QUESTION SET 1

1. WHAT ARE YOUR INITIAL IMPRESSIONS OF THE ORGANIZATION AND AN OVERVIEW AND THOUGHTS ABOUT THE KIND OF WORK YOU'VE STARTED DOING; HOW DOES THE WORK MATCH YOUR EXPECTATIONS, HOW DOES IT MATCH YOUR GOALS?

 I enjoy the office atmosphere here at Run for the Cure Foundation, and really admire the work that they are doing here in Japan to help women across the country. I like that the office is shared with Paradigm, and I am able to work with those employees as well as Naoko and Marco from RFTC. The work I was doing during the first week started pretty easy and slow, but has built up to more exciting things including going to business meetings, making changes on the website and actually picking people to interview for Naoko’s job when she leaves. I have gained more and more responsibility while being here which is both rewarding and humbling at the same time. The work has pretty much matched my expectations, and has been very good so far. I am happy that I am able to do such important things for the foundation, and see myself as an important member of the RFTC group. My goal is to use more Japanese, which I am doing more of everyday.

1. WHAT STOOD OUT TO YOU THE MOST REGARDING YOUR ARRIVAL?

 What stood out to me most was everyone’s friendliness and kindness. Everyone in the office is so nice and fun to work with which creates a great working environment. Also, the weather stood out to be because of how different it is than in Oregon. It is hotter here than I am used to and even though I knew this before I came it has been very uncomfortable. I am getting more and more used to it, but its hard to stay cool when commuting to and from work.

1. WHAT WAS YOUR GREATEST ANXIETY PRIOR TO DEPARTING AND HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THAT NOW THAT YOU HAVE ARRIVED?

 I was mostly anxious just to be by myself in another country. I have never been away from home for more than 2 weeks and am not used to doing things alone. Since being here, I have felt homesick but have managed to keep myself busy. Although I do go sightseeing and to eat meals by myself everyday I have gotten more used to it and have been able to feel more independent.

SECOND SET OF QUESTIONS:

1. HOW ARE THINGS GOING AT WORK NOW THAT YOU HAVE SETTLED IN FOR A BIT? HOW DOES THIS ALIGN WITH YOUR PROFESSIONAL GOALS THAT YOU SET FOR YOURSELF? WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO ACHIEVE IN THE NEXT HALF OF YOUR INTERNSHIP?

 Things are going really great at work and I have taken on more and more responsibility. I have been testing my Japanese by writing more and having Naoko check it. Throughout the rest of my internship I hope to accomplish more things for the upcoming events as well as help RFTC find a new office and production manager (Naoko’s position). I have been assisting Marco (Davide’s replacement) in planning for a new event at Nozawa Onsen Sept. 29th and hope to get that event worked out as well as the annual run that takes place at the imperial palace. In my remaining time I also hope to enhance my business skills and learn more about how NGO’s work.

1. HOW ARE THINGS GOING RELATIVE TO YOUR PERSONAL GOALS? IN WHICH AREAS HAVE YOU MADE PROGRESS AND WHERE DO YOU STILL HAVE SOME ROOM TO EXPAND? WHAT DO YOU WANT TO MAKE SURE YOU ADDRESS BEFORE YOU LEAVE?

 As far as personal goals, my main one is to find friends. I did not think that this would be so difficult, and hoped to get pared with roommates close to my age who would be in a similar situation as me. However, this was not the case and both of the girls I live with have been here for a long time and have their own lives, and are older than me. I have had a few dinners with one of them, but hardly ever see the other. I really like my apartment and room, so do not want to move, but hope that over time I can find people to sightsee with or share meals with. Also, as I have previously stated, I want to deepen my understanding of Japanese language and hope to improve my own skills over the summer. Before I leave, I hope to be a better Japanese speaker, which will be easy as long as I proactively use Japanese everyday. I have only been here three weeks, and still have a lot to address before I leave.

1. HOW ARE THINGS GOING RELATIVE TO YOUR CROSS-CULTURAL GOALS? WHAT KINDS OF EXPERIENCES HAVE STOOD OUT TO YOU SO FAR? WHAT DO YOU WANT TO ENSURE TO EXPERIENCE BEFORE YOU LEAVE?

