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Thursday, March 3, 2011

## Mids Study at Japanese Military Academy

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From the International Programs Office

Three Naval Academy midshipmen spent the fall semester 2010 studying at Japan's National Defense Academy in Yokosuka, Japan.

Midshipman 1st Class Rick Murphy and Midshipmen 2nd Class Kristopher Gallagher and Daniel Vallejos lived, trained and attended classes with the Japanese cadets and received Japanese language instruction.

Their first month in Japan was spent studying the language while the Japanese cadets participated in their usual classes. After the month of language study the mids joined the Japanese cadets in their normal academic classes. All three midshipmen had completed up to second semester Intermediate Japanese at the Naval Academy with various levels of practical experience in Japanese language and culture.

The National Defense Academy has approximately 1,600 cadets as well as a small number of graduate students from the Japanese Self Defense Forces. These cadets will enter all three branches of the Japanese Self Defense Force after graduation. The National Defense Academy is funded by the national government. The cadets receive a degree but not a commission upon graduation, and if they wish to become officers, they must also attend their respective Officer Candidate School. The Japanese cadets are not obligated to join the military after graduation however a majority of them do.

"Daily life at the National Defense Academy is very busy and keeps the cadets and constantly in a hurry," said Gallagher.

Early morning formation at 6:30 a.m. is usually accompanied with Taiso, a traditional Japanese form of calisthenics. From the morning formation to the next formation at 8:15 a.m. the Japanese cadets have to eat breakfast, clean and carry out other miscellaneous assignments, such as preparing for an upcoming school event.



Photo courtesy of the International Programs Office

From right, Midshipman 1st Class Rick Murphy and Midshipmen 2nd Class Kristopher Gallagher and Daniel Vallejos stand with a Japanese National Defense Academy cadet at Senso-ji, a Buddhist temple in Tokyo. The three midshipmen spent the fall semester studying at the National Defense Academy in Yokosuka, Japan.



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The cadets then march to their respective classes, which last until 4:30 p.m. when the sports period begins. During this time, every cadet practices for his or her sport, which ranges from sumo to American football, until dinner. After dinner, the cadets study.

While there are similarities between Japan's National Defense Academy and the U.S. Naval Academy, the midshipmen noticed several significant differences between the two.

"At the Naval Academy life is centered on classes," said Vallejos. "At the National Defense Academy classes take up a large amount of the day, however there is not as much emphasis put on them. Classes are easily canceled for military or physical training."

Japanese classes are almost all entirely lecture based. There is little student and professor interaction, even in the smaller-sized classes. Students are evaluated through infrequent tests and written papers. There is little homework, graded class work or quiz grades to balance out the final grade. Sleeping in class is also more acceptable in Japanese classes.

"While this varied from teacher to teacher, on the whole there was significantly more sleeping allowed in our classes at the National Defense Academy than at the Naval Academy," said Murphy.

At the National Defense Academy there is also no formal honor/character development program. The Naval Academy has classes on ethics, professional quizzes on the honor concept and other various formalized steps in developing the character of midshipmen, but the mids did not see this in Japan.

"Character development is much more emphasized in Japanese cultural expectations and in Japanese children's upbringing," said Vallejos. "Being honorable and truthful is expected of all Japanese citizens. No one group is expected to have better character than the other."

The midshipmen found that the Japanese cadets' lives were much more regulated than American midshipmen's lives.

"While this might give the Japanese cadets more discipline, we also felt like it made them more reliant on their superior's guidance for decision-making," said Murphy.

Despite these differences, the midshipmen agreed that the principles behind both academies were the same, and found their semester experience in Japan very valuable.

"Being at the National Defense Academy gave the three of us a great insight into Japanese culture and the culture of Japan's National Self Defense Force," said Gallagher.

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