

Academic & Organizational Skills Gained at St. Stephen's College

By Harumi Yokokawa



Author
Harumi Yokokawa

Japanese students traveling abroad widen their horizons and develop extraordinary linguistic and communication skills. St. Stephen's College, Delhi, has been instrumental in helping me develop my skills in reading, writing, and communicating more effectively. It has also changed my worldview and given me a network of international friends. Central to the presence of St. Stephen's in Japan is the dedicated work of Prof. Mukesh Williams. St. Stephen's alumni in Japan trace their understanding of the college through him. I participated in a three-week program in 2014, a one-year study abroad program from 2014 to 2015, and another three-week program in 2018 through the academic partnership program initiated by Prof. Williams with Soka University, Japan. Since March 2018, I have been working as one of the core committee members of the alumni association in Japan.

Being Part of the St. Stephen's & Soka Partnership

Over the last 35 years, Prof. Williams has worked assiduously to create a friendship between Japan and India through academic

exchanges, which have transformed the lives of scores of young Japanese. Many of them, like me, can stand proudly on an international platform to compete and win. The exchange program of St. Stephen's College and Soka University is one of his initiatives, and students and professors from both institutions have visited each other's campuses and had academic and cultural exchanges. Students have taken courses at their visiting institutions, and professors have conducted lectures related to India and Japan. I was fortunate to take part in a three-week program in which 10 undergraduates from Soka's faculty of letters studied at St. Stephen's, learning about Indian culture using English as a medium. After completing the course, Prof. Williams opened a way for me and two other students to study at St. Stephen's on a one-year study abroad program, where we could study history and English. We were also welcomed to join the societies of the college, and I took part in the choreography society and the Malayalam literary society.

In my final year at Soka University, I had the opportunity to go to St. Stephen's again, participating in another three-week program. Just after returning from this program, Prof. Williams expanded opportunities for both Indian and Japanese students by creating a group for alumni in Japan. Currently, there are more than 80 members and five committee members to organize events and get-togethers of the St. Stephen's alumni Japan Chapter. The committee members include students and faculty of both St. Stephen's and Soka.

English Reading & Writing Skills

My English skills improved from an upper-intermediate level to advanced, and I have been able to use them in both academic and business fields. Before studying at St. Stephen's College, though I was comfortable with speaking and listening to conversational English, my academic skills in English were not enough to conduct research and write essays using rational thinking. Prof. Williams and the lectures of the course I took at St. Stephen's would guide us from the fundamental basics, from the history of a subject to the creation of ideologies and philosophy. From there, we were trained in academic writing to summarize ideas.

Thus, my reading and writing skills improved dramatically, and I could score 955 in the TOEIC exam in my senior year of university. Moreover, I was able to write my graduation thesis at Soka University in English. Even after graduation, the experience of



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Afternoon scene at St. Stephen's College, Delhi

working in the alumni association endorsed my skills. Currently, I am working for an IT firm in Tokyo, System Shared, and I have been able to take part in business meetings with international clients and translate Japanese to English for company CEOs and directors. I have also worked on professional translation for release notes, which include specialized IT terms for RPA systems that are made in the United States for my clients. More recently, I have worked with the human resources department of my company and conducted a company orientation using English for international students living in Japan.

Communication Skills

The style of my communication changed from local to global, which has helped me work in an international environment with my colleagues and clients. I only spoke to people with a mutual background before participating in the study abroad program. The majority of my friends were Japanese or international students who adapted to Japanese culture and traditions. I did not try to change the way I communicated, and there was no urgency to do so living in my home country. However, living abroad forced me to move out of my comfort zone, and seeing the attitudes of professors and students at St. Stephen's inspired me to broaden my way of thinking, which enabled me to become comfortable communicating with people from diverse cultures.

When I first visited the college in 2014, I knew next to nothing about India. Even in this situation, professors and students tried to understand me and the culture of Japan, and they would even help me understand Indian customs. Furthermore, understanding that India is a multicultural country and seeing students interact freely despite language, culture, and religion was heartening. I respected their way of communicating, and I became open to understanding new values. Slowly, I could make friends with students, which I would never have imagined doing back in Japan, and I am still in touch with them even today.

This experience has been useful in doing a job where I work with employees from abroad. My former boss was Chinese, and I had worked with a new Korean employee. I had neither resistance nor hesitation in communicating with them other than through language. My boss took good care of me, and I never differentiated her from other Japanese employees based on nationality. I could focus on the given work, thus gaining trust from my boss and the company. With the new employee from Korea, I taught her how to send messages to clients using the Japanese protocol, even though it was not my responsibility, and as a result we created a bond. All of this happened because I experienced a similar situation in India: not being able to connect with people even though I had good intentions, and I could understand the same thing happening to people settling down in Japan without knowing the language.