 As far as cross-cultural goals, I just hope to keep sightseeing around the city as well as experience as much real Japanese culture as I can. I have had the opportunity to go to two different matsuris (festivals) that have been great cultural experiences. Before I leave, I hope to experience going out with friends, visiting Mt. Fuji and hopefully some areas on the outskirts of Tokyo. I can hopefully accomplish more cross-cultural things when my father comes to visit, seeing as I will have somebody to share those experiences with.

Question Set 3 Week 6-8:

1. Describe a day in your life – what is your work schedule like, what do you do after work, how do you balance your time between work and exploring life outside of work?

 On weekdays, I wake up around 8:30 and it’s already in the 80’s. I am never going to get used to the heat, but at least I have AC in my room and at work. I wake up, get ready for work and leave my apartment around 9:30. The subway station that I use is only about a 5 minute walk, and I take that subway one stop then transfer to the bigger JR train line and take a second train one stop. From the train station by my work, it takes less than 5 minutes to walk to the office. This gives me only a 20-minute commute unless the train is delayed or I accidently miss one. Luckily the trains come every 3-5 minutes so when I miss one, it’s never a big problem. I work from 10-6:30, Monday – Friday. Once I get to work I do a variety of things including: website updating, emailing sponsors, making flyers, updating and posting to facebook and twitter, coming up with ideas for new sponsors, organizing databases and files, making media kits to deliver to our potential and current sponsors, random office tasks…ect. We eat lunch from 12-1, and some days I go eat out at a restaurant and others I go get a bento of some kind and bring it to my desk so I can either keep working, surf the internet or chat/email friends and family.

 At 6:30 I get off, and usually go find some dinner either near my house or in another area. There are many places around my apartment so I stay close to home when it’s unusually hot or when I’m tired, but some days I take the train to another station and walk around to find something new. Recently, I have been going for walks at night to see more of my neighborhood while getting a little exercise. This has been nice, and I am thinking about climbing Mt. Fuji next month so I am trying to start exercising more to prepare for that. Some nights I have dinner with my roommates but mostly it’s on my own. Once home, I usually relax and watch TV shows or movies on my computer until I fall asleep.

 On Friday nights I usually always go have dinner or shop around in a new area or somewhere that I have only been once or twice. This is a good way for me to find new things to do. On the weekends is when I do most of my sightseeing and exploring. I have tried to go to different or new places every Saturday and Sunday. I also use this time to catch up on sleep, and try and arrange things to do with my roommates or the two other people I know in Tokyo.

1. Housing: What is your living situation like? Knowing what you know now, are there other options you would have chosen instead? If you can provide some resources for future interns, that would be most helpful.

 I live in a shared apartment with two other girls. One has actually done work with RFTC and knows all of my supervisors (she takes photographs at the events). At first I was a little disappointed that my apartment building had no common area as it seemed it would, and I have virtually no contact with anyone other than the two girls in my same apartment (and barley even see them). After the first couple of weeks though, I started to enjoy my apartment more and I really like the location. It is very close to work and has a really cool shop and restaurant filled street nearby. I am not sure that I would have done anything different other than maybe try and find a shared building with more rooms, with more options to meet people. I think Sakura House is great to go through for housing in Tokyo and I am really happy with their accommodations and summer actives they offer.

1. Finances: How is your budget working out for you? Are you spending more or less that what you expected? How much do you typically spend on food, recreation, travel, etc? What would you do differently knowing what you know now?

 Tokyo is expensive. I knew this coming here of course, but was unprepared to spend so much money on random things such as a hairdryer, a towel and a comfortable pillow. I forgot to pack a towel with me, and ended up having to buy one for around $30. Also, a small hair dryer cost me around $55. The first couple weeks I woke up with a sore neck from my pillow and went to the store, bought the cheapest one and still ended up spending $60. Wow! There are also a lot of deals around though, and getting dinner on the street near my house is fairly cheap anywhere from $5-15. RFTC gives me 500 yen for lunch everyday (I spend between 500 and 800 each day so this works great). They also paid for my Suica card (train pass) that gets me to and from work. I add additional money to this card so I can easily travel around after work or on weekends. I started by added around $60 and that lasted me about 3 weeks. Since then I just add 1,000 yen each time I get low, but would say depending on how many times during the week I travel farther than just to and from work, it’s between $75 and $100 a month. I have been shopping fairly a lot but only buy things I know I can absolutely not get at home, or things I cannot live without. I have decided to buy most of my gifts at the 100-yen shop, and get lots of candy and small things to bring back for friends. Right now there are also summer sales at almost every store so I have been able to get things for good prices. I am trying to limit myself to around $1,000 a month and think I have pretty much stuck to that since I’ve been here. I have used the internet to find deals on things I am interested, and found that if you go to Disneyland after 3, it is almost half price. I am also planning on hiking with my coworkers as well as a possible Mt. Fuji trip, so will need to buy boots for this.

