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When I think about what truly defined my university experience, the first thing that comes to mind is the intense, life-changing two-week program I completed in the US. Kingfisher Global Leadership Program radically transformed how I see my future career paths and has had a significant impact on my daily decision-making. Not only did I gain invaluable insights into leadership, but I also discovered many new things about myself, which continue to fuel my motivation. In this report, I will reflect on what I learned about global leadership, including the importance of full intercultural immersion, passion, and risk-taking. Additionally, I will outline the goals I aim to achieve in the coming years.

The key takeaway from this program is that full intercultural immersion is the foundation of global leadership, and knowing your audience upgrades that experience. Professor Ishizuka, from Columbia Law School, said that a good balance of listening actively and making one's point can be achieved through full immersion in different cultures. This response took me aback and left a profound impact on me. It made me realize that multicultural inclusion can begin within individuals and then spread to society. While one might struggle to integrate different cultural traits, complete immersion and self-acceptance can lead to the development of a highly adaptable "self." This was the moment when I first clearly envisioned what it means to be a "global person." Additionally, I recognize that understanding your audience and being in the moment with them will refine this process. Nick from CSIS highlighted this point, explaining that it is crucial, especially when you are seeking to cooperate with people in different fields. Namely, finding an intersection, a link between your interest and your opponent's, is significant. I developed this attitude through the program by meeting people from various fields and asking them questions. Through this process, I got used to finding the links between myself and others, leading to engaging conversations.

Strong passion was a central trait commonly shared among global leaders, with definitions varying from person to person. Ann from NASA described it as something you find worth working extremely hard for. This definition was compelling, especially after realizing how challenging it is to take on all the responsibilities at NASA. Estevam from Megagon Lab defined passion as something that makes you comfortable or encourages you to continue pursuing your interests. All in all, you cannot succeed, or even continue working, unless you are truly captivated by what you do. My favorite interpretation of passion, above all, is how Michael Sera put it: something that excites you when you wake up every morning. This mindset was significantly impactful and helped me pinpoint my passion: my genuine passion is enjoying cultural immersion while connecting with many different people and producing an enlightening impact. When I think of the connection with individuals across the world, I feel energized enough to start my day. This discovery was essential for clarifying which path to take.

Another essential takeaway that I should not rule out is the significance of being bold and taking risks. The speakers never hesitated to leverage all the connections, asking for support. This way, they made risks smaller. I have always feared asking for help from others, let alone reaching out to people in high positions. The bold attitude of the leaders I met made me realize that reaching out is the best investment because you have nothing to lose by it. Recognizing that shyness and hesitation had gotten me nowhere fueled my motivation to activate all my connections. Moreover, successful leaders have a clear vision of “risk.” Many people might fall into a pit of illusory “risk” created by society, such as the notion suggested by the older generation in Japan that “falling out of the safe career path is dangerous.” The individuals I have met each had their own rational ways of assessing risks, which made me realize that I cannot determine if things I fear are truly “risks” unless I give them a try. Above all, after hearing so many complex yet interesting career stories from various speakers, I came to believe that experiencing new things enriches your life and makes it worth telling, even if those experiences involve failure. Just as Michael Sera said, “It’s win or learn, not win or lose!”

Lastly, I will outline my next goals in light of the insights gained from this program. Attending the Kingfisher Program was the final item on the bucket list I created in my first year. Now that nearly everything is checked off, it's time to set new goals for the coming years. Enrolling in a master's program abroad to advance my academic expertise is one of them. While this has been a long-term goal, I now have a clearer understanding of how to select courses that align with my career aspirations. I'll ensure the program fits my interests and evaluate whether the faculty has connections in my desired career. In the meantime, I plan to pursue internships to strengthen my practical skills. After realizing my passion for working in a multinational environment, I'm more motivated to gain real-world experience. This marks a significant shift in my career vision, as I originally planned to stay in academia. I owe this transformation to speakers who clarified my priorities and the pathways to achieve them. Alongside these bigger goals, I also want to put my leadership skills into practice daily. Although I've learned much about leadership, overcoming my fear of stepping into leadership roles —particularly in making decisions for others— requires practice. I've often worried about letting others down and thought someone else might do better. However, I've come to understand that leadership isn't about holding a title; it's about being sincere and coherent in decision-making. Professor Ishizuka emphasized that it's not about pleasing everyone, but about explaining your decisions with integrity. Yoshi from UCSF reassured me that it's okay to fail and let people down as long as you actively take charge and learn from the experience. Above all, Nick from CSIS emboldened me by saying: there will always be a place where your leadership fits, so don't be afraid.

To conclude, I gained vital insights into leadership —full multicultural immersion, passion, and risk-taking— all of which have strengthened my purpose to move forward. I genuinely appreciate the excellence of the Kingfisher Global Leadership Program for being well-established yet flexible enough to allow for even minor improvements. I am grateful to everyone who has supported this program. In particular, our program manager, Danielle Reed, added value by being an approachable, confident role model as a leader. She was skilled at bridging the gap between students and speakers, and distinguishing facts from opinions. It is not only Danielle who inspired me and kept me cheerful

during the program. I appreciate all nine other members for being engaging, autonomous, and thoughtful peers. This program would not have been the same without them, and I am fascinated to see what they will achieve in the future. I will cherish all the learnings, experiences, and fun memories with friends from this program as a guiding light for my journey into the unknown.

Hanana Nakano

Faculty of Education, 3rd year

Introduction

What type of person am I? This is the question I had often asked myself. Looking back, I was too bound by the self-image I created. Having spent two weeks in the US, I would answer the question differently now.

I must confess that before and even the first few days of the program, I had been a bit awkward about being in the “Global Leadership” program because I felt I might essentially lack the personality traits required for “that type of person.” Thanks to this program, however, I gained some new perspectives about how to think about my personality, my weaknesses and strengths, and what I can potentially do to contribute to a better society.

When I applied for the Kingfisher Program, I set mainly three goals for the program. First, I wanted to explore how people with different backgrounds, interests, values and cultures can have dialogue in this society, which is often referred to with the word “division” or “polarization”. Second, I wanted to get some ideas about the mindset to work in a team, especially to create a good team atmosphere as a leader. Third, I wanted to learn the situation about DEI (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion) in the US to think about how to make an inclusive community where everyone feels safe and valued.

