

A Letter of Gratitude

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Introduction

I am a third-year student of the European and American Languages and Cultures course at Kanagawa University's Graduate School of Foreign Languages, with an English and American Culture specialization. Classes in the first term of this year were conducted online via Zoom—this meant no daily commute involving climbing up “the hill to Kanagawa University.” However, now, as I come to the campus only when required, it seems I will end up graduating without learning more about the various noteworthy and interesting things about the university. My schoolmates in other fields graduated in the previous academic year; I joined the graduate program through the adult entrance exam after retiring from my job. I learned via the university's homepage that this entrance exam involved only an interview, and no prerequisite background knowledge was required—this boosted my confidence as I believed I would be able to clear the interview. As my major was chemistry, my humanities background knowledge was limited to what I had learned in high school. Nevertheless, I hoped to take English studies, as I have some level of fluency in the language due to my time as a graduate student at a Canadian university.

Meeting the Professor

Browsing through the past research conducted by the course professors here, via the university's homepage, I came across all the papers and articles written by Professor McOmie on the late Edo period—I found them to be utterly fascinating, and immediately sent him an email asking if I could study under him; when it came to his books though, I found them rather difficult to understand. Before taking the exam, I had visited him, and he had given me an outline on the kind of research that could be conducted. Seeing Professor McOmie's photo on the homepage, I thought he looked quite young; hence, I was surprised to hear that he would be retiring in three years. Given that my

studies could go on for up to four years, I did think it was quite unfortunate that our time together would be limited to three years. Still, he agreed to work with me—knowing how busy he was likely to be during this period, taking care of multiple things prior to his retirement, I felt particularly fortunate for getting the chance to study under him. While I had viewed the European and American Languages and Cultures specialization homepage prior to starting at the university, I had not noticed that the course was actually subdivided by fields of study, with different professors focusing on different fields; I found out only after joining that there were restrictions vis-à-vis the classes one could enroll in.

Advice and Guidance from the Professor

The fact that I was Professor McOmie's first and last student was surprising—this meant that each class was, by default, one-on-one. While this was indeed highly fulfilling, it was also quite exhausting, as there was no time to rest. We did use textbooks, but while teaching, he would not refer to them or other material, instead preferring to use the whiteboard to write down names, dates, and other information related to the events in question, as well as the titles and authors of the reference material. I was impressed with how he had committed all of it to memory, particularly because I myself struggle to retain numbers as well as names of people appearing in historical events. There were instances during our classes when I could not understand the original text, not even after listening to Professor McOmie's explanation, or after reading a translation. There were also times when I lost track of what page was being discussed, as he would have proceeded to the next page while I was copying down the information written on the whiteboard—finding my place in the English text after losing it was no easy task. The graduate school requires an end-of-term report to be submitted for each class taken. In the first term of the first year, I thought Professor McOmie would go easy on me, and that there would be no exams. I flew into a panic when I realized this was not the case. Professor McOmie is, without a doubt, a kind man, always thoughtful and considerate in class; when it comes to exams, however, he is quite strict.

I had attended his undergraduate classes for a year. Then, he used to write on the whiteboard rather quickly, also using slides at times, making note-taking difficult. One time, I had to ask him to repeat what he was explaining, having lost my place in the text, and he had suggested that I take a photo of the whiteboard with my phone, advice I then put into practice—in fact, it was only then that I found out that the other students had already been doing this to keep up with him. Taking photos of the whiteboard, as well as writing down notes had ensured the classes were busy for me. He also used to distribute printed material, which came in handy for class preparation and review. At that time, I had been surprised to learn that the other students were able to understand his lectures, which were entirely in English. I was then scheduled to graduate in three years, but I thought if I could do it quicker, my graduation would not overlap with Professor McOmie's busy pre-retirement period. However, I was ultimately unable to complete the number of units required for graduating within two years, thus returning to study under him for three years. Because I had little background knowledge, I found it difficult to decide on a topic for my master's thesis, because he showed me a rough idea and then gave me a free hand.

Closing Remarks

I found out that Professor McOmie visited the library even on his off days, to prepare for the publication of his next book. This highlights his work ethic as well as dedication.

I was certain that taking his classes at the undergraduate level would also be quite interesting, as his field of specialty was multifaceted and would thus allow study of a wide range of topics; hence my surprise on finding no undergraduate students in the department continuing on to the graduate program. Perhaps, the undergraduate classes are quite difficult.

I have seen Professor McOmie's room packed with all sorts of study and reference material, so much so that it felt like a maze to me at first; I was not really sure where to enter from. The initial classes were held in his office, just like those of the other professors, but he courteously noted that it was rather cramped; from that point on, we met in a spacious classroom, as

having a desk made it easier for me to take notes. There was a whiteboard there as well, and I was able to write down a good amount of English. The reason behind the mountain of material in his office, I suppose, could be that it is all important stuff that he needs for his future works. I wonder though where all that material will be stored after he retires; given that he is a humanities professor, I imagine that he has a spacious study at his home. I must admit I am a little anxious for him regarding this storage, as in my own case, ensuring space for unorganized or disposed material after retirement has been tough. With respect to the era studied, his next work and my thesis seem to have some overlap, so it is quite unfortunate that I will not be able to refer to it for my thesis. I am looking forward to reading his future works.

Professor McOmie, my sincerest thanks for your extensive guidance and advice during our time together, as well as for your efforts and work for Kanagawa University over the years.