Interview with Metro Student, Brian Laster, about his own research in Japan

How did you end up doing your own research project in Japan?

Well, my current project is basically an extension of a previous research project from Dr. Rebecca Forgash’s Ethnography of Communication class titled “At Home in the Mile High City.” For the initial project I focused mainly on one individual’s constructions of community and home based around his involvement in the Denver skateboarding culture. This went well and I was already planning on studying abroad in Japan the following summer so I decided to stay in country about a week after the study abroad course ended and attempted to basically replicate my earlier project in Japan in order to gain a cross cultural perspective. So, I basically narrowed the scope of my previous project in regard to notions of skate community as well as uses of urban space and tailored it to fit Japan more specifically in order to analyze and synthesize the data from my project here in Denver and the data I collected in Japan. Luckily I had the help of Dr. Forgash and already had a couple connections to the skate community in Japan which made conducting research there in such a short time frame a lot more feasible.

What kind of trouble did you have getting started?

Initially, pinning down exactly how to conduct the research and what to focus on was a daunting problem because for one, I had never been to Japan before, and because in my previous project the scope had initially been much wider. Also, considering I hadn’t seen or spoken to my primary participant in Japan for nearly six years it was hard to say if he’d be willing to participate in the project, let alone share the data and photographs I collected with others in an academic setting. Another hurdle was submitting all the necessary documents to the MSU IRB and receiving approval. The process took weeks and numerous revisions to project guidelines as well as to the consenting process. Again, Dr. Forgash was there to help.
What was your favorite experience while doing your research in Japan? Most difficult?

I think my favorite part of doing research was getting to skateboard through the streets of Tokyo at night with the group of Japanese skateboarders I’d come to know there and exploring the city and night life that way. However, I think the craziest experience on the trip for me was being welcomed to sit down at a long wooden dinner table in the home of a large family of rural peanut farming surfers and being fed a delicious homemade Japanese curry while the whole family socialized and laughed.

Where are you now in your research?

At this stage I am reviewing the data and conclusions from my previous research project as well as from my research in Japan in order to draw a basic outline of how to compare and synthesize data from both into a coherent research paper. I have also just received transcribed translations of an essential interview I conducted with my primary participant regarding his participation in the skate community and his life in Tokyo. I will be using this audio as well as photos from my research to create a photo-ethnography to compliment my research paper.

Are you planning on attending grad school?

I do plan on attending grad school but I think that after attaining my Bachelor’s this December I might take a year or two off from school to do further traveling and potentially continue working on my research in order to submit it to a journal. I think a break will also give me a chance to really consider the focus I’d like to pursue through grad school rather than diving straight in.

How tall are you?

6’6” or the answer I gave to this frequently asked question in Japan, 198 cm.

Any suggestions to other students conducting their own research?

Don’t underestimate the value of your connections, and always ask for help. Find something you have a real interest in. I mean, I’m essentially doing a college level research project on skateboarding. Make it your own and don’t worry how trivial it may seem because as one professor in Japan told me, even though it may seem like something small, it may become something big.
Featured Graduate Schools

University of Alaska, Anchorage

Degrees: Master’s

Programs: General Anthropology, Applied Anthropology

Requirements: 3.0 Undergrad GPA

Funding: Teaching Assistantships, Research Stipends

Applying: Deadline—February, 15th

Tuition and Fees:  
Resident- 403$/Credit
Non-Resident- 823$/Credit

http://www.uaa.alaska.edu/anthropology/

Brown University

Degree: PhD

Programs: Archaeology, Linguistics, Cultural

Requirements: Sign up required to receive full details.

Funding: 5 year package- Tuition Covered, living stipend

Applying: Deadline—December 15th

Tuition and Fees: $46,408 a year

http://www.brown.edu/academics/anthropology/phd-anthropology
Featured Field Schools

AAS 290 Africana Studies – Spring Break 2015 in the Dominican Republic: This course allows students to engage actively with the history and culture of the Afro-Caribbean in the Dominican Republic. Among the many activities, students will tour the colonial zone in Santo Domingo, a 16th – Century Sugar Factory and local sugar-worker towns (bateys); participate in lectures on the history/culture of the Dominican Republic, and workshops with the Dominican Women Group, and La Cofradia del Espiritu-Santo Los Congos de Villa Mella (Brotherhood of the Holy Spirit of the Congos of Villa Mella); visit a Taino cave, La Peidra, El Limon waterfalls, and explore African ancestry in Semaná.

