

INTERVIEW WITH PROFESSOR YAMAGATA'S STUDENT TABA Taiki



We Q Team members have observed that after the shift from in-person to online classes during the COVID-19 pandemic, it has been very difficult for 2nd-year and 3rd-year students who are planning to take seminars to choose their seminar professor and for professors to connect with their students. This project focuses on both the seminar professor and student point of view to relay the elements and dynamics of seminars. Our interview articles on seminars introduce two professors at APU (one APS professor and one APM professor) and their seminars, alongside a spotlight on one of their seminar students. Through the student point-of-view focus, we hope that in addition to conveying successful seminar methods to other APU professors that they can incorporate into their own seminars, we can have them discover successful teaching methods through the student perspective as well.

I. Introduction

ABA Taiki was born in Okinawa. He is a fourth year, seventh semester APS student majoring in Environment and Development. As a student in Professor Yamagata's seminar, his main research topic focuses on people with disabilities. His hobby is listening to music. The most recent memorable movie he watched is "CODA (The song of love)".

II. Q&A about Professor Yamagata's seminar

Taba-san has been a member of Professor Yamagata's seminar for around a year and a half. He entered the seminar in his fifth semester, third year. First, we asked him to answer [Q]uestions about the seminar.

- 1. Please tell us about the characteristics of Professor Yamagata's seminar.**
What is interesting about the seminar is that there is a wide variety of research topics from seminar students. We conduct our own research in diverse categories such as education in developing countries, poverty reduction, or gender studies. Also, I think Professor Yamagata is an "Original Idea Man". Instead of giving instructions, he draws out ideas with "Perhaps it is good to have this kind of problem awareness" or "Maybe it is good to have this kind of different take". It is for this very interesting point that I joined Professor Yamagata's seminar.
- 2. What surprised you when you first entered Professor Yamagata's seminar?**
What surprised me was that the percentage of international students was quite high. Therefore, the seminar is basically conducted in English. There are many situations in which it is difficult and intimidating for Japanese-basis students, but since we use time outside the seminar to give feedback in Japanese and consult with the professor individually, I feel that it is easy to work within the seminar's atmosphere without being nervous.
- 3. Please tell us about Professor Yamagata's seminar format and the amount of assignments in the seminar.**

The main format of the seminar is individual work. I do not have the experience of doing group work. Regarding the workload of the seminar, I do not think it is much compared to other seminars. Currently, I wish that there can be a place to do a presentation on our research once per semester. The specific submissions we do are only the research plan in our fifth semester, third year, and the graduation thesis for the eighth semester, fourth year. Additionally, each semester each student has to do a presentation once. Although the workload is not a lot compared to other seminars, I personally feel that I cannot catch up to the work if I do not keep progressing precisely because I have this much freedom. I ask myself whether I should have my own planning and time management system and what kind of commitments I should make precisely because of the lack of assignments. In that sense, I think that Professor Yamagata's seminar is a place where you can test your self-management abilities.

