



Alumni Newsletter

From Rutgers to Rising Sun: An Enchanting Winter Exploration of Japan

—By Amisha Tiwari SAS '25

Rutgers Meets Japan could be likened to a dream study abroad program for me: nine days in January would be spent exploring Japan’s beautiful cities of Fukui, Yokohama, and Tokyo.

Through our Fall Interdisciplinary Honors Seminar course, Professor Haruko Wakabayashi and Dr. Fernanda Perrone took great care in preparing us for the actual trip by encouraging us to explore the rich and complex history that exists between Rutgers University and Japan. We learned about Japanese students who attended Rutgers, such as Kusakabe Taro, Rutgers’ first Japanese alumnus, and William Griffis, an esteemed professor from Rutgers who taught Japanese students in Fukui. I even got to create a story map that retraced the footsteps of Griffis’s travels with my two friends, which was such a fun project to excite us for our adventures to come.

We began our adventures in Fukui, a mountainous, gorgeous city in Fukui Prefecture, on the Western coast of Japan. We were received so kindly by members of the Fukui government, as well as by students from Fukui University. We were even featured in the local newspaper!



Yokokan Garden

The rest of our first day was spent getting to know one another and walking around the area, visiting the Fukui Castle Ruins, and eating Japanese barbeque for dinner. However, our second day was where the real exploration began. We were brought to the stunning Eiheiji Temple, where we learned how the monks lived. Following that, we visited one of Japan’s largest Buddha statues, the Echizen Great Buddha. I felt like a pebble next to this statue!

One of my favorite memories of this trip was the Aikido class we were invited to partake in. I remember so vividly the way I felt, speaking to those Aikido masters in the mountainous and beautiful regions of Fukui, children’s laughter echoing through the air, and flurries of snow cascading down outside as we celebrated the new year

continued inside...

Julianna Margolin SAS '24 Delivers Senior Speech



The Honors Senior Gathering Speaker Julianna Margolin SAS '24 delivered the senior speech to the class of 2024 honors scholars at the Honors Senior Gathering in May. The following is an excerpt from Margolin’s speech; the full speech is available on the SASHP Student Blog: go.rutgers.edu/honors-speaker

“If there is one thing the pandemic taught me, *besides* how to use Zoom, it’s that navigating change is *difficult* but **not impossible**, especially for **us**. I learned to embrace the unknown instead of fearing what’s to come. “There’s **always** gonna be **another** mountain.” But, we now know that we’re **capable** of tackling whatever obstacle comes our way. Let’s keep climbing, Class of 2024.”

Message from the Honors Deans



The ways our talented students engage at Rutgers always amazes us. From serving their peers as tutors to mentoring our newest members, SASHP students actively contribute to our vibrant campus community. There are so many highlights from this academic year. Academically, our faculty taught interdisciplinary honors seminars on topics ranging from pop culture to historical figures. Transcending the boundaries of the classroom, two long-awaited global embedded experiences took flight following the pauses of the global pandemic. Students traveled to Japan and reprised our experience in South Africa where they visited the locales and saw the ideas they studied during the semester in real life over winter break. Socially, this year's graduates shared how grateful they were to gather in-person for graduation festivities. As our senior speaker remarked, their transition to Rutgers was marked by Zoom screens, masks and social distancing. We love when they meet alumni like you at our annual spring gathering during Rutgers Day.

We're always happy to hear from our alumni. Contact us when you have time to share your life updates, career path, or help create new opportunities for our current students.

Charles R. Keeton

Charles R. Keeton
Vice Provost for Experiential Learning

Musu Davis

Musu Davis
Administrative Dean, SAS Honors Program

continued from cover...



Meeting with members of the Fukui Government

together. It was the epitome of what life is about: a reminder that despite language barriers, cultural differences, and living miles apart, humanity could overcome all and bond with one another in the name of genuine kindness.

Six days flew by faster than I realized, and it was time to go. I was saddened to leave Fukui, but no less excited to explore Tokyo and Yokohama for our last three days of the trip.