We visited many different places and had the opportunity to talk with people in various fields and positions. Each experience and story was inspiring in different ways, but I also found some common points regarding the goals I set for this program.

Chance for Dialogue and Connection

Before the program, I had been hoping to find a way in which people can connect over differences because the world seemed so divided. However, through this program, I realized it was me that had been blind to the possibilities of dialogue and had been limiting my zone of interest.

At the start of the program, Danielle, the program manager, told us the tips and mindsets for this program. She said that every person we would meet would have different opinions and perspectives about the career, and we might not agree with all of them, but we should “think bigger.” It means we should not judge instantly that the story is “not for me”, but we should be open-minded and curious listeners. Now I learned that this is a very true and important tip not only for the program but also for our lives.

In fact, I learned how important it is from other participants. We were a group of students with different academic and cultural backgrounds. I was impressed by how they are interested in others and try to find connecting points by actively asking questions. I really enjoyed being in the community, and that was partly because we all were interested in each other. Showing others that “I want to learn from you” and “I am interested in you” is the first step to nice communication.

I repeatedly heard the importance of reaching out throughout the program. Mr. Goto, who works for the United Nations, said that he spends over 50% of his working hours talking with people. His job requires broad and deep knowledge of many fields, but it is technically impossible to specialize in everything. The important thing is to reach out to the experts in each field and continue learning from them. In Washington D.C., I heard that “coffee chat” is part of D.C. culture as a form of informal networking.

When we visited the World Bank and IMF, I realised and was shocked how little

I knew about economics. I haven't even tried to learn economics before because I unintentionally thought economics was outside of my field. However, when I said I wanted to do something for social justice and DEI at the alumni party in New York City, I was told that social justice is such an economic problem.

Even if something seems totally unrelated to my initial interests, I should “think bigger” and be an open-minded, curious listener. It is also important to show what kind of person I am so that I can show them my interests and how I can potentially find a connecting point with them. Chance for dialogue is something I create, and it is not difficult if I am willing to.

Soft Skills Can Be Practiced

One of the focuses of this program is to give us ideas about the skill set to be a global leader. Before the program, I was not very optimistic about my personality with regard to leadership because I felt I essentially lacked many soft skills to make a better leader. However, I learned that soft skills are not something innate but something to practice in daily life. Many leaders we met said they were not originally good at communication by nature, but they just kept practicing and got used to it. Mr. Rahman from Megagon Lab said, “Communication can be practiced,” and as Danielle said, “Practice is continuous”.

I also learned that practicing the skill I lack doesn't mean that I must change my original character completely. For example, some people I met (including some of the participant students) think of themselves as introverts rather than extroverts, at the same time enjoying communicating with people and trying to build connections. Mr. Fukunaga, a biotech entrepreneur, said that being shy is his strength because it makes him prepare carefully when he speaks in public.

Designing Place Matters

I also got some ideas for creating an inclusive and innovative culture in a community by visiting several different organizations in this program. We visited some incubators and offices, and I found that the room for casual networking and mingling is always considered the facility's core. Google Bay Campus was a unique place which literally looked like a University Campus rather than an office. Google has an online platform for its employees where they can find information such as tips for their work-life balance, networking and notices for club activities in the company.

One of the places I found really impressive is the hostel we stayed in San Francisco. The hostel had the ground rule for diversity and inclusion, and shows it clearly in a very friendly way. They also had free events for guests to make friends, and they had a board encouraging the guests to start the conversation at the breakfast table.

Conclusion

This program gave me the courage to enjoy meeting new people and expressing clearly who I am. Several people we met said that the US-Japan cultural difference doesn't really matter, but how you behave as an individual is more important. I continue trying to be an open-minded, approachable and curious person on my way to my goal of making a more inclusive society. Finally, I truly appreciate this opportunity and thank all the program managers, speakers and supporters. I am also grateful to 9 other friends who share the love of learning.

Runa Sugita

Faculty of Economics, 2nd year

These two weeks during the program were far more wonderful, fruitful, and meaningful than I expected. It was not just an extremely stimulating and precious experiences but was an experience in which I learned many life lessons and will surely be a turning point in my life.

Mainly the original goal for this program was to learn diverse international careers and clarify the path to my dreams. While longing for international careers since I was a little kid, the path to it was vague. Therefore, I wanted to know how to initiate an international career through direct access to people working in the U.S. Consequently, at the end of the program, I could achieve that goal, and I learned a lot of unexpected things from them. What I imagined in terms of an international career was that there is one correct way to achieve that goal. In retrospect, I think I was looking for the only right path to have a specific job. However, I realized that it was wrong. The reality is that each of them has a different career, and some of them did not even expect to get into an international workplace or had many detours. This was a grand discovery for me and changed my view towards my future career.

Instead of following a common career path, they had some characteristics in common: networking skills. This skill is what almost everybody we met told us was extremely important to get opportunities. Although I was looking for some soft skillsets that are required for pursuing international careers, the answer I found through this program was honestly quite unexpected and surprising to me because I have never been told the importance of networking so intensively. However, soon I understood how

networking is crucial in the U.S. by talking with many people and how they have built their careers. By learning how connections are created and how networking works as a booster for navigating us to new opportunities, I realized that I had missed so many opportunities. Previously, I had considered being modest, not showing off, and being humble a virtue, waiting for the right opportunities to come along. However, it doesn't bring any opportunities even if you have special skills. By aggressively showing off who you are and what you are interested in, someone may get interested in you, which helps broaden your network and acquire opportunities. Since I learned how important networking and self-branding are from many people, I will try to make an impression on others, be recognized by many people by materializing what I have in mind, and be outgoing and extroverted. Thanks to the wonderful and special itinerary of this program, I could meet so many Japanese and Kyoto University Alumni working in the U.S. and could make precious connections with them. Learned the importance of networking and acquired valuable human connections in the U.S., I am more confident in pursuing an international career. Whenever I have uncertainties in my mind about my career, I can ask them. I am now very passionate about talking with people frankly, being recognized by others, and asking them anything. I will try not to forget this mindset and try to practice. Personally, a significant progress for me was that I could feel it was possible to work internationally. Before the program, since an international career was quite vague for me, I thought it was too far from my present self or just a dream, and I could not imagine myself working there. However, actual experiences of seeing many Japanese who are working in the U.S. help me understand the different atmosphere depending on the jobs, organizations, or locations, which allowed me to thoroughly consider my career based on the actual images of various international careers. Then, I could clarify what kind of

international career I would like to pursue and imagine myself working there in a more concrete way than before. The direct contact with people who are already on the path to the career I am aiming for and asking a lot of questions was quite helpful for me to realize that an international career is not something impossible but is possible.