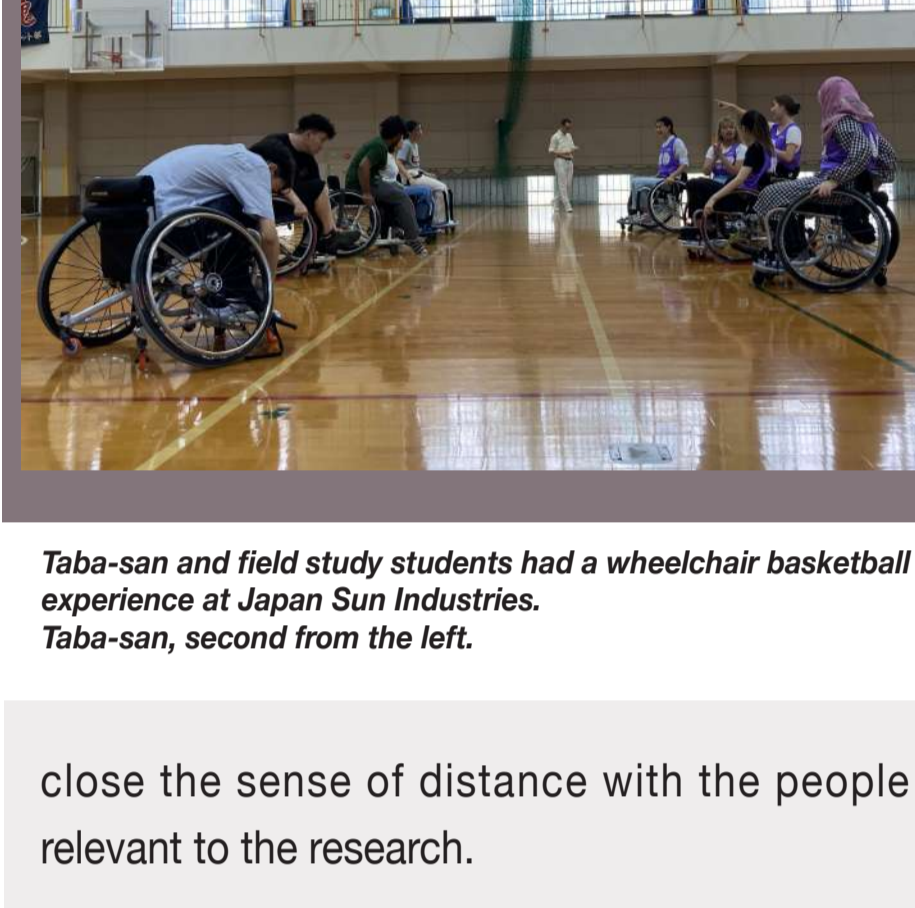
Q4. What do you think are the misunderstandings about seminars?
It is difficult to say for sure what the misunderstandings about seminars are, but after all, "the difficulty in writing a thesis" is a part of those misunderstandings. I think it's difficult to write and submit a graduation thesis, but it's not good to look at only that part and think negatively that "seminars are hard" and "seminars are demanding" and avoid them. The feeling of trying to "adapt oneself to the environment (seminars)" is very important, and I think of a seminar as a place where you can try anything. "What do I want to do?" "What kind of specialty will I go on to study after the two years of study before entering the seminar?" "What do I want to graduate from APU with?" There are many difficult parts in terms of self-management, but I think that the experiences and skills cultivated in the seminar will come to benefit me in the future.

5. Please describe Professor Yamagata's seminar in five words.
For me, I think of "self-management", "the ability to raise questions (the ability to have problem awareness)", "the ability to question

III. Q&A about Taba-san's research

Taba-san puts himself in a "place where he can test himself" which is Professor Yamagata's Seminar and pursues research with a positive attitude. He answered [Q]uestions which focus on his personal research.

- 6. Why did you choose Professor Yamagata's seminar?**
The reason I chose the seminar was: I wanted to study under the teacher because the teacher brought out the research topic that I wanted to do. The first topic that I researched was "the ideal way of supporting independence among people with disabilities", and it was Professor Yamagata who drew my interest to "disability studies" associated with this topic. However, when I met with Professor Yamagata, he did not have a seminar at that time. Therefore, I personally proposed to Professor Yamagata that I wanted him to open his own seminar. That opportunity also deepened my own research theme. "Disability studies" or "research on the topic of people with disabilities" is different from the fields of international development and development economics that Professor Yamagata specializes in [laughs].
- 7. Please tell us about the lessons learned in the seminar.**
I think the biggest lesson from Professor Yamagata is the importance of having an awareness of problems, such as what you should use as clues to live your life in the future (whether you will tackle problems). And through the multinational and multicultural learning space of Professor Yamagata's seminar, I feel that it is very important to speak to the parties relevant in the research and to respond to the other party. Whatever your research is, it is important to know what the good and not so good aspects are, and it is necessary to be aware that the more you research, the more you



Taba-san and field study students had a wheelchair basketball experience at Japan Sun Industries. Taba-san, second from the left.

close the sense of distance with the people relevant to the research.

