

# WE'RE NOT IN KANSAI ANYMORE: DESIGNING FOR REVERSE CULTURE SHOCK

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Master of Design: 2011  
Communication Planning and Information Design  
School of Design, Carnegie Mellon University







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A thesis submitted to the School of Design, Carnegie Mellon University,  
for the degree of Master of Design in Communication Planning and Information Design

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## お世話になりました

I would like to extend my sincere  
thanks to the following:

### THE PITTSBURGH JET ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

Allison Alvarez, Amiena Mahsoob, Amy Boots,  
Bonnie McCloskey, Chris Tittle, Clark Munson,  
Dave Sheldon, Jen Donehoo, Jenn Murawski,  
Richa Pokhrel

### THE JET ALUMNI COMMUNITY WORLDWIDE

### THE LADIES' DEN

Aliya Baptista, Jeanette Leagh, Kim Dowd,  
Rodrigo López-Negrete de la Fuente,  
Katherine Betermier

### PROF. DAN BOYARSKI

### NISHANT PRASADH

### MY FAMILY AND FRIENDS

This thesis and this entire graduate experience have  
been very intense and challenging. Through these  
two years and well beyond, your love and support  
have always helped me to keep my chin up and keep  
moving forward.

Thank you, from the bottom of my heart.



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新鮮  
んぶり  
どん  
今小町

ビジネス  
ホテル  
ヤマシロ  
→

ヤマシロ

阿波池田郵便局  
→

美羊屋安宅本家

CASIO  
イサワ文具店

弁当

山  
大学・高

# THE PROBLEM

How can I develop a resource to aid people who are experiencing reverse culture shock after returning from extended stays abroad?

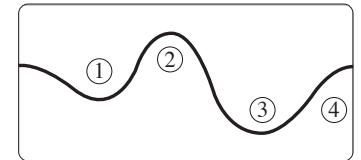
What is reverse culture shock?

A person may experience this when returning from a stay in another country or environment where the culture and daily life differ from the person's home.

Especially when returning after a long absence, this may be felt more acutely than conventional culture shock because it's expected that one's home is a familiar place. The reality is that home and the people there may have changed, and it's after returning to those formerly familiar places that the returnee becomes aware of how s/he has changed.

There are four standard phases:

1. **DISENGAGEMENT:** letting go of the host culture as a person prepares to return home.
2. **EUPHORIA:** excitement over being home and seeing both new and familiar sights.
3. **HOSTILITY/IRRITABILITY:** rising awareness of the disconnect between memory and reality.
4. **RECONCILIATION:** overcoming the disconnect, and beginning to move forward with a modified sense of home.



## CASE STUDY: JET Programme

The Japanese Exchange and Teaching Programme is the world's largest international exchange program. Through JET, people come to live in predominantly rural and suburban communities throughout Japan in order to promote grass-roots internationalization, as well as to teach English in public schools.

JET is coordinated by several Japanese governmental organizations in conjunction with Consulates General of Japan worldwide. Participants are hired by local boards of education or local governmental offices for up to five years. Currently there are over 4,300 participants from 36 countries.

*I was a JET participant from 2005 to 2007. I lived in a town of 16,000 (pictured to the left) in Tokushima, Shikoku, Japan's fourth-largest island. I worked in one junior high school and six elementary schools, and taught two community English conversation classes.*





総合  
センター →  
Center 800m

徳島社会保険健康センター  
ペアーレ 徳島 →  
Tokushima Social Insurance Health Center 150 m

ブレインズパーク 徳島 →  
Brains Park Tokushima 1.3 Km

# ABSTRACT

I developed a resource to aid people going through reentry and reverse culture shock after returning from long stays abroad. Based on my experience with the JET Programme, I used North American JET alumni as my case study, but aimed to develop a solution that would be scalable and useful for people in other programs and situations.

While JET and other similar programs assist and support participants in the initial journey abroad and during their stay, they tend to not provide much support when the participants return. This is a real issue because culture shock upon returning from an extended trip is stronger and generally unexpected than what's experienced at the initial departure. Because of the increasing number of people going abroad for extended stays, this highlights a very real need for support, either from the organizing groups or from alumni of those groups and programs.

I began my exploratory research with an extensive survey, where I gathered information on people's situations prior to joining JET, various qualitative and quantitative aspects of their time in Japan, and their experiences upon their return. I continued to conduct exploratory research to gather people's personal experiences, and I worked closely with JET alumni during my generative and evaluative research phases as well.