1. Travel and Transportation: How do you typically get around town and to work? Are you satisfied with that choice? Would you recommend other options? Do you have time to explore the surrounding area on time off? How do you manage that? What do you recommend for travel options? Where do you recommend exploring?

 I use the train and subway systems to get everywhere. This seems to be the easiest choice because taxis are so expensive and it is too hot to walk very far. It works great and upon checking into my apartment, they gave me a really great English train map that I take with me everywhere. After a couple of days, it was really easy to figure out the train and subway systems and they work really great. I have time to explore different areas both after work and on the weekends, which has been really nice. I wish I had some more time to travel outside of Tokyo or even to Kyoto or some of the other bigger cities, but I was able to go to the beach one afternoon (about an hour away) and have plans to take day trips to Kamakura and other surrounding areas just outside of Tokyo. There is so much to do in the city. I have enjoyed simply taking the train to new stations, and walking around the different areas. The big temples and shines are really enjoyable and very ‘Japanese’. Also Ueno Park is great, and I spent a whole day just walking around and going into museums, and have plans to go back to visit the Panda’s at the zoo. Shibuya, Ginza, Shinagawa, Harajuku and Shinjuku are busy areas with so much to do around the train stations that you can easily spend a full day exploring each. Disneyland was a lot of fun, and I plan on making another trip there to explore DisneySea. I have not done anything I did not enjoy so far, and have used The Lonely Planet guidebook as well as the internet for ideas of places to go.

🡪More detail about my living situation:

 Sakura House was on the list that Sarajean provided, but I had also asked a friend and she suggested it as well. They are very nice and all speak English. They have buildings all over Tokyo with different types of room options. The website is: http://www.sakura-house.com/en/ and when I made my reservation, I just emailed them the address of where I would be working, and they gave me a couple options of open rooms close to the area. You can reserve a room months in advance and because it’s just a month-to-month rental agreement, I would suggest booking in advance since you cannot predict what other people are doing. I reserved my room 2 or 3 months before I left. Sakura House is open 7 days a week and their office is really easy to find (by Shinjuku station). Somebody comes to clean the shared space in our apartment once a week or once every two weeks, which is very convenient (and something I didn't even think about until getting here). When I arrived, I took a hotel shuttle to the Shinagawa Prince Hotel. I chose this because I figured it was in a relatively close area to where I would be living and had actually stayed there when I was in 5th grade on my class trip and was interested in revisiting it. The shuttle from the airport was only around $35 and took around an hour and a half. They have a variety of room types and I stayed in a single, small room, for just over $100 for the night (not bad for a nice hotel). When it was time to go get the keys to my apartment, I left my stuff at the bag check at the hotel and took the train to check in at the Sakura House office. This was very easy, and I had printed out directions to their office before I got to Japan, making this very simple. When it was time to take my stuff from the hotel to my apartment, I was nervous about lugging my stuff through the train. I had two huge suitcases, a duffle bag and a backpack. I could barley manage rolling them around by myself, so decided to take a taxi to my apartment. I was lucky because the hotel was only about 10 minutes away from my new apartment and surprisingly only cost me about $20. It worked out great.

Week 8-10 #4

1. Professional: How well did your coursework prepare you for your internship? What knowledge of your field has been most important so far?

 My language classes prepared me the most I think. Being able to take Japanese language classes right before being fully immersed in the language has been really great. Although I do not use Japanese at work all the time, I am getting great practice and am putting what I have learned to good use. A few things I have learned in my business classes have been helpful as well, but I would have liked to taken a class related to NPO work prior to coming here.

1. Cross Cultural: Describe an event where you misunderstood something due to cultural differences. What did you do? What would you do next time?