On the other hand, by meeting many people, especially entrepreneurs, I found my weakness, which are bravery and risk-taking. Entrepreneurs or those who have blazed their trails seemed so confident despite the high risks they were taking. On the other hand, reflecting on my life, I have always chosen a solid way for big decisions in my life and avoided higher risks as much as possible, fearing failure. However, feeling the ecosystem of Silicon Valley, I realized taking risks is quite important because, without big risks, there will not be any big rewards. What an entrepreneur said was that seemingly major risks from other people are not always significant risks for oneself but are great chances at the same time. He said even if he fails in his business, robust networks and the expertise in biology he built throughout his career will be maintained, and there is no problem. This brought me a big impression. Be brave, be bold, be a risk-taker. As long as I have a wide network of people and the technical knowledge and skills that people are looking for, will be fine. This new mindset is one of the most valuable life lessons learned in this program, and I will remember it whenever I hesitate and feel fear of deciding something that others say is too risky.

Lastly, I appreciate being able to participate in the Kingfisher Global Leadership Program 2024. It was not just like an aggregation of one-way lectures or a tour visiting famous places, but it was an interactive and network-based program supported by many alumni and other people in the U.S. who were willing to be involved in us. I learned numerous precious life lessons from many people, and I am sincerely grateful to have this

wonderful experience. I would like to express a huge thank you to everyone who supported this program and enriched my experience, including Dr. Kuno, Danielle, the staff at Kyodai Collaborative, the staff at Kyoto University, many Alumni and volunteers, and other peer participants.

Nguyen Hong Hanh
Faculty of Economics, 3rd year

Before Kingfisher, I must admit that I did not expect a 2-week program to have such a profound impact on me. But now as I look back on my journey, I have no doubt that Kingfisher has been an incredibly educational, inspirational, and pivotal experience that I'm so lucky to have.

One of the biggest changes that happened to me after the program is the way I now think about my future career and choices. I used to believe that the fastest way to success should be a linear trajectory that is clearly defined and well-planned ahead. However, the Kingfisher experience has taught me that there are great values in trying different paths in order to learn new lessons and discover my true passion. By visiting various types of organizations and talking to people of different backgrounds, I was exposed to many new ways of thinking and future career paths that I had never thought of before. I found it interesting how most successful people I met throughout the program never actually planned to do the jobs that they are currently in charge of. Instead, they are all very open to changes but always do so with an intention to connect with their bigger vision and a focus on the skills and knowledge that they can pick up along the way. I learned that opportunities can come in many different forms, that there are many professional roles to help achieve one's personal vision, and that it is okay to draw my own unique roadmap to success. For this, I believe it is very important to stay curious, flexible, and open-minded so that I will always learn and be willing to take on new challenges.

Another valuable thing I received from the Kingfisher program was the inspiration to dream big and the courage to pursue those dreams. From Silicon Valley entrepreneurs to university professors, their burning passion as well as the impact of their work on society really inspired me to think bigger and to create my own values by doing what I'm truly passionate about. I used to look up to these leading figures with pure admiration, but Kingfisher has helped light up my ambition and belief that, I too, can become like them one day.

The program also gave me an invaluable experience to learn, think about, and practice global leadership in various contexts. My definition of leadership has expanded tremendously, and leadership to me now is not just about power, authority, or superiority. I believe it is a

combination of many qualities like passion, courage, empathy, communication, decision-making, etc. In other words, anything that helps to make an impact on other people and create shared values for the whole team. On top of that, I was also introduced to many interesting ideas related to this expanded concept of leadership. I now understand that different combinations of the above qualities will result in different styles of leadership and that leadership can be dynamic, which means there is no need to stick to one style of leading. Leaders also need to be adaptable depending on the team and the tasks at hand. I now also believe that one doesn't need to be in a leading position to be able to practice leadership. These skills and qualities can be developed through how I perform my tasks, and how I make decisions or interact with people daily.

Lastly, the Kingfisher program has taught me a very impactful lesson on the power of networking and building connections with other people. Throughout the program, I had a lot of opportunities to sharpen my interpersonal skills and learn how to communicate more effectively, even with people from different cultural and professional backgrounds. The interdisciplinary nature of Kingfisher has allowed me to see how the combined skills and experience of people from different backgrounds can lead to a strong cohort effect and create a great catalyst for innovations. Kingfisher has introduced me to a lot of successful people from a variety of fields. But on top of that, I feel very thankful that I got to meet the other 9 participants. I learned a lot from each of them, and throughout the program, we were able to build very precious friendships.

Regarding my future career, I want to have a job that allows me to contribute to global development issues. I am interested in working for IGOs, such as the World Bank or IMF, but will also be open to opportunities to work with impact-driven businesses or academic institutions. One of the advice I remember most was from a World Bank's HR person. I expressed my interest in getting into the organization and asked her what I should do to be able to join the World Bank, expecting answers like what type of degrees should I get or how to prepare for the application process. But to my surprise, her answer was "To get into the World Bank, you should not focus on trying to get into the World Bank at this stage". I could not comprehend her advice at first, but then she went on to explain "You don't want to limit your chances when you are in your 20s. Be open to trying different kinds of jobs or different working environments, and make sure to accumulate as many relevant skills and knowledge as you can. All these experiences will help you do a better job if you still want to get into the World Bank

later on. You don't want to compete with highly qualified and experienced 30s candidates when you are in your 20s." This is just one example of plenty of other insightful and practical career advice that I got during Kingfisher, which helped me see my future paths much more clearly. I am truly grateful for the fact all the people we met during the programs showed genuine interest and willingness to support the students. I also received a lot of connections with people who are working in the fields that I intend to pursue, and now feel more excited and empowered than ever about what the future will unfold.