From the beginning, I leaned towards an online solution that would connect JET alumni regardless of distance or location. Though I considered other options, this approach was vindicated by the strong needs for “community” and “shared experiences” voiced by JET alumni throughout all my research.

Ultimately I developed a plan for an online platform that enables people to share their experiences through writing and other media, as well as to communicate and connect easily with others. The name of this platform is OKAERI, which means both “return” (verb) and “welcome” (greeting) in Japanese. Beyond the site's structure and function, the key element is the visual-verbal rhetorical strategy throughout the content and layout, which will set an empathetic tone and perpetuate the sense of community that already exists among JET alumni.

I'd like to continue pursuing development of this idea and its existence within a larger system after the official completion of this thesis, and ultimately I very much would like to implement this solution.

*JET: Japanese Exchange and Teaching*







# INTRODUCTION + BACKGROUND

The idea for this project came about from personal experiences—both my own and those of my friends. Through the JET Programme, I had the chance to live in a small Japanese town roughly 3 hours from Osaka from 2005 to 2007. Like many others, I prepared extensively for my departure from Japan—but I never expected to experience such intense reverse culture shock during my first year back in the US.

Many of my friends experienced similar reverse culture shock, though personal circumstances varied greatly. One close friend had a quarter-life crisis: he realized that his values and life goals had changed fundamentally while he was abroad, and he withdrew shortly after entering a graduate program and took a year off. His story was what made me take note of this lack of support for JET participants preparing to leave Japan.

I knew when I first enrolled at Carnegie Mellon that I wanted to explore how design can help overcome cultural boundaries. When exploring potential thesis topics, I spent a long time researching the field of cross-cultural communication at large. Inevitably, I found myself drawn back to JET and Japan as I realized that I already had identified a very poignant need area.

From the beginning, I'd leaned towards developing a resource to aid returning JET participants with dealing with reverse culture shock. At first, I focused mostly on the negative. I knew that I couldn't cure reverse culture shock and never set out to do so. Instead, I aimed to see what it was that helped JET alumni cope and readjust upon their return, and create a resource around those. I focused on North American JET alumni for the sake of scope, but always kept the international JET community in mind, as well as other groups and organizations that deal with international exchange or extended travel. It was important that I created an extensible framework, as this issue of reentry support is becoming increasingly relevant as more people travel abroad for business or pleasure.

Besides helping the participants themselves cope with reverse culture shock, in time a secondary issue manifested itself: relaying people's individual experiences and lives in Japan, not just for oneself or to share with JET friends, but even to share with family and friends who didn't experience life in Japan. My solution came to embrace communicating both information and experiences, in a way that's hopefully accessible and still personal at the same time.

*JET: Japanese Exchange and Teaching*



# REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE + PROJECTS

In order to do my thesis on alleviating reverse culture shock, I needed to better acquaint myself with what reverse culture shock was. It wasn't long before I realized that if I wanted to understand the psychological underpinnings of these international shifts, I needed to have a stronger understanding of intercultural communication. I needed to know how to discuss and analyze the issues and "symptoms" that people experienced as a result of moving between different cultural groups, and a primer on sociolinguistics and discourse analysis was crucial for that.

Fortunately, I'd taken a course titled Communicating in the Global Marketplace in Spring 2010 that gave me precisely the foundational knowledge I needed. Even more fortunately, Carnegie Mellon's library had every single issue of the Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology: in short, I had plenty of relevant articles at my disposal, and the proper background knowledge to analyze and utilize them.

There were three major subject areas I targeted:

- reverse culture shock: information, resources, and psychological background
- the experiences of international travelers, but returnees in particular
- the JET Programme

As I examined existing reverse culture shock materials, I realized that I was asking a different set of questions about them. *Were they effective? Why or why not? And why were (or weren't) people using them?*

This made me reframe my literature review into a two-prong approach.

- Examine the support structures and reverse culture shock resources that JET provides for its departing participants
- Develop a thorough background on the subject areas relevant to this project: the psychology behind reverse culture shock, the experiences of people returning from extended travels, and the history and structure of the JET Programme







# LITERATURE REVIEW, PART I: EVALUATION OF EXISTING RESOURCES

This is an analysis of existing reverse culture shock resources. In general, there are two recurring issues:

- The information is inadequate in its reverse culture shock coverage.
- It's not easily accessible, regardless of its efficacy.