8. Please tell us about the research you are currently working on.
The research I'm working on right now is about "unmanned railway stations in Japan" which involves a case of a person with a disability filing a lawsuit. I was able to connect with groups of people with disabilities such as those in Beppu that I met during a Field Study I participated in last year. In this way, I feel that **by entering the seminar and having my own topic, "connections with people" have increased.** In seminars, it is very important to not only read literature and collect data, but to also directly come into contact with the problems in the community and society. "Connections with people" will always be important to me.

9. What kind of research topics are you interested in for the future?
Up to now there has been a lot of research on the topic of people with disabilities, or "disability studies", including "disabled people's participation in society" and "the ideal social welfare system for people with disabilities". I am very interested in the "Disabled Persons' Movement" which was the catalyst for people with disabilities to appear in society every day, so I hope to study such topics in the future.

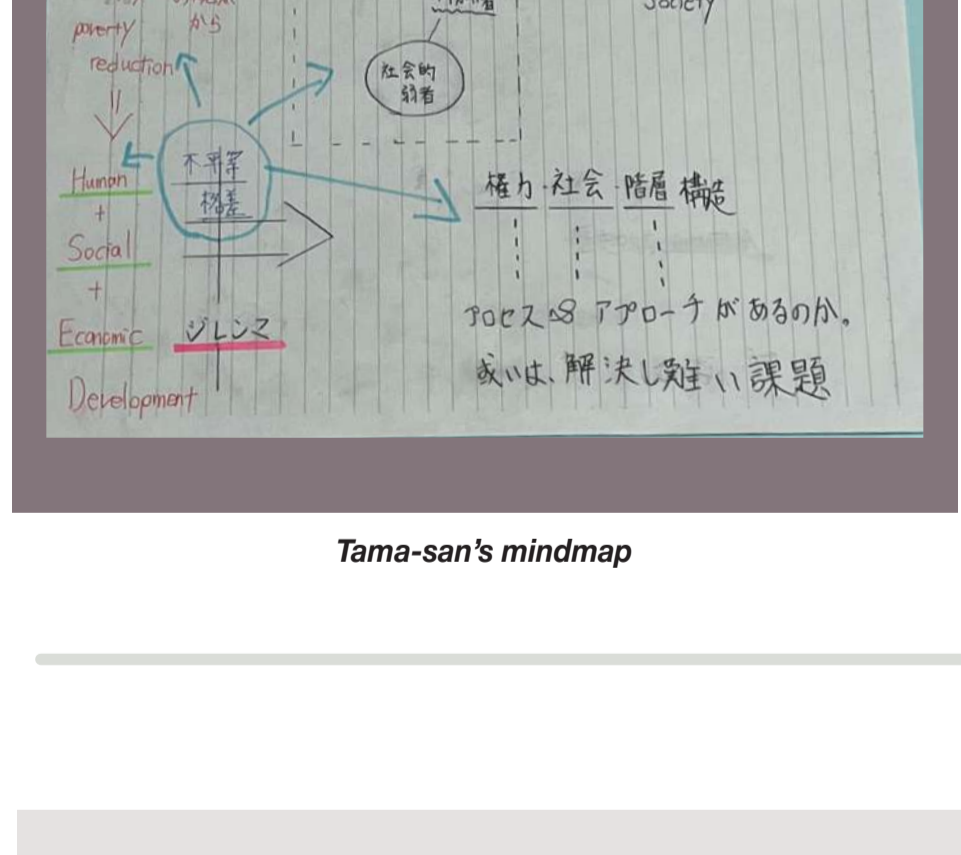


Taba-san with Professor Yamagata and field study classmates pictured with former Paralympics weightlifter, Jo-san, who currently works for Omron. Taba-san, front row, second from the left.

