

Dear Class of '55,

Thank you so much for the opportunity you have allowed me to engage in. Being able to study abroad was definitely the highlight of my collegiate career. Not only was I able to study abroad, but also, I was able to go to Japan, a country that I find very intriguing. Before my departure to Japan I had the opportunity to study the Japanese language and culture here at Cornell. The Japanese hold different views in regard to their life, culture, and artwork. Studying the Japanese not only aided communication and made traveling easier, but also allowed for me to be more deeply involved and appreciative of the artwork I was studying on this trip.

The vast amount of beautiful pottery I was able to witness was astonishing. Not only did I view pottery and ceramics in museums, but I was also able to meet and study artwork with famous potters, while visiting their personal collections and workshops. I even had the opportunity to make tea bowls and help fire a wood kiln in a town historically known for ceramics (Shigaraki, Japan). The homestay portion of the trip was absolutely the best. I learned so much more than just ceramics and art from my gracious host family.

Overall, I feel I have learned so much more, a sort of “hidden curriculum” in my first ever trip outside of the United States. Growing up in Fort Pierce, Florida, I never imagined that I would one day find myself walking the streets of Tokyo, asking for directions to the nearest subway line or where is the best local ramen shop in a language completely different from English or Haitian Creole (both of my parents are from Haiti). This also has given me a slight edge in the competitive world of the job market. Not everyone can say they visited another country such as technically-inclined Japan, where I also was able to network with other Cornell alumni offering potential internship opportunities and lifelong friendships if I ever decide to return to Japan.

Thank you so much for allowing me to engage in such a life-changing experience. All I can think about is how I will move forward from here, knowing that there is so much more to learn and explore in the world. I hope that this award will continue to help other Cornellians in the future meet their goals and that they too will benefit equally, if not much more, to the amount I have. I hope one day I will also be able to help students fulfill their goals and engage in eye-opening experiences.

Thank you so much,
Marnel Desir