

Your Name: Greta Hiehle

Host Lab in Japan: Masahiro Inoue, Kyoto University, Department of Clinical Bio-resource Research & Development

Meaning of Nakatani RIES Fellowship:

The meaning of the Nakatani RIES Fellowship is to advance biomedical research and strengthen connections between US and Japanese researchers. It aims not only to teach international students valuable lab techniques, but to also to teach them about other cultures.

Research Internship Overview:

For my research project, I applied the Cancer Tissue-Originated Spheroid (CTOS) Method to investigate heterogeneity and tumor recurrence of colorectal cancer. I learned various new lab techniques, including culturing and passaging organoids, performing drug sensitivity assays, and preparing a xenograft tumor. My project closely related to my academic interests because I have been curious about cancer research. I was able to carry some skills with me from my lab at Georgia tech to Kyoto University. However, I gained so many more skills that will be very valuable for my future in medical research.

Lab Environment Overview:

Although there were many similarities between my lab at Georgia Tech and the lab at Kyoto University, I was surprised by the differences between the two. In Japan, the lab environment was slightly quieter, more organized, and cleaner. Additionally, I was impressed with how much my PI interacted with each of the students and even went into the lab himself. Although it was a quieter atmosphere, the lab environment was very collaborative and welcoming to me. The members also did not hesitate to ask each other for help and were eager to learn about one another's projects. Additionally, they made a point to get to know each other outside of lab. For instance, my lab organized a welcome party for both me and another new student where we got to know the lab members.

Daily Life in Japan:

Each day in my life in Japan began waking up in my one-bedroom apartment. Although it was much smaller than my apartment at Georgia Tech, that I live with four other people in, it was the perfect size. I was surprised to learn that most Japanese university students live either with their family or in a similar single apartment. After waking up, I walked about ten minutes to my lab, passing by stunning temples and looking up at the mountains surrounding the city. Often, I stopped at one of the many convenience stores along the way. For lunch, I usually ate at the University restaurant, where I filled my plate with karaage, rice, and side dishes. After lab, I liked to go out to different restaurants and try foods including sukiyaki, ramen, conveyor belt sushi, mazesoba, and more. Although it was sometimes difficult communicating with the staff or reading the menu, they were always welcoming. On some weekends, I either explored Kyoto or traveled to other beautiful places including Hiroshima, Tokyo, Osaka, Nara, and Okinawa.

Experiences with Japanese Culture:

One of my best experiences in Japan was participating in a nagashi somen experience with some of the JP fellows and alumni. We spent the entire day in the middle of a bamboo forest and completed the entire process beginning with cutting down the bamboo ourselves. Hours later, we ended by enjoying a feast of noodles flowing down our creation. I also really enjoyed making Takoyaki in my apartment with some of the other US and JP fellows. On a more daily basis, whether I was at lab, a restaurant, or purchasing something in a store, I learned about Japanese culture. For instance, I learned how polite and considerate people are when a cashier profusely apologized to me after I pulled my credit card out of the machine too early to complete the transaction on accident. Additionally, I saw how independent people are when taking the bus around Kyoto and seeing young children riding around alone. Lastly, I saw how hard working and dedicated people were, coming home late on the train from work and taking all their jobs seriously, whether they were a parking lot traffic director or a thoracic surgeon. Almost every day I got to learn something new about Japanese culture.