I strongly believe that any student who has the curiosity for learning, willingness to change, and drive to make an impact would benefit greatly from the Kingfisher program. It is an invaluable opportunity for one to learn, to connect, and to navigate a better future.

One of the biggest changes that happened to me after the program is the way I now think about my future career and choices. I did not have a clear answer for myself yet, but I received a lot of connections with people who are working in several fields that I might decide to pursue. I also received a lot of inspiration to dream big and the courage to pursue those dreams. I now feel excited and empowered more than ever to push myself forward to see what the future will unfold.

Fauzan A. Hamid

4th year, Faculty of Economics

“Who lives sees, but who travels sees more.” That was the quote printed on my favourite t-shirt in high school. While its point is evident enough, here I must clarify what “travels” means. For me, and I am sure it is also the case for many people coming from developing countries, “travel” does not just mean going to a different place. It means going to somewhere better, like Japan, Europe, or America. My mind tends to slip into crude generalizations, thinking that of course, I will also see *something* if I go to other places, perhaps people living in huts or cattle grazing by the roadside tended by men in weird hats. But that is not much different than what I see when I take a drive in the countryside back home. America, on the other hand, seems to offer much more. Billions of dollars are moved daily from one skyscraper to another, and the fate of small countries is determined behind the doors of its grand governmental buildings. Naturally, if I want to see more, it is America I have to travel to. So, let me tell you my story, as someone who has “seen more” through the Kingfisher Global Leadership Program.

A land of opportunity

In Washington, D. C., the first city in this two-week trip, our first destination was the S&R Evermay estate. Built in 1801, the estate is a gorgeous red-brick mansion with floor-to-ceiling windows and a manicured garden. While it is used as the headquarters of S&R Evermay and Kyodai Collaborative, the organizer of this program, it might as well serve as the set for the next Knives Out movie. The first room we went to was the library, which was covered in dark wood panelling and tastefully bathed in dim, warm light. I half expected a secret room to open when I pulled one of the books from the shelves. As I settled into couch, I thought to myself “There is wealth here like I have never seen before”.

The next day we had a series of talks at the estate, including one by Dr. Sachiko Kuno, one of the founders of S&R Evermay. After getting her PhD at Kyoto University, she went on to develop new drugs, first in Japan, then in America. Taking the jump from being an academic researcher to a biotech entrepreneur, as a female immigrant, no less, is undoubtedly a risky move, and she was handsomely rewarded for her success. While the merit of being wealthy in an unequal society is highly debatable, I think this experience showed me how America largely delivers on its promise of being the land of opportunity. Take risks, work hard, and with a little bit of luck, you might just succeed.

A melting pot

As an immigrant and a traveller, it is difficult to not feel different from the rest of society. A few months ago, I was on a local train in a small town in Mie and being the only non-Japanese-looking person in the car, I caught small children staring at me with curious eyes all the way until my stop. The same is true when I travel to other countries. After resorting to hand gestures to signal that I want a large coffee at a café, I would fumble through my purse trying to find the right coins and I could just feel the locals behind me glaring at my clumsiness.

However, in America it was a different story. Riding the NYC subway, nobody took notice of me. Ordering a \$1.50 pizza slice or a sandwich from a deli, I did not feel like the workers treated me any differently from their other, American customers. I felt that in no time I can actually be one of them.

One reason for this, obviously, is language. While I speak decent Japanese, after the first few well-practiced greeting phrases, most people can tell that I am still some distance away from sounding like a native speaker. In other countries where I do not speak the language, this distance is multiplied many folds. However, in America, where most people speak English, I could get by comfortably enough.

Another reason is that America, as they say, is a melting pot with so many immigrants of different origins that adding another one does not seem to disturb the contents of the pot. I walked the streets of New York for five minutes and saw Black and

Asian office workers walking into a café and Indonesian tourists walking past Mexican construction workers. If you count the fake Tibetan monks in Times Square too, it was an even more diverse crowd. On the other side of the country, in the Google Bay View campus cafeteria, a similar scene can be seen. Chatting between plates of Indian curry, American hamburger, and foods from other countries, were a mix of people of all shades.

Unexpected powerful forces

When I was in high school, I came across a quote by an Indonesian writer, Pramoedya Ananta Toer, that goes like this: “They say there are unexpected powerful forces that can arise in oceans, in volcanoes, and in individuals who know their purpose in life.” I used to take this quote to heart, not least because of a sense of competition. One time I heard my friend told me about a girl who was just elected as student council president. It turned out that she had planned her life up to her career since she was in junior high, and being the student council president was just a step in that plan. To my uncertain self, she was holding that force, while I was, and still am, not.

This program opened my eyes, as I spoke with people who have achieved great things in their career and say that they did not have that clear purpose when they started. Nicholas Szechenyi, a vice president at CSIS, said that he “had no idea” what he wanted to do after college. He in fact worked as a news producer for a Japanese network before joining CSIS. Richard Dasher, director of the US-Asia Technology Management Center at Stanford, told us that he studied music and used to be a language trainer before switching to his current career. In his words, “you can't plan this sort of thing”. Thus, even for these people, the path was not clear cut. What I took from this is that a purpose in life might be important, but perhaps we should not rush. Perhaps we should take a step back and allow ourselves time and space to think about what we want to do and change it if needed.

And now, sitting in front of my computer back in Kyoto, I can say that I did see more through the Kingfisher Global Leadership program. I saw more opportunities and diversity in America. I also saw more ways of thinking about my life and career path.

While I must content with living as the semester starts again, I hope I can travel and see even more in the future.

Natalie Ng Jen Ryu
Faculty of Science, 2nd year

Until I stepped off the plane and into Washington Dulles International Airport, I couldn't believe the program was real. It felt too good to be true—fully funded expenses, a two-week trip to the U.S., visits to a wide range of organizations, and opportunities to meet decision-makers and policy planners. What made it even more incredible was that they were taking questions from me—an undergraduate student from Malaysia, still in the process of figuring out her path in life. Even stepping off the plane back at Kansai International Airport, the entire experience felt surreal. Though the two weeks passed quickly, I returned feeling more motivated, inspired, and filled with knowledge that would have taken me years to gain on my own. In this report, I will attempt to summarise all that I've learned and experienced during those two weeks, in the hope of conveying even a fraction of the transformative impact this program had on my life.

