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I enrolled in the Department of Global and Transcultural Studies mainly because of the variety of courses offered. When I first set foot in Japan, I was always curious about everything, and I was excited and prepared to learn anything. The department of GTS offered some economics classes—the ones I thought I would excel in—and courses in cultural studies, politics and sociology, which were the ones I was also interested in. And I was not disappointed. In my four years of study here, I not only expanded my knowledge and fields of interest through various classes but also discovered what I really enjoyed and what I was good at.

Another reason I chose this department was for a global experience. I had previously lived in different countries, and I learned that being in a diverse and inclusive environment was crucial for self-development. The department of GTS offered this. I have met professors and students from all over the world, and they were generous and kind to me. I liked asking difficult questions, sometimes even challenging professors. Throughout the years, I have never been discouraged once. Outside of class, I liked meeting new friends from different backgrounds. It was always refreshing for me to hear their stories and learn something new.

In my first two years at the university, I was just jumping between different disciplines. Everything was new to me, and everything seemed interesting. There were so many options on the table, so I just picked whatever interested me. I took many introductory courses, such as Introduction to Economics, Introduction to Political Science, Transcultural Studies and Global History. At the same time, I took many Japanese and English language classes. Since I am not a native English speaker, those classes helped me tremendously by building the foundation for my future studies and pushing me to be more confident in public. I remember that during the first semester, I had my first-ever debate in my life, and of course, it was in English. I received a lot of feedback from peers and teachers, and I gradually improved my debating ability and confidence over time. Looking back now, it might have been one of the most important classes I have ever taken.

In my third year, I started to focus more on economics and political science. I really enjoyed that we had the option to choose various types of economics-related courses, including finance, region-specific economics and economic policymaking classes. In particular, I remember taking an entrepreneurship class that delved into how businesses were created and how to make a social impact while creating profits for the company. On the other hand, I kept exploring political science—a field I became interested in after taking some introductory classes. To this day, I still appreciate the international relations class I took, which prepared me for graduate school.

There were many things I did outside of the classroom. What jumps out at me immediately are the fun memories with friends and classmates. Whether it was doing karaoke or partying at a rental house during Christmas, or watching fireworks together in summer, I have done it all. Those are precious memories that reside inside my heart, and I will never forget them. Besides that, I also tried many new hobbies, such as kyudo. I can still recall the days I was in the kyudo club. Despite my terrible Japanese, I was treated with kindness and patience. And I left with many great memories of the experience.

Speaking of hobbies, the one I truly developed and fell in love with was bodybuilding, and I have my classmate and friend Liam to thank for introducing me to it. Initially, I was looking for some exercises to build up arm strength so I could shoot a heavier bow. From there, Liam introduced me to weightlifting and taught me step by step. This training not only improved my health but also made me become more confident. But what benefited me the most was the mindset I developed from the weightlifting principle of "progressive overload," which emphasizes the need to increase the weight, frequency, or number of repetitions over time to grow muscle. To me, each workout should be more difficult than the last one, each day should be more challenging than the last, and I should expect and be happy about it, because this is how I can grow and become better.

I am currently doing a master's program at the Graduate School of Asia-Pacific Studies, Waseda University. What I realized in my first year of graduate school was that the academic skills you have are more crucial than the accumulated knowledge you hold. Your knowledge of your research field is indeed important, but it can be easily built up by reading more books and papers. But we do not just learn from reading, we learn from others by talking with each other.

The way you articulate your opinions is far more important than the opinions themselves. If others cannot understand what you said, it is as if you said nothing. Fortunately, during my four years of study in GTS, I had enormous opportunities to practice those skills. Whether there were presentations, discussions or reports, I always received feedback from peers and professors, which gradually helped me to build communication and writing skills that ultimately helped me in my graduate research.

I would like to encourage students to be curious, and to not get too comfortable. Curiosity is what makes us grow—it is the intrinsic motivation that pushes us to learn more about the world, allowing us to continually become better versions of ourselves. Whatever you have in mind, pursue it as hard as you can. If you feel comfortable with your circumstances, it might be a sign that you are not pushing yourself hard enough. We grow under pressure, and every challenge eventually becomes a stepping stone beneath our feet.