New World View of Selfless Service & Developing Life Skills

New life skills arose through the transformation of my worldview and have positively impacted my work. When I was a high school student, I did not understand myself and was not aware of the fundamentals of my thinking. My likes and dislikes were based on childhood experiences and information I read in a book or through the media. The main purpose of my life was to realize my desires and achieve success for myself. I was certainly not open to learning new subjects and did not have the stamina to achieve something that would take a long time. After having access to a higher level of education in university and experiencing challenging real-life situations in another country where my ideas were not applicable, my ideas and way of life changed.

The idea of academic excellence at St. Stephen's College is selfless service, and Stephanians embody it in their lives. They work joyfully in the given situation for themselves and others. Interacting with people who had a larger way of looking at the world surprised me, and I developed new life skills in the process of change, such as following a certain time schedule for the day, being able to appreciate myself and others, networking, staying focused for self-improvement, interacting with seniors, and finding time to relax in the midst of everything. I started enjoying life not through realizing desire but by recognizing the blessings we have and by sharing and cooperating with others. This has made me healthy both mentally and physically and has helped me start a job in a new field and accomplish long-term goals in the challenging environment of a company.

Life Skill 1: Following a Schedule

St. Stephen's College starts the day with an early morning chapel service and then assembly for the first-year students every day at 9 a.m. Many of the classes are held in the morning as well. Prof. Williams created an opportunity for us students in the three-week program to participate in them too. We were staying in the Delhi University Guest House, which was 10 minutes away from the college. In order to be present at the morning services, we had to wake up early in the morning, have breakfast together, and then leave for college. After the assembly, we would study in the seminar room and prepare for the classes, as they were very tough. Then we would have lunch at the café or the mess, and in the afternoon, classes started. In the evening, when our classes were over, we were given opportunities to participate in the societies of the college and talk to the students of the college. By 6 p.m., we would return to the guest house and have dinner. Finally, have a short meeting led by Prof. Williams and have some free time to relax and also study. This fixed schedule to wake up, eat, study, enjoy, and sleep in the given time frame and to finish our work created a rhythm in my life that I continue to use in my career in System Shared. Our company's

working hours, like most Japanese companies, begin at 9 a.m., with a one-hour lunch break at noon, and end at 6 p.m. every weekday. Employees are required to show results within a given time. Many fresh graduates in Japan find it difficult to adjust to this system, as in most Japanese universities classes are more flexible, and as you become a senior, classes become fewer and your weekly schedule is not as strict as it was in your first year. When I look back, I understand that the three-week program was a great simulation of working in a company without creating any problems.

Life Skill 2: Appreciation of Yourself & Others to Overcome Difficulties

Prof. Williams has always guided us students in techniques for living a healthy life. One of them was to practice appreciation. When I started working for the company, I faced issues of depression due to a lack of IT skills. It prevented me from focusing on learning, and my health became bad. I had to be hospitalized for some time, but the alumni and my company supported me. Through the activities of alumni work, I could be in touch and discuss my issues with Prof. Williams and with my seniors and friends, and I learned a new habit. First thing in the morning, in my bed, I would appreciate the day – the sun, my body, the trees, the birds, that I am hungry, what I will eat, that I am alive. Furthermore, whenever I have time to reflect, I appreciate specific things, for instance, “I have good health; thank you to my body; I’m living in a safe place without any issues; and I have this much money.” This creates self-awareness, and it makes me feel relaxed and joyful during the day, which helps me work

Photo: Author



Main building of St. Stephen's College, Delhi

effectively. Now I have recovered from a health problem and am confident enough to learn new subjects and overcome problems in my job. IT company employees are constantly learning new technology as the market is changing and expanding day by day. I had no background in IT before joining the firm, but I could learn Java programming skills through our three-month company training and a year of OJT and have been able to teach them to professionals. Recently, I have been working on a project using RPA technology for two years, which was another new field for me, but I could catch up with the team by using this technique.

Life Skill 3: Networking

Through developing skills of appreciation, I could further learn how to create a network of friends. To tell the truth, I was only interested in my own success when I was living a narrow life in Japan. Gradually, I became generally happy and fortunate to encounter and interact with someone in each situation. When speaking with someone, I began to share knowledge and experiences and also sympathize with and accept their point of view, like the professors and students of St. Stephen's College. Later, I learned in the alumni association that a win-win situation creates a bond that is beneficial for both you and others. Now I have friends and colleagues from college, university, and my company in different parts of the world, contributing to diverse industries and firms. Undoubtedly, the alumni association of St. Stephen's was another way to create a new network as well as learn the significance and techniques of networking from experienced people. I have also used this network for the benefit of the college and my company and connected System Shared with St. Stephen's College at a career forum in the US.