Program Goals

The Kingfisher Global Leadership Program focuses on global leadership—how to lead in an increasingly interconnected world and how to guide a team to thrive together. I entered the program with two main goals: first, to explore different career paths in STEM; and second, to connect with women in STEM.

During family New Year reunions, my relatives often asked about my major at university, followed by, "What type of job can you do with that degree?" I would typically respond with "researcher" or "professor." This program, however, expanded my understanding of the career possibilities in STEM, introducing me to fields such as policy making, biotech startups, and diverse research roles. I also realized that choosing a specific major doesn't limit me to that field. It opens doors to a wide range of opportunities, as the world is far more interdisciplinary than I had imagined.

Secondly, as one of the few female students—just 10%—in the Faculty of Science, I'm keenly aware of the challenges women face in establishing themselves professionally in STEM. Through this program, I had the opportunity to meet accomplished female scientists, researchers, and managers, and engage in candid discussions with them. They shared the obstacles they've faced

and offered invaluable advice, which I'll elaborate on later. Meeting these successful women has eased some of my concerns about my future in STEM and provided me with the knowledge and confidence to navigate this competitive and often intimidating industry.

Reflection

The day before we flew back to Japan, we attended the Kyoto University Alumni dinner at Stanford in San Francisco. It was there that I met 88-year-old alumnus, Mr. Akihiro Nishimura, who shared these powerful words with me: *"No guts, no glory."* His message was simple but profound—dare to take risks. For me, it became a reminder to continually "dare to step out of my comfort zone."

While I always knew stepping outside my comfort zone was important, various external factors often held me back—especially the fear of failure. During the program, I realized that much of what I avoid in life is due to ego and self-esteem. My ego has driven me to pursue many things and kept my standards high, but it also prevented me from trying new things, asking for help, and growing. To take risks requires courage, something that is cultivated over time. Great leaders develop this courage through repeated failure, which teaches them to take smarter, more calculated risks. Before being accepted to Kyoto University, I had an interview where I was asked, "Have you ever faced failure, and how did you overcome it?" I responded, "No, I haven't," and I'm somewhat embarrassed to admit that I still haven't. But now, I want to fail! I want to embrace failure, learn from it, and grow. I look forward to my future failures and, more importantly, the lessons they will bring as I continue to navigate my journey.

Another key takeaway was the importance of a support system. I used to think leadership was an innate quality—that I should simply be kind, empathetic, and possess integrity and good communication skills. During a lecture by Richard Dasher, he asked me *why* those traits were essential for leadership. The answer? To gain the trust and support of the people around you. Leadership is often thought of as lonely, with leaders having to make difficult decisions and maintain their position in a hierarchy. But I disagree. A good support system enables leaders to thrive, and good leaders help their communities thrive in return. Family, friends, teammates, and coworkers who trust and advocate for you create an environment where you can delegate tasks, confide in them, and focus on what truly matters. While I can't "practice" building a support system,

I can foster it. Moving forward, I want to focus not only on my personal growth but also on strengthening my relationships with the people I care about.

Are all leaders good people? Was a question that I was able to explore throughout this program. While I truly appreciated the kindness of those we met, who took time to speak with students like us, I sometimes found myself in disagreement with certain values. It wasn't a matter of labeling these differences as right or wrong but understanding that leadership styles vary. Some resonated with me more than others, and some made me rethink my concept of leadership. This reflection led me to define my own leadership style. On the first day, we engaged in leadership training focused on identifying our strengths and utilising them to solve problems. Combining my strengths and approach, I decide that I want to lead with authenticity. I believe in appreciating people, myself, and my circumstances. I consider this authenticity to be one of my strongest traits, and I aim to incorporate it as I carve out my future path.

Conclusion

A thousand words aren't enough to capture everything that happened during those two weeks. I returned with a notebook full of insights, new friendships, a heart full of gratitude, and a suitcase packed with Trader Joe's snacks. It's incredible how such a short experience could trigger a paradigm shift. On the plane ride home, I wrote down my short-term goals, and unlike before, I've already begun taking action. Where it leads, I can't be certain, but I am committed to applying what I've learned and moving forward toward my ultimate goal.

In closing, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to those who supported me throughout the program. A special thank you to our program manager, Danielle Reed, and the Kyoto University staff members—Yamamoto-san, Shiho-san, Tatsuta-san, and Hattori-san—whose efforts ensured the program ran smoothly and allowed us to make the most of this experience. Lastly, I am deeply grateful to my fellow participants, from whom I learned so much and whose presence made this journey truly extraordinary.

Kaimuk Lhuengwongpaisarn

Faculty of Engineering, 3rd year

The Kingfisher Global Leadership program is a two-week career development program for Kyoto University students, designed to empower the next generation of leaders with skills, networks, and global mindsets. As part of this program, we had the privilege of visiting 3 cities: Washington D.C., New York, and San Francisco, where we explored a wide range of companies, incubators, institutions, and organizations across various disciplines. This exposure allowed us to gain insights from different fields, broadening our perspectives. While each participant takes away something unique, I would like to share my journey, the invaluable experience I gained during this program, and how it shaped my perspectives.

Initially, my goal was to improve on soft skills, especially leadership, and to learn about entrepreneurship. However, during the program, I realized there were many important aspects I overlooked, and several of my weaknesses became evident.

What I learned

At the beginning of the program, I attended my first networking event at Evermay, where I met several Kyodai-kai alumni and lecturers from Washington D.C., and New York. Although I was impressed by all of them, I was too intimidated to approach many, wasting valuable opportunities for conversation and feeling disappointed in myself afterward. The following day, we had an orientation with our program manager, Ms. Danielle, and one of my biggest lessons from this journey came from this orientation: “You can fail but recover quickly.” Normally, this phrase would not have had much impact on me, but in light of my recent regret and the ticking clock of this journey in America, I have come to understand its true meaning. Not only in this orientation was it mentioned. Dr. Richard B. Dasher emphasized “Failure hurts, but we recycle it well,” while Mr. Michael M. Sera added, “Fail fast and learn from the failure.” In this program, I

faced several failures, but because of this advice, I learned to recover quickly and benefit from each mistake.