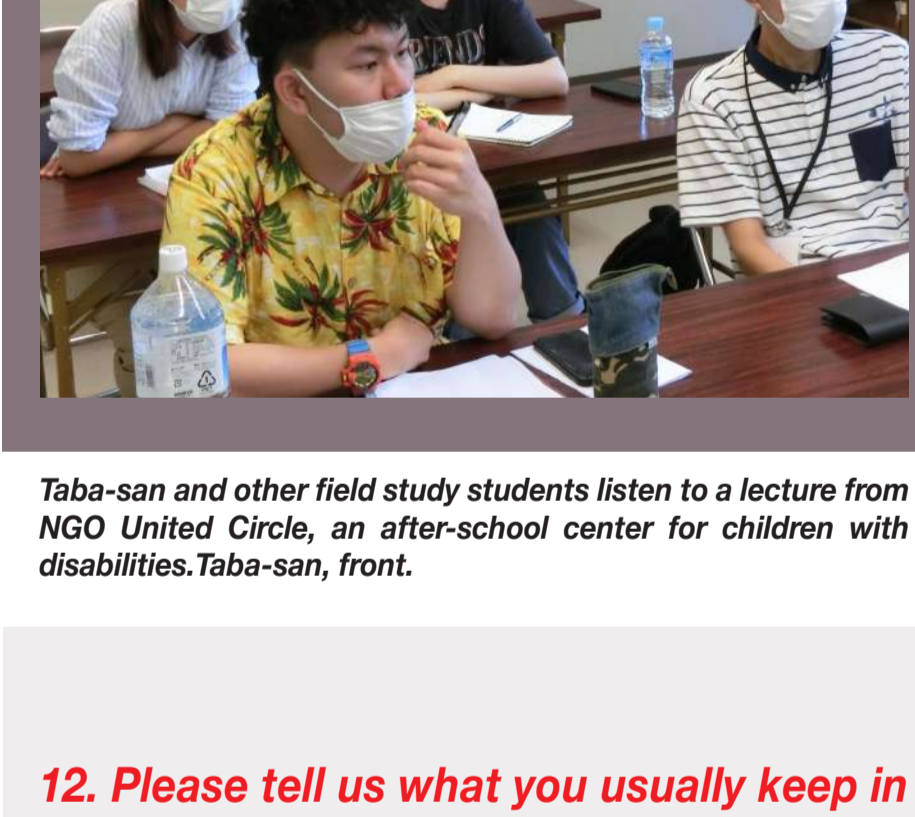
IV. Q&A about advice for future seminar students

Lastly, Taba-san answered [Q]uestions on advice for seminar students who will study in Professor Yamagata's seminar in the future.

- 10. Through your experience in the seminar, do you recommend entering a seminar in third or fourth year?**
I recommend entering a seminar in third year. This is because it takes time to ponder the research topic, such as whether it is really a good topic, and to carefully think about the research topic.
- 11. What should students prepare for the seminar interview?**
Be specific about what you are interested in and what you want to research. The specific method I actually used was to draw a circle in the center of a piece of paper and write my interests around it as a visualizing method. I think this will help you clarify what you want to learn independently, rather than what you want to study.



Taba-san's mindmap



Taba-san and other field study students listen to a lecture from NGO United Circle, an after-school center for children with disabilities. Taba-san, front.

12. Please tell us what you usually keep in mind and what resources you use for your seminar research.
Research is about actively organizing opportunities to talk with people, with the awareness that you are one researcher. Whether you are Professor Yamagata, a professor at another university, or a book writer, it is important for you to take action on your own. I also read books on a regular basis. When I read, I try to mark parts that can be used for research with a sticky note or jot them down in a notebook. It is also important to refer to movies and dramas (documentaries).

Lastly...
13. What is a seminar to you?
A seminar is a place to consider by asking and answering what you have experienced so far and what you want to experience in the future. In other words, for me, a seminar is "a place to discover what I want to do".