Estimated cost: $4,170 (includes tuition, room/board, books, meals, passport, and extra expenses. Price may be lower, depending on airfare.)

Credits: Contact Dr. McLeod (see below)

Date: Spring Break 2015

For more information, please contact Dr. McLeod at jmcleod2@msudenver.edu, or visit the Office of International Studies, located in Central Classroom 206.

The Speaker’s House – Home of Frederick Muhlenberg Archaeology Field School: Join Montgomery County Community College for a summer in Pennsylvania to help excavate a historic home. Built in 1763, the house has served several functions, including a general store, dormitory, and a private residence. Due to the complex history of the home and the impressive state of preservation, the home serves as a great location for archaeology! This program is a three-week course that will teach excavation techniques, record keeping, artifact identification, processing, cataloging, and classification. No prior experience is required and anyone over the age of 15 can attend. Enrollment is limited to 20 participants.

Estimated cost: Cost will vary. Non-Pennsylvania residents must pay $420/credit. There is an additional $75 for supply cost. Tuition and fees apply. For more information, please visit the website below.

Credits: 3 (Must register with Montgomery County Community College as a guest student)

Date: June 10 to 28, June 30 to July 5 is an optional add-on week

For more information, please contact Lisa Minardi at info@speakershouse.org, or visit The Speaker’s House website at http://www.speakershouse.org/archaeology.
Conferences

American Anthropological Association: Annual Meeting
- 12/3 - 12/7
- Washington, DC
- [http://www.aaanet.org/meetings/](http://www.aaanet.org/meetings/)

Lavender Language & Linguistics Conference
- 2/13 - 2/15
- Washington, DC
- [http://www.american.edu/cas/anthropology/lavender-languages/](http://www.american.edu/cas/anthropology/lavender-languages/)

American Academy of Forensic Sciences: Annual Meeting
- 2/16 - 2/21
- Orlando, FL
- [http://www.aafs.org/meetings/2015](http://www.aafs.org/meetings/2015)

Paleopathology Association: North American Meeting
- 3/24-3/25
- St. Louis, MO
- [http://www.paleopathology.org/2015MeetingInfo.html](http://www.paleopathology.org/2015MeetingInfo.html)

American Association of Physical Anthropologists: Annual Meeting
- 3/25 – 3/29
- St. Louis, MO
- [http://physanth.org/annual-meeting/84th-annual-meeting-2015](http://physanth.org/annual-meeting/84th-annual-meeting-2015)

Hey! You!

Are you wondering how to fund a trip to any of the above conferences (or others)??! MSU Denver has a Student Travel Program for those wishing to attend or present at a national conference! For more information go to:

[http://www.msudenver.edu/studentactivities/studenttravel/](http://www.msudenver.edu/studentactivities/studenttravel/)

Featured Organizations

**The Egypt Study Society (ESS)** is an organization for people who are interested in ancient Egypt. ESS welcomes anyone with similar interests to participate. ESS programs include lectures, slide and video presentations, seminars, hands on workshops, and an annual picnic. Well known egyptologists and knowledgeable ESS members make presentations throughout the year.


**The Colorado Archaeological Society (CAS)** came into existence in 1935 as a focus for people having interests in the history and prehistory of humans in Colorado. The Chipeta Chapter, in Montrose, CO, was also founded in 1935 and is the oldest continuously active chapter. Subsequently, other groups were established in other Colorado cities, and a state organization was created.

Roxborough State Park Archaeology Fair

**Roxborough State Park** in Littleton, Colorado will celebrate International Archaeology Day with a fair that is both educational and fun. Events will include:

- Lectures by Colorado archaeologists;
- Hikes to view a few of the park’s many archaeological sites;
- Naturalists explaining hands-on exhibits of plants, animals, and tools used by the area's Archaic and Woodland residents.
- Learn how to do tree ring analysis
- A flint knapper will demonstrate ancient survival skills.
- Sample ancient foods at an Archaic snack stand
- Children of all ages can enjoy prehistoric crafts and lively games, grinding acorns, and face painting.