Another key factor I realized is the value of networking. Each speaker had people who supported them, trusted in their abilities, and gave them valuable chances, such as being a co-founder of a company or being invited to take important roles at their company. Moreover, many speakers emphasized choosing the right mentor or leader who can truly support and guide us rather than passively staying with superiors who offer no opportunity to grow.

I also gained insights into the career path. I found that many speakers transferred to different jobs before reaching their current positions. For instance, Mr. Yoshinori Fukazawa, a co-founder of Eugit, shared his experience of navigating multiple roles before his success, and he told us to be efficient while taking detours. At the end of the program, I came to understand that we each have our own pace and path. We may not find the ideal career path immediately, and it is acceptable to first explore the opportunities as long as we always learn something along the way.

In this leadership program, I developed my understanding of the skill sets and mindset of leadership. Two skills that were mainly emphasized were communication and the ability to delegate tasks. Communication is one of the most important skills, as it helps build a common ground and foster understanding in the team. Mr. Kazu Komoto from OSARO introduced that one way to reduce miscommunication, especially in a diverse environment, is to write meeting notes and share them with everyone because it is easier to comprehend by reading than listening. In terms of delegating tasks, it is essential for maximizing team productivity and ensuring each team member can contribute their strengths to the project, which will also allow the leader to focus on overall dynamics and strategy. Ms. Makiko Shiino, a head of operations from Megagon Labs, also stressed the importance of understanding yourself which helps you delegate tasks more effectively by trusting others with the right responsibilities.

Apart from this, I learned about entrepreneurship, especially in Silicon Valley, home to many start-ups. Stories from each speaker of their challenges and how they overcame them inspired me and opened my eyes to the possibility of starting my own impact-driven business. Besides, I noticed how enriching the ecosystem is in Silicon Valley and the effects of social influence. The combination of mentorship, networking, and a culture that encourages risk-taking creates an environment where innovative ideas can flourish. I realized that surrounding yourself with like-minded individuals who share a passion for entrepreneurship and innovation is crucial to success. The culture of Silicon Valley makes it a breeding ground for impactful solutions. This experience made me reflect on how important it is to be in an environment that can foster growth and empower individuals to reach their goals.

Reflection

During this program, I not only became aware of my weaknesses but also how to improve them. One significant growth I noticed at the end of the program was networking. On the last day at Stanford University, when we had dinner with Kyodai-kai alumni from San Francisco, I genuinely enjoyed the conversations to the point that I did not want them to end, which is a stark contrast to the first day when I struggled to approach and talk to anyone. I initially set high expectations for myself in this program and became afraid of failure, but I did fail several times in these two weeks and learned from them due to the advice on “failing fast and recovering quickly.” Additionally, I achieved my goal of exploring skills in leaders and identifying styles that suit me. Through conversations with Ms. Lauren Mosely and Mr. Nicholas Szechenyi from CSIS, I discovered the leadership style that resonates with my strengths.

In terms of career path, this journey introduced me to various opportunities and taught me to actively seek them out while remaining open-minded to all possibilities and learning from every step in life. For example, I plan to utilize my newly developed networking skills to explore job opportunities in my field by attending industry events and seeking mentors who align with my

aspirations. Moreover, I have become more aware of the significance of the environment on growth and opportunities, prompting me to carefully plan my future with those in mind.

Conclusion

The Kingfisher Global Leadership program provided us with invaluable experience in the United States. Exposing diverse disciplines from various backgrounds with different stories enhanced my viewpoints on skill sets, particularly in embracing failure, networking, leadership, and entrepreneurship. Frequent reflection and advice I gained during the program also enlightened me about my weaknesses and allowed me to constantly improve. Besides, this career development program broadened my horizons in terms of career opportunities and guided me to explore them.

Lastly, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Kyodai Collaborative, the Kyoto University staff, and Ms. Danielle for arranging this fruitful journey and allowing me to be a part of it. Thank you, all speakers and lecturers, for dedicating your time to share your insights with us. I also want to extend my thanks to the other nine participants for your constant encouragement and support throughout the program. The lessons and experiences will forever remain with me, guiding and inspiring my continuous growth toward my aspirations with greater purpose.

Natsuhi Koyabu

Faculty of Engineering, 1st Year

Introduction

Kingfisher Global Leadership Program enabled me to review my goals from different perspectives and clarify skillsets I need to acquire, offering two weeks of fulfilling experiences. Before the program, I had a vague goal, and did not have detailed outlook for what to do for the next few years. There was an ultimate goal, flexible application of mathematical modeling, but how can I utilize what I am learning for this goal? What skillset do I need to contribute as a researcher to innovation in the international community? I did have opportunities to put what I hope to do in my future into words, and I came to realize that my anxiety derived from the fear to uncertain future. We are living in times of flux, and I have believed that flexibility is the key to deal with potential risks. If that is the case, how can I live “flexibly”? This report is about simple but easily overlooked ideas which triggered a significant change in my mindset: being conscious about the influence from others while networking and making the most of my uniqueness to realize bidirectional impact.

Competencies to contribute to innovation

The first thing that struck me in this program was the definition of innovation given at the Halcyon House. They said that any ideas with some impact on specific field or region can trigger innovation. This word evoked a concrete and familiar image of innovation and made me focus on competencies to maximize the impact of new ideas.

As a student majoring in informatics, I knew that I must acquire sufficiently

specialized knowledges and skills, but I was somewhat worried that it may be difficult to keep up with the rapid change of required skillsets. How can I catch up with the cutting edge, find unexplored area, and take advantage of my strength to display leadership? The answers to my question varied from person to person. One general advice I received was to find important researchers in my field in addition to reading papers regularly. Another was to actively get involved with decision making of groups and learn how to speak in front of different audiences. I was also inspired by what I was told by Naoki Matsumura, who works for Intel: “If you work for a large organization, you must be aware of TOP. Your Talent and Passion is essential, but Organizational direction cannot be ignored.” These stories are themselves helpful and interesting, but up until I reflected on my way of thinking, I did not understand the true meaning of their words. I noticed that I have been concerned with macro view of things, which probably motivated me to learn about mathematical modeling. On the other hand, I may have overlooked the importance of micro perspective to focus on people. Innovation, which fascinated me at Halcyon House, was driven by bidirectional impact from person to person. I recall what I heard at Megagon Labs: “Being aware of assumptions and expectations others may hold, and making sure that everyone is on the same page is required.” Now that I became acutely aware of the benefits of communication, I am convinced that recognizing my communication skills as soft skills and developing them along with specialized skills will be helpful to become a powerful impact player for innovation.