 I have been thinking about a way to answer this question for a few days, and have come up with nothing. Since I went to a Japanese elementary school and have been studying Japanese since I have been 5, I have been immersed into Japanese culture my whole life. It is because of this that I cannot think of a single time where I misunderstood something due to cultural differences. There have been times where I have misunderstood things due to communication, and have had to ask people to repeat themselves or tell me what they are saying in simpler terms, but being in Tokyo is not like a traditional Japanese town. My roommate has been in Tokyo for 8 years and does not speak more than 5 words of Japanese. It is very easy to live here and not speak Japanese, so Tokyo is unique in that way. I use all the opportunities I can to speak Japanese and practice communicating with people, which has been great practice.

1. Personal: What are the most important things you have learned about yourself thus far through this experience?

 Since being here, I have learned that I can be almost completely independent. Being an only child and always being close to home has enabled me to be needy and spoiled. I have found that although it was difficult at first, I am able to be on my own and capable of doing things easily. It has been a great experience for me to have this opportunity to be on my own working and living in another country. Coming here, I knew I could do this but had no idea how hard it would be for me to be away from home. At first I wasn't sure I could do it, but after a couple of weeks, I got my routine down and started to feel very comfortable being independent.

Week 10-12 Questions 5

Professional: Have you learned about any new possibilities for career paths? Have you done any informational interviews (formal or informal) to learn about the field?

 I have learned that I am more interested in magazine layout design and editing than I thought I was before. Working on PiNK Magazine has been very interesting to me and I enjoy doing the small tasks related to editing and design that have been given to me. Also being in the office with Paradigm has allowed me to see how the production of a magazine really works. I have done informal interviews with Naoko about what all is involved with producing a successful magazine and it is something that really interests me.

Cross Cultural: What is the most frustrating aspect of your host culture? What is the most rewarding aspect?

The most rewarding aspect of the Japanese culture would have to be the kindness and generosity of the people here. Everybody is so polite and really makes an effort to help you. An example of this is when I’ve been at a train station looking at the map of where to go, and people will come up to me and ask me if I need help and try and figure out the best way to get where I am going, and sometimes even go out of their way to come with me or follow me to make sure that I get on the right train. Sometimes this is also frustrating because once I know the direction I need to go, I don’t need somebody to come with me while I walk to the train or to even take me to my stop. It is very different than at home, and people are so genuinely nice. There is not much else that is frustrating about the culture, other than since I live in an area with not too many foreigners, at times the older people stare at me and that can be a little strange. Also, I have noticed that while people understanding me when I speak Japanese, they don’t think I can understand them so they spend all this time trying to talk in English to me which only makes things more confusing.

Personal: The period of cultural adjustment is often represented by a “W” curve with various peaks and valleys: Honeymoon (peak); Initial Culture Shock (Valley); Cultural Adjustment (peak); Further Culture Shock (valley); Futher Adjustment (peak); Re-entry Shock (valley). Outline your cultural adjustment thus far marking the highs and lows with approximate dates and descriptions of events that represent some of these phases (recognizing of course, that your still in process)

 Peak: When I first arrived I was very excited and anxious to find out about what I would be doing and where I would be living. I stayed in a hotel the first night and could not wait to find out more about what my next three months would be like. Moving into my apartment and going to my first week of work was a big peak and I was very excited and happy to be starting such a new adventure.

 Valley: I did not have any real culture shock upon arriving in Japan, but finding time to communicate with my family back home was my first real low point. With the difficult time difference, I found it very hard to Skype and talk with my parents and friends. This was really difficult for me because having never really been away from my family, I expected to be able to talk with them a lot.

 Peak: Once I was able to get my routine down and get involved with work, I was really able to start enjoying my time here. Adjusting to living in such a big city did not take too long, and I soon found myself able to use the trains easily and found fun things to do every weekend.

 Valley: Getting homesick about half way through my time, and feeling like I had been here forever was another low point for me. After about 6 weeks, I felt that I had been here for so long and felt ready to leave. It never really had to do with culture shock, but it was more the shock of being on my own so much without someone to really talk to or hang out with.

 Peak: My dad coming to visit me was really great. He came for a week, and I was able to take a couple of days off and work half days. It really brought my spirits up and gave me a chance to show off places my neighborhood and office, as well as go sightseeing with somebody for a change.