In Yokohama, we were received kindly by Ferris University students, who showed us all around the city, joining us for lunch and bubble tea. Tokyo was marked by a visit to the Sensoji Temple in Asakusa, which was surrounded by an impressive variety of vendors offering souvenirs and sweet treats. I was also able to get a lot of my sight-seeing done here: Shinjuku and Shibuya are amongst my favorite special wards of Tokyo.

Though there's far too much to reminisce on, I am most thankful for my experience in Japan because of all the friends I left the trip with. The memories I made with my classmates throughout this journey are ones I will hold onto for the greater part of my life, and I'll never forget our times spent laughing in the dimly lit streets of Fukui at night together.

Friendships Forged in Honors Housing Lead to Annual "Friendsgiving" Gathering Long After Graduation

"It's our time to hang out again"—Krista Klein



When Krista Klein looks back on her undergraduate days at Rutgers College, she recalls the joys of suite-style living in the honors program residence hall, McCormick Suites.

"It was a different vibe than a traditional dorm," says Klein RC'08, noting how the layout of three-bedroom suites fostered an atmosphere of openness in which students would casually venture across suites to socialize.

"I'd hear something (from another suite), grab my blanket, and wander over to see what's going on," says Klein, now an associate dean at Rutgers Honors College.

Friends at McCormick ate together, hung out in each other's common spaces, and relished endearing games such as spin the compliment bottle.

"I was never alone," Klein said. "We all just clicked. It was a really special time."

The comfort and closeness carry over to today, especially at Thanksgiving time when Klein and her fellow honors alums from '08 and '09 hold their annual "Friendsgiving" celebration. The potluck gathering, typically held in late November or early December,

continued on page 3...

continued from page 2...

started in the early 2010s and quickly drew a devoted following.

“Friendsgiving is such a special time because it really does feel like getting together with family,” says Irena Nayfeld RC’08, now a developmental psychologist based in the New York City area. “Our lives have changed so much. I have moved many times. I lived in different places, and yet it really feels like home.”

“The kids basically run rampant,” Klein

quipped. “One time I thought there was blood in my bathtub, but it was makeup they were throwing in there.”

“It really is like the next generation,” Nayfeld adds.

Friendsgiving has spawned its own traditions, such as the much-loved baked brie appetizer that one participant brings or the special salad another prepares.

“Now that we have kids, mac and cheese

has become a big deal too,” Klein adds.

But perhaps the most prized tradition of Friendsgiving is just being together, which brings the alums back to their days at McCormick.

“It’s our time to hang out again,” Klein said. “It’s almost parallel to when we would just sit in our dorm room and just talk and catch up. It’s lovely, and everyone looks forward to it.”

SASHP Senior Leader Award Recipients

The SASHP Senior Leader Award acknowledges the contributions of Honors students in their final year of undergraduate study who have made significant contributions to campus life at Rutgers, with particular emphasis on service to Honors Program organizations and initiatives. 8 of the 14 recipients share their reflections below (not pictured: Evonne Chiang, Anshruta Chidananda, Aya Moshet, Ramitha Ravishankar, Tulip Sengupta, Anna Trinh)

Rebecca Raush



“I am so grateful for the academic advising that I was able to get as a part of the SASHP and that I had the chance to complete an honors

thesis. My next dream is to get a job working in publishing starting with completing Columbia’s Publishing Course this summer!”

Abdullah Ghanima



“I loved being a part of Aresty here at Rutgers. I was able to contribute to an impactful research project that taught me skills I will continue to use throughout my career.”

Julianna Margolin



“My favorite part of SASHP was the embedded study abroad program. I travelled to South Africa and Spain

through Honors, and those two opportunities allowed me to gain new perspective and cultural experiences that transformed my worldview.”

Caitlyn Colabraro



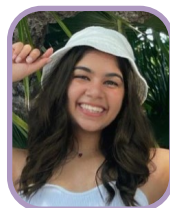
“Being on the SASHP Peer Mentor Programming Board has had such a big impact on my college career, and I will miss it very much!”