Networking is one of the representative soft skills, and building up networks was one of my initial goals. However, I was not confident for this goal because I thought that networking is something more limited to those with professional background, and out of reach of students, much less first-year undergrads like me. Nevertheless, looking back, I

surely had plenty of opportunities to learn what networking is like, and how it works. I came to understand that this program itself would not have occurred without networking. I am already living in a dense network, but it is up to my effort whether I can elevate communication to cooperating relationship. First and foremost, I must put my interests into words, and then seek for opportunities to broaden my network.

Toward my future

One conclusion I have reached through this program is that in the future, I should try to combine my background, experiences, and interests organically, and make myself easier to find out what I can do to deal with rapid change of society. For that reason, of course specialized knowledge and skills are essential, but I will also need to reflect on the past, understand myself better, and grasp the relative position of my background and what I am currently working on. It does not mean that someone's experience is valuable than that of others, or I should not focus on something which does not help me immediately. The opposite is the truth. I believe that every single encounter has some impact on my life, and I must consciously recognize how I am influenced from others so that I can clarify from where my passion derives. This attempt will enable me to combine my background with surrounding field, find out issues that have been not touched on so far, and know how I can take advantage of my background to deal with the issues.

Toward my future, there are three takeaways which I am determined to put into action. First, I will count backwards from the ultimate goal, and prioritize the skills and experiences required. Given the career stories – in most cases, they were not straightforward – of speakers, understanding the risks which I must take and the obstacles I need to overcome will also be essential for rational pursuit of goals. Secondly,

I am going to continuously output what I am working on. Small updates are indispensable to preserve and expand my network, and it also helps me to self-evaluate my progress. Finally, and the most importantly, actively perceiving the change and being aware of the impact from others. It seems that I do not have to stick to the stereotype because the optimal solutions to drive innovation differ depending on the scale of organization, the type of mission, locations, and the circumstances. The word of Dr. Kuno indicated the desirable attitude toward this fact: “I did not intend to succeed. I dreamed of the best case and analyzed the worst case, then took risk if it is necessary to pursue my goal.” Entrepreneurship is itself an ability to break a common sense and create a completely new demand, and we are the ones causing changes. The substance of innovation is a chain of impact, and seen in that light, being influenced by unexpected encounters can be a chance rather than a threat, and this mindset will be a key to live “flexibly”.

I would like to express my gratitude to Kyodai Collaborative and Kyoto University staffs who provided this invaluable opportunity. I must thank Danielle Reed, the Program Manager, for arranging the whole schedule and supporting us. Lastly, I appreciate the interaction with all the speakers and other 9 participants, and I am determined to give this experience back by putting what I learned into practice.

Daisuke Aramaki

Faculty of Agriculture, 1st year

Embracing Uncertainty: Lessons from the Kingfisher Program

My goal in the Kingfisher Program was to find hints for my future career. Now that I have completed the program, I have got an answer that I had not imagined before the program.

When I was in high school, I aimed to enter a university in the US, although I ultimately decided to enroll at Kyoto University instead for some financial reasons. During high school, I focused on extracurricular activities since they were necessary for application. I participated in a variety of activities, such as high school American football varsity, a school-sponsored camp in Fukushima to learn about the 2011 disaster, and volunteering to introduce Japan to poor children in Tanzania. Every time I engaged in these activities, my dreams for the future changed. At one point, I wanted to become a specialist in sports business, while at another, I dreamed of becoming a politician working on Japan's energy issues or an activist helping developing countries. As a result, choosing a major for university felt like a life-defining decision, and even after entering university, I often questioned whether I had made the right choice. Studying at university without a clear career path plan filled me with uncertainty, and at times, I feared that my efforts were in vain. That's why I applied to the Kingfisher Program to find a more concrete direction for my career through interactions with experts from various fields and fellow students.

During the program, I stayed in Washington D.C., New York, and San Francisco, visiting international institutions, startup companies and other interesting organizations.

I had many opportunities to learn from the career stories of those working in such places and to gain insights into what international leadership truly means. Each experience left a strong impression on me. Among them, the visit to the World Bank, which supports the development of developing countries, was particularly inspiring for me because this institution showed me a potential career path by deepening my studies in the Department of Food and Environmental Economics. Additionally, visits to institutions like the United Nations and Google offered me a broader understanding of various career paths through lectures and discussions with people there. However, because I am a person who is easily influenced by different interests, I began to feel that every career seemed appealing, and I almost lost sight of my original goal of finding specific career hints. While these diverse experiences were invaluable, they also highlighted the difficulty of determining my own path.

At the end of the program, each participant was required to give a “Final Presentation” at Stanford University to reflect on their two weeks of learning. The day before the presentation, I remembered all my experiences in the US, thinking about the diverse range of people I had met and the insights I had gained. However, I struggled to organize what I had learned into one certain lesson. At first, I saw each person’s career story as disconnected, like isolated dots with no clear pattern. For instance, one person had worked as a journalist in the television industry and then became a researcher at a think tank in Washington D.C. Another had pursued economics in graduate school after being influenced by a global economic depression during his college days and eventually became an economist at the IMF. Like these stories, every career path is so unique that I could not find the common lesson. But after thinking about their career paths and how they made their life decisions again and again, I began to see a common point in these

career stories: none of them followed a predetermined path from the start. Instead, they built their international careers by trying different things and navigating through trial and error without sticking rigidly to one plan.