 Valley: Now that my time is almost over here, it is starting to set in that I will actually be leaving. This has been a little disappointing to me, and I think that if it weren’t for specific classes that I need to take fall term, I would stay. I feel like I do very valuable work here and I am going to be very sad to leave.

Week 12-14 #6

Professional: With your experience thus far, are your more or less committed to a career in this field? What experiences have contributed to this?

 After working at such a great NPO, I can say that I am more or less committed to a career in this field. Being able to do a variety of work, while knowing that it is helping people has really contributed to my enjoyment of work. I am very interested in helping people as well as event planning and magazine production. As far as I know, working with an NPO is one of the only careers where you can do all of these different things while contributing to the well being of other people. With this unique experience, I am also thinking that working for an international company is also something that I am very much interested in. Living in another country has been so great for my professional development, and I think doing something similar to this as a career would be great.

Cross Cultural: Looking back at your pre-departure journal or notes, how have your impressions of the host culture changed? What new sources of information have shaped your perspectives?

 My impressions have changed slightly because I had no idea what living in a big city would be like. There is always so much going on, and people are everywhere. I was initially worried that I would not find my way around but I was completely wrong. I have had no trouble finding things to do and have not once gotten lost. I have found that while it is still easy to feel lonely in such a busy place, there are always new places to explore and things to see. Now that I have been working here for three months, I am starting to hang out with the Paradigm employees outside of work and I feel that if I was going to be here longer, we would only become closer.

 My shyness to use my Japanese has gone, and I am now comfortable speaking to people and not afraid to make mistakes. I was nervous that I would not get over this before I came, but it is nice to be able to impress people since they usually don't expect me to be able to communicate so well in Japanese.

Personal: What has been the greatest challenge personally thus far on this internship? What has been the greatest reward?

 My greatest personal challenge has been simply being alone and away from my family. I did not have many chances to make friends, and felt like I had nobody to talk to or hang out with for a lot of my internship. At the same time, this has also been my greatest reward. Before coming here I did not think I could be completely on my own and was nervous about not having anybody to depend on. I have exceeded my personal expectations and am very proud of how much I have grown here being on my own.

More about my work at RFTC: I have been lucky to be able to do a wide variety of things. I have worked with Marco (Davide's replacement) helping with event planning, sponsor coordination and donation collection while being able to help Naoko with PiNK Magazine, website updating and sending news letters out. I update the website anytime it is needed, and compose newsletters every other week to send to our sponsors and friends. I have made a ton of contacts with new possible sponsors and reached out to previous donors to ensure more support. Planning for our annual Run for the Cure/ Walk for life and the 10th annual Pink Ball has also been an everyday task. I do so much work here and I feel very valuable to the team. I was even part of the screening and interviewing process for hiring a new employee. Naoko has decided to go part-time, and we hired a 'replacement' for her job. I was the person to do the initial screening and was involved in all the interviews. It is very nice to feel like an asset, especially since I am only an intern.

Question set #7.

1. Describe the workplace culture at your host organization.  How does your personal cultural lens work within the culture of your host organization?

 I was able to work with an extremely diverse group of 13 people who were all from different parts of the world. Including myself there were; 4 Americans, 3 Japanese women, one man from India, a woman from France, another from London, a man from Ireland, 2 men from Australia and a man from Italy. Being able to share one office with this amazing group of people was such a great experience and created a very unique workplace culture. The office was somewhat casual and very relaxed. When deadlines were approaching for either Paradigm or RFTC, things would get a little tense but for the most part everyone was very friendly with each other and shared ideas, stories and even beers after work on Friday evenings. The founder of RFTC Vickie created a great work atmosphere with a very caring and welcoming place to work.

2. What words of advice do you have for future interns as they prepare for this internship and living in your host country/culture?

My advice for future interns would be to get involved as much as possible and be confident. This is a great organization to work for and since there are only a couple of staff, you will get to be involved as much as you would like and will get to make big discussions as well as come up with crucial ideas to help the foundation gain support. I was so humbled by how much the people I was working with respected my opinion and took my ideas into consideration. The more you are willing to put in, the more you can earn and if you are confident in your ideas and your decision making, then this internship would be a great experience.