This past year from February 14th to March 22nd, thanks to the Liu Institute and the Anthropology department I was privileged with the opportunity to study Japanese immersively at a home stay in Kyoto, Japan. (My first home stay experience!)

Kyoto, which literally translates to capital, is where I lived. The previous capital before Tokyo. Therefore, many rich cultural artifacts and shrines are all over Kyoto. It’s rich history, many temples, and a unique traditional pre modern feel makes it a much different experience than other parts of Japan.
I lived in a little village area, that was about 40 minutes out from the city center. I would take the bus and then train into the city and go to class from Monday- Friday. I would study Japanese for 5 hours - day at Kyoto JALS, Japanese Language School.
After I would return home. My host mom, Atsuko-san cooked me meals everyday. Although she only spoke Japanese and I could only speak English at the time, we became very close.

This night she taught me how to make Takoyaki! A very popular dish in Japan.

Although the Japanese only was initially a challenge. She had patience with me. Everyday, we would sit down and have two meals together. Breakfast at 7:30 a.m and dinner at 7:00 p.m. She was never late— and if she was I would get a detailed explanation beforehand. We had even cried together once discussing history. Connecting with her and her family was by far one of the most valuable times of my life.

During this period, though there were times that I failed flat on my face though. I came in one week late to my Japanese language class and struggled immediately with writing and reading. (In Japan, they utilize three alphabets.)
I failed my first two Japanese tests, barely pass the third one, and made a hundred on my final two. In the end, my school, Kyoto Japanese Language School asked me to give a speech in Japanese. They paid for me to stay an extra two days in Kyoto, before I started my exchange in Tokyo.

Some people that I met here even went on to visit me in Tokyo.

Ultimately this experience changed my life. I have a greater appreciation for my connection with other cultures, Japanese traditional history, communication, and so much more than words can not simply express. None of this would’ve been possible if it weren’t for the Liu institute and the Anthropology department who supported my studies.

Thank you so much for the help along the way.
Short Follow Up Report on Life in Kyoto Japan
Special thanks to Liu Institute and the Anthropology Department
Josiah Spencer