This realization taught me an important lesson about the nature of a career. A career is not something that is meticulously planned and built from the beginning; rather, it is something that takes shape later through a lot of challenges and experiences driven by one's interests and passions. In other words, I now understand that my future career will not be a single and straight path chosen from routes like agriculture, economics, or sports. Instead, I have realized that my career will be shaped by intersections of my interests, skills, and experiences and branching paths that may lead me in new directions I have never imagined. This means that I can change what I am doing when I discover something I am more passionate about or when new opportunities arise that stimulate my curiosity. By thinking about my future career in this more flexible and open-minded way, I feel that there is no "right" or "wrong" in my life decisions such as my college decision or college major decision.

This lesson has eased the anxiety I once felt about not knowing what I should do in the future. Before, the uncertainty of not having a clear path often made me feel lost or overwhelmed, but now I understand that this uncertainty is not something to fear, but rather something to embrace. From now on, I plan to pursue my career with a more open mind, ready to take on new challenges, following my interests and curiosity. The Kingfisher Program has provided me with this answer to my original question, though that is different from what I had expected, and the answer has shown me a more fundamental way of thinking about my career. Again, the future is uncertain, and that's why I have a good chance to build my unique career. Just embrace the uncertainty!

Acknowledgments

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude for being given the honor of participating in the Kingfisher Program, which provided me with two weeks of invaluable learning in the US. Although there is no doubt that the experiences I gained from this program will become a cornerstone of my life, completing this program is just the starting point of my life journey. Moving forward, I am committed to applying the lessons, skills, and mindset I gained through the Kingfisher Program to carve out my own international career. I would like to thank once again all the people I met during the program, the supportive staff, my invaluable fellow participants, and Danielle for running the program for two weeks.

Ayano Naruse

Master of Applied Life Sciences, Graduate School of Agriculture, 2nd year

Introduction

These two weeks were the most memorable time in my life. During the Kingfisher Global Leadership Program (KGLP), each day I learned something new and gained fresh perspectives from individuals working at international organizations, universities, and companies in Washington DC, New York, and San Francisco. Even after returning to Japan, I feel that the experiences I gained through KGLP continue to influence my daily decision-making. In this essay, I would like to focus on my personal goals for KGLP, how my future career path has changed, and the impact of this program on my outlook.

My personal goals for this program

1: Getting involved in something I never experience in my daily life.

Visiting various institutions and meeting a diverse range of people was indeed something far beyond my everyday experiences. In Japan, there's a proverb that says 「百聞は一見に如かず」 (Seeing once is better than hearing a hundred times). After visiting the US, I realized the truth of this saying. We visited the World Bank and attended a lecture there. The presentation was completely different from what I had experienced in Japan - it was powerful, fast-paced, and highly interactive. As I'm interested in working for international organizations, I had previously met people in Japan who had worked in such institutions and heard about the working atmosphere and style. However, once I saw and experienced that atmosphere firsthand, my desire to work there grew even stronger. Therefore, if

you're interested in working internationally, I highly recommend participating in KGLP. It provides invaluable first-hand experiences that can't be replicated through secondhand accounts.

2: Communicating with those who have rich experiences in their own fields.

The intense communication during KGLP completely depleted my social energy. This is a good example of how much I communicated. Generally, I enjoy talking with people, so I enjoyed these conversations. And because diversity is one of the key elements of KGLP, I was able to interact not only with people related to my field of expertise but also with lawyers, entrepreneurs, economists, and others. This experience diverse my network and it is helping me a lot. For instance, people I met during KGLP continue to keep in touch with me after returning to Japan and provide useful advice about choosing career paths. I realized how diverse, powerful, and meaningful the KGLP community is for my life. Being able to join the KGLP community is one of the most beneficial opportunity I gained from participating in this program.

3: Discovering my strengths and weaknesses.

This was the most challenging yet meaningful goal for me. Before coming to the US, I was extremely afraid of failure, believing that a successful person's life was a series of successes. However, I learned this isn't true. Many successful speakers in various fields shared their failures with us honestly. One memorable quote from Megagon Labs was, "The success you see is only a part of what I have done. Behind success, there are many failures." So, what's the difference between successful people and me? The answer is that they're not afraid of failure. I recall the words given by the program manager at the beginning of KGLP: "Fail Frequently, Recover Quickly." I was surprised by this statement, but at the same time, it brought me great relief. As a student in Japanese society, I often

feel an intangible social pressure suggesting, "You cannot fail; if you do, it's the end of your life." Consequently, I became overly fearful of failure. I discovered that my weakness lies in being too afraid of failure and reluctant to take risks. From now on, I've decided to pursue what I want to do, even if there are risks involved. I believe that even if I fail, if I can quickly recover and keep moving forward, my dreams will surely come true someday. In this way, I am determined to overcome my weakness. The experience at KGLP has taught me that failure is not the end, but a steppingstone to success. It has encouraged me to face challenges and see setbacks as chances to grow. This shift in mindset is perhaps the most valuable lesson I've gained from the program.

My future career path

Before joining this program, I thought my dream of working at an international organization like the United Nations was clear. However, after returning to Japan, I find myself concerned about my next steps. This is because I learned many new things and encountered various ways of thinking and career options from the people I met in the US. Reflecting on my journey in the US, I met someone who provided valuable insight. He is an alumnus of Kyoto University who now works as an attorney, despite holding a master's degree in engineering. His story of changing professional fields and his reasons for doing so were fascinating. As I struggled with choosing my career path, he gave me this advice: "You can start anything you want to try at any time." In Japanese society, people often rush to find their path and assume they must pursue a single career for their entire life. However, in American society, people freely change their professional fields when they feel the time is right. Furthermore, I learned that in life, such career changes can even become a strength. I now realize that this is a time for me to pause and carefully consider

my career path. This period of reflection is crucial for my life. Once I decide or discover what I truly want to do, I believe I can move forward persistently until I succeed.

Conclusion

In addition to what I've mentioned above, I learned many other important things. While I can't mention all of them, I'd like to share one more crucial lesson which I've been learning through KGLP. It's about the belief in one's work. The people I met in the US were passionate about their jobs. Or rather, they had turned their passions into their careers. I'm confident that what I learned in the US will help me find something I'm passionate about and want to turn into my profession. Lastly, I am deeply grateful to everyone involved in organizing this program. I also want to express my sincere appreciation to all the other students who helped and inspired me. Because of you, my journey in the US became more exciting and meaningful.