Riddhi Shah



“Being a part of SASHP Peer Mentor Programming Board allowed me to leave my own legacy by creating events for freshmen to meet each other!!”

Rithika Sriram



“Coming in after an online freshman year, I felt like I had missed out on a really crucial part of my college experience, but I am so glad to have found wonderful friends who made it seem like I didn’t miss out on anything at all! I will really miss the community at Rutgers: my professors, peers, and everybody who made the transition from high school to college so seamless and so fun that I didn’t even notice 4 years go by.”

Philip Melnichuk-Litvak



“Undeniably, my most memorable SASHP experience was my honors embedded study abroad trip to Costa Rica. I had the pleasure

of practicing science communication while learning about the culture, history, biodiversity, and science of Costa Rica. But even more so, I am grateful for getting a chance to find my own family at Rutgers, and I wish that everyone gets a chance to find a family of their own.”

Paula Sholander



“The SAS Honors Program allowed me to build a supportive community and create a home away from home at Rutgers. I was able to fulfill my personal and professional goals with the SASHP and [I will] continue to use the lessons I learned [at Rutgers] at NYU’s MA in Psychology Program!”

They Said “Yes” to the Honors Program, and then to Each Other

Three couples who met as honors students

He was only on stage for a moment, but Robert Buccigrossi gave class valedictorian remarks in 1994 that would be hard to forget.

With a U.S. senator and university leaders looking on, Buccigrossi stepped to the microphone at the Rutgers College commencement and said, “Jennifer Horn, could you please stand up?”

Horn, a fellow senior seated among the throng of graduates on Voorhees Mall, was as surprised as anyone to hear him call her name.

“I expected some mushy ‘Thank you’ for helping him get there,” she said. Instead, “he basically just said, ‘Will you marry me?’”

And Horn responded with a nod of her head: “Yes.”

The couple met and fell in love in the Honors Program.

And they aren’t the only ones.

Alumni of the Rutgers honors and scholars programs can easily list what they treasured most about their honors experience, including mentoring, housing, special courses, and a strong sense of community.

But for some, the program also gave them something more—a relationship that would blossom into marriage.

Jennifer and Robert



Jennifer Horn and Robert Buccigrossi RC’94 met while living at McCormick Suites, an honors program residence hall known for its friendly vibe.

“We were part of a pretty cohesive group,” Jennifer said. “We all just got along. Different majors, different personalities. We would go to lunch and do things.”

The couple got involved in Alpha Phi Omega service organization, working together on jobs like de-stapling old fliers, staffing the lost and found office, and walking dogs at an animal shelter.

“I was completely afraid of dogs,” Robert said. “She turned me into a dog lover.”

After popping the question from the stage during graduation, Robert couldn’t gauge the response. U.S. Senator Bill Bradley shook his hand. And after returning to his seat, the person next to him quipped: “Looks like you’ll have to wait till you get home to get the real answer.”

The couple married a year later. Jennifer is a pediatrician and Robert is Chief Technology Officer at a Washington

D.C.-based consulting firm. They have a daughter who is attending Rutgers, and a dog named Bear.

Shortly after graduating, the couple celebrated their engagement with a trip to Disney World. Waiting in line at a roller coaster, someone spotted their Rutgers regalia and approached.

“He said ‘oh Rutgers, did you hear some guy proposed to his girlfriend at graduation?’” Jennifer said.

Sweta and Patrick



Sweta Devarajan and Patrick Ambrosio SAS ‘17 got acquainted while exploring ancient Mayan ruins. The two were among a dozen honors students to go on a one-credit Spring Break trip to the Yucatan Peninsula in Mexico.

The much-loved annual journey led by then honors assistant dean Julio Nazario had students climbing pyramids, hiking in rainforests and learning about the region from local guides.

The two sophomores met for the first time as the group gathered at the airport for the flight to Mexico. During the week, as the students toured historic colonial cities and snorkeled in tropical seas, Sweta said she developed a positive impression of Patrick.