Life Skill 4: Staying Focused for Self-Improvement

I have also improved my self-awareness through my education at St. Stephen's College. One of the subjects learned in the three-week program was Indian culture. In this course, we learned ancient Indian philosophy and were fascinated to see some students and teachers practicing some of the exercises, such as yoga, in the morning. With this interest, I joined the Sun Rise Club of the college and would sometimes join the senior faculty, block tutors and students for a run in the field and then do some breathing exercise. After starting my job, I began to realize that it was important for me to stay focused and cooperate with others. Since then, I have picked up practicing concentration exercises and breathing exercises to remove unnecessary thoughts that prevent me from completing a task whenever I have time. I also slowly understood that most of the problems that I had in my life with others were not caused by external factors but by bad habits of my mind, and I decided to pour my energy into changing myself rather than complaining. This has helped me create good relationships with colleagues and work together as a team. In fact, this has enhanced my ability to save time and be sufficient at work, as well as reduce my time spent thinking

about unsatisfactory aspects of others. These exercises are not easy, and I am still in the process of learning, but I could continue to challenge myself because of the constant support I had from the alumni members.

Life Skill 5: Interacting with Seniors

Most faculty members of the college live on campus, and students have opportunities to interact with them outside the classroom. Dr. Renish Abraham, who is a faculty member in the English department and the coordinator of the academic partnership program, would always interact with us students from Japan for dinner at the mess and support us to live comfortably in India. He was the supervisor of the trip to Kerala with the Malayalam Literary Society too, on which I went with two other Japanese students and nine Indian students, along with another lecturer for the three-week program. In addition, the alumni of St. Stephen's College are strongly connected to the college, and there are special occasions to connect with them. For instance, they give speeches in assemblies and societies, and there is also an annual reunion at college. Even when I returned to Japan, I could interact with some of them, as they are not only in India but all over the world. Also, through our alumni work, we have experience working with them. In March 2018 and November 2023, the principal of St. Stephen's College, Prof. John Varghese, visited Japan, and the alumni members could greet him and have dinner together. We helped organize a get-together in Tokyo. In planning the location, agenda, contacting members, making seat arrangements, and so on, with the support of Prof. Williams and Dr. Ui Teramoto, we could learn the etiquette of organizing an event and learn how to work with people who are senior to you and follow their advice. This outside-class experience with seniors was great training to interact without feeling too shy and learn from them. In a company, we suddenly work, talk, and have dinners with people double our age, and many find it challenging, but the experience with St. Stephen's helped me overcome the issue in my student years.

Life Skill 6: Finding Time to Relax & Enjoy in the Midst of Everything

Students at St. Stephen's College are excellent in their studies, and many of them are part of the societies or sports teams of the college. One of my close friends was a badminton player, and she would exercise in the morning before class and, after class, find time to play sports. Besides the Malayalam Literary Society, I was welcomed to join the choreography society for a performance and was surprised to see how much planning, practice, and fun they were having even after a class. Also, students organize special events and invite guests occasionally, in addition to the annual college festival, Harmony, exclusive to students of St. Stephen's, and the college is decorated creatively. I enjoyed making arts and crafts with my friend for the décor of the festival and doing face painting on each other. I thought I would quit my hobby for studies and part-time jobs at the

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Gardens of St. Stephen's College, Delhi

university after returning from India, but I decided not to, and I am glad I made this decision. The time to do something besides my studies or work refreshes my mind and keeps me healthy. I have not changed since then, and even in my company, I feel that the company dinners, trips, and sports days, as well as going to dancing lessons in my free time, have helped me in achieving results. I must say this is one of the key factors in keeping on doing a job.

Widening Horizons

Studying at a prestigious institution abroad can transform students to help them think in a new manner, be capable of working in any environment, and achieve success. I could not have thought of myself working in the field of cutting-edge technology before living in India. St. Stephen's College was undeniably a life-changing experience, and the tremendous support from Prof. Williams, the inspiring professors, seniors, and friends made this possible. Learning the language, becoming open-minded, and creating habits of life have given me the wisdom to make the best of what I have and can do for the well-being of myself and others in this life.

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the college and am dedicated to giving back through my duties as an alumni core committee member of St. Stephen's in Japan. Not only to welcome any alumni visiting Japan but also to support students who are eager to study and have the same challenging yet fruitful experience studying at St. Stephen's College. Together, we will grow and become strong, capable leaders in any field, celebrating life as it is.

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Harumi Yokokawa is an IT engineer at System Shared Inc. and a former study abroad student from Soka University, Japan, at St. Stephen's College, Delhi.