AUTHOR'S IMPRESSION

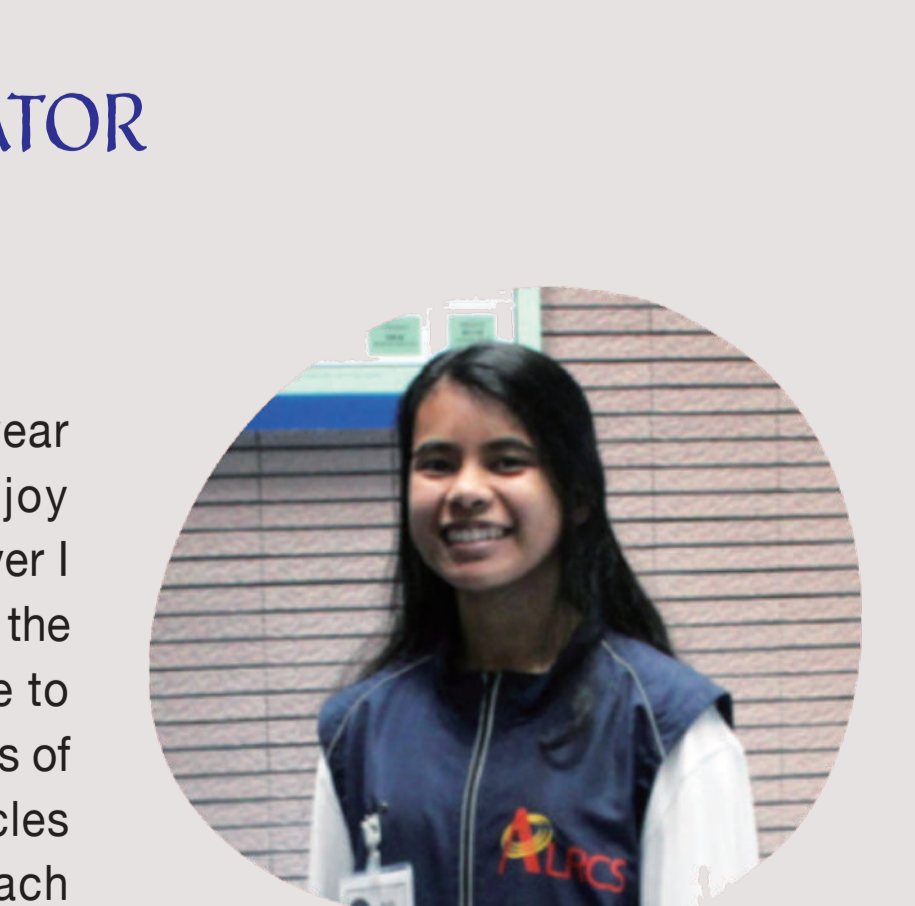
What surprised me most was that Taba-san himself went to ask Professor Yamagata to open a seminar. I strongly felt Taba-san's enthusiasm to study under Professor Yamagata. Always keeping in mind strong feelings for research and an awareness of them while valuing "connection with people" and having an attitude of striving for research daily are what really struck in my mind, and I am considering studying in a seminar in the future. I myself want to be a person who can "discover what I want to do" and continue to pursue it.

INTERVIEWER and AUTHOR

Name : SHIBATA Ayaha
College : APS
Country : Japan
Message : Hello everyone! I am SHIBATA Ayaha, a Q-Team member with ALRCS since Fall 2021. My hobbies are listening to music and looking at design. Through participating in Project Q, I have been able to get to know professors' and senior students' views on learning at APU and strengthen my desire to further deepen my own learning. I would like to convey the appeal of seminars that I learned and felt in the interview to all students!

INTERVIEWER and TRANSLATOR

Name : LORENNIJ Kelly
College : APS (ED)
Country : Marshall Islands
Message : lakwe (hello)! I am Kelly, a 3rd year Environment and Development major. I enjoy traveling and taking my ukulele to play wherever I visit. As a member of the Project Q team under the Academic Office's ALCRS, I have been able to get an inside look on the goals and expectations of APU's faculty teachers. Through these articles detailing the methods and motivations of each respective professor, I sincerely wish each reader takes away a nugget of wisdom.



What is [Q]?
At APU there are many professors who put together wonderful classes, and if we could get to know how these classes are planned, it would contribute to the improvement of other professors' classes. For that purpose, we have begun doing interviews in order to learn about class planning. These articles have been entitled [Q], comprising a variety of meanings such as: [Q]uality of classes, answering [Q]uestions to increase quality, and forming a [Q]ueue, or line, of class improvements. We would be very happy if these articles could contribute to the [Q]uest of APU professors' class quality improvement.