“It was like ‘oh he likes history; he’s a good swimmer; we can talk to each other, and he asks good questions to the guide,’” she recalled.

Patrick’s roommate on the trip noticed the rapport blossoming and encouraged Patrick to ask Sweta out on a date.

“I was like, ‘oh, do you think she likes me?’” Patrick recalled. “And he said ‘Oh yeah, I can tell by the way she is talking to you. Go for it.’”

After returning home the two struck up a relationship.

“I felt we had a whole week’s worth of dating without there being the pressure of being on a date,” Sweta said of the trip. “We were with others our age. We all lived in a courtyard. And we would stay up talking.”

The two continued building their relationship through honors program activities and events, including bus rides organized by Nazario to New York City to see the Cloisters and take in the museums.

“One of our first dates we went to the Met,” Sweta said. “That was what was so great about the honors program,”

Patrick said. “You get this small liberal arts college within the research university.”

After graduating from Rutgers, both obtained graduate degrees—Sweta in physical therapy as well as anatomy and clinical health sciences, and Patrick in statistics. They married in 2021 and relocated to Denver in 2024 where they are pursuing careers in health care and data analytics. The couple recently celebrated the birth of their first child, a baby girl.

Though they enjoy their new surroundings, they at times feel nostalgic for the days in New Brunswick ordering food from places like Thai Noodle.

“The woman who ran it knew our orders,” Patrick said.

Sweta adds: “I’d always order an eggplant dish and she’d say ‘yeah, yeah; and pad kee mao?’”

Faith and Wee Siang



Wee Siang Tay and Faith Lee SAS '19 met in an honors seminar called “China’s Capitals Across Time and Their Linguistic and Cultural Impacts.”

“She always came to class with some Brower takeout nachos,” Wee Siang, an economics major, recalled in an email from the couple, who now live in Singapore.

During the seminar, the two were paired up to do a presentation together. And then for ten days in May of 2017 the class toured China, led by Richard V. Simmons, of the Department of Asian Languages and Cultures.

“Our trip to China provided a lot of common ground,” said Faith, who majored in French and medieval studies.

After returning, the two remained close friends through honors events like incoming students’ day and honors formal, and occasionally going out to eat.

“We became a couple by eating all the delicious food within the periphery of Rutgers,” Faith says.

She said the two were often running into each other at the honors program’s main offices on the College Avenue Campus.

“Many of our friends were also in the honors program, so our roads often converged at 35 College Ave.”

The two began dating in their junior year and were married in 2022.

Wee Siang is an analytics consultant and Faith teaches kindergarten in a French international school.

2024 Summer Reading Program



This summer the incoming class’s common read was *True Biz* by Sara Novic. The novel takes place at a school for the deaf and examines deaf culture from the

perspectives of two of its students and its hearing administrator. SASHP students discussed disability rights issues raised in the book while also learning some sign language that was included in the book. At their welcome event prior to the start of the semester, students had the opportunity to meet with Ms. Novic and have their book signed while enjoying a reception.

If you would like to suggest a book for next summer’s common read, please email: hpsummerreading@sas.rutgers.edu.

Did you recently move or change your e-mail address? Update your contact information with us at: go.rutgers.edu/sashp-contact

SAS Honors Program by the Numbers

137

Class of 2024 Honors Scholar Graduates

124 and 13

SAS RBS

Top 3 Majors

1. Computer Science
2. Biological Sciences
3. Psychology

11

Graduated with a 4.0
Cumulative GPA

Top 3 Minors

1. Psychology
2. Spanish
3. Sociology

8

Completed an Interdisciplinary
Honors Thesis

Save the Date

Honors Alumni Gathering
Saturday, April 26, 2025

Our Thanks to Dean Chuck Keeton



Looking ahead to another exciting year in honors, we want to take this opportunity to share our appreciation for Dr. Chuck Keeton's contributions to our program. This summer, Dr. Keeton became the Vice Provost for Experiential Learning after five years as our academic dean and several years as a faculty mentor and member of our Summer Reading committee. We thank him for his service and his leadership of our community and wish him the best.