, at the cafeteria on campus, meals can cost around \$5-\$8. Overall, careful planning and budgeting are crucial to making the most of this academic and cultural experience.

Prior to arrival, application procedures are handled by the International Exchange Office. They give plenty of information regarding this matter, they send out emails, ensuring that students understand the process and the deadlines for applications. You have to take a passport style photo in October (according to Japanese measurements, not Canadian measurements) and send to the Japanese Host university as well. This can be done at your nearest Walmart for 10\$. The acceptance email that provides you with the Certificate of Eligibility and housing registration requirements was sent in December. It is essential to wait for your acceptance, and Certificate of Eligibility before applying for your visa. Once received, I started registration for the visa. The Certificate of Eligibility, visa application form, and a passport- sized photo are to be brought to the Japanese Embassy. The Japanese Embassy located downtown is very accommodating. There are no visa deadlines, I applied for my visa in February, and the expected date to receive it was 4 days. Please note that there is a national Japanese holiday in mid-February may cause delays to your visa by 1-2 days. To get the visa form, you can go on their website and fill the General visa form. If you have any questions, you can call the embassy and they will guide you.

As an exchange student, we stay at AP House 4 (11-11-8 Kyomachi, Beppu, Oita, 874-0926, Japan). All exchange students reside at AP House 4, which is located in the downtown region of Beppu. To get there from Fukuoka Airport, the school will send a bus to pick you up if you preregister for the pickup dates. If that is not possible, you can take a bus from the airport to Beppu. The closest station in the airport bus route to the dormitories is called "Beppu Kitahama".

Housing prices included bedding and appliances, but student will need to purchase utensils and purchase cookware. Its not recommended to bring pots and pans as AP house uses specific pots pans that are IH compatible. Everything can be bought from daiso (Japanese dollar store), from laundry detergent, baskets, curtains, towels to kitchen appliances.

The dormitory features communal kitchens for each floor, there are mixed-gender, female-only, and male-only floors. Each room contains a bathroom, with a shower included, a desk, a bed, an AC unit, plenty of storage room, a fridge, and a balcony. Each floor has its own laundry facilities and lounge area providing a comfortable and convenient living space. Housing includes utilities, and internet access, making it affordable and hassle-free. Living in AP House was a great way to connect with other student and is a very convenient location as there are many restaurants within walking distance and grocery stores that are 10-20-minute walk from AP House. There are two malls that are both 10-minute walk.

It is important to note that the AP House 4 is very old, and mold has been found in some rooms causing allergies for some students and hospitalizations for 1-2. If a student finds themselves in a moldy room, they can request a room change or fill out moving out procedures and get an apartment nearby. But they would have to subsequently change their registered address on their card.

I personally didn't work but I know you can apply to be a TA for Q2, starting Q1 however, on exchange, it is also important to have fun and make the best of this experience. I have fully immersed myself in this experience, thanks to the friends I made at AP House 4 and on campus. While knowing some basic Japanese phrases is helpful, translation apps suffice for everyday communication. Understanding the cultural norms here is essential, and though they may seem different at first, they are easy to adapt to, especially with a good support system. Exploring local areas like Beppu, known for its relaxing onsens (hot springs), is amazing but taking advantage of the location and cheap flights to travel across Japan is a must. My exchange experience at APU has been enriching, allowing me to forge lasting friendships with students from around the world. Traveling with these friends has been amazing, and the academic courses have been engaging. Living at AP House provided a supportive community, but is not for everyone, and exploring Beppu's natural beauty and other areas of Japan has been unique. Overall, this exchange has enhanced my academic knowledge and contributed significantly to my personal growth.