## JET Programme

*These are official documents or other information sources distributed to all JET Programme participants by one or several of the major governmental organizations that manage JET.*

## General Information Handbook

This is a comprehensive resource of official and day-to-day information. All JET participants receive this upon arriving in Japan. There's one page with a basic definition of reverse culture shock and a list of symptoms.

**THE PROBLEM:** most JETs don't even realize this is in here. Additionally, quite a few lose or dispose of their GIH prior to leaving Japan.

## Returner's Conference

This is an annual conference for returning JETs nationwide in February or March. It covers the logistical processes all departing JETs will face, and has job resources and a job fair. There's an annual panel on reverse culture shock, and individual consulates/embassies may also have culture-specific presentations.

**THE PROBLEM:** this is an optional conference. While some JETs' contracting agencies pay for them to go, others either have to use their vacation days to attend or aren't allowed to attend.

## JET Streams newsletter

This is issued annually to all recent JET returnees, as well as alumni who opt to receive it. It may have some reverse culture shock coverage, in the form of a definition or anecdotes and advice from alumni.

**THE PROBLEM:** though every JET receives this at least once, it isn't very impactful and doesn't contain any unique information, especially with so many easily accessible online resources.

*Nearly all incoming JET participants land in Tokyo and attend a three-day orientation session in the summer, before departing for their new homes. They receive many of their important documents and more pertinent information about life in Japan here.*



*AJET: Association for Japanese Exchange  
and Teaching*

## AJET

*AJET is run by current JETs as an on-the-ground sponsor of projects, publications, conferences, support efforts, and social and cultural activities. AJET is also the major conduit of communication between JETs and the program's official sponsors. Besides one main Japan-wide chapter, there are chapters for each of Japan's prefectures/governmental districts.*

### AJET Across Japan

This is a bi-monthly printed newsletter/magazine that goes out to all current JETs. On occasion, it features articles detailing the experiences of JETs and JET alumni with reverse culture shock.

**THE PROBLEM:** this information is geared towards current JETs and their life in Japan, and is typically not targeted towards departing JETs. There's also the concern that some JET participants disregard these mailings.

### National AJET: Life after JET

This is an online interview series with JET alumni that showcases how people have utilized their JET experiences in positive ways after leaving Japan.

**THE PROBLEM:** it isn't a resource to help returning JETs. Rather, it's a showcase of how JET has played a part in the lives of these alumni.

## Individual AJET sites

These represent the JETs in each of Japan's ~47 prefectures and governmental districts. Each chapter shares information and communicates with its members completely independently and sometimes in very different ways, and the amount of information available in each group varies greatly. A handful of AJET sites have excellent resources for returnees.

**THE PROBLEM:** Not all AJET groups offer the same amount of information and support. Some are very active and group-oriented, but others are more independent. Additionally, a few AJET groups charge membership dues, which means that not every JET is necessarily a member.

## JET and Beyond

This is a newsletter available on the AJET website, which contains a couple of essays written by JET alumni about the reentry and readjustment process.

**THE PROBLEM:** It's obscure and not well-advertised.

## JET Alumni Associations

*Known as JETAA for short, this came into being shortly after the founding of the JET Programme. There are major chapters located in nearly every city that hosts a Consulate General (from where JET participants depart for Japan), as well as sub-chapters to support JET alumni in other areas.*

## Mission Statements and Activities

Many JETAA chapters host parties in the fall to welcome recent returnees. Some happen in August/September and some happen in winter, to tie in with celebrating the Japanese new year.

**THE PROBLEM:** Only a couple of chapters explicitly address reverse culture shock on their sites or among their aims.

## Other

*There were two books I found that are excellent and helpful resources for returnees. Both took similarly personal approaches, but from different angles.*

### Cross-Cultural Reentry: A Book of Readings

CLYDE AUSTIN

This consisted of many personal testimonials, from travelers or their spouses (who moved along with their family). The writers were in different situations, some traveling for business and some missionaries, but there was something very compelling in hearing both objective and subjective aspects of these moves told in the first-person.

### The Art of Coming Home

CRAIG STORTI

It's a really wonderful and precise guide that's told in a matter-of-fact but empathetic tone, and describes various facets of the return home that people may have to contend with. I relied on this book to inform the tone I maintained throughout the site.



6 今度の発車は  
Next Train  
快速マリアー-44号 15:43 岡山  
停車駅 坂出 児島 茶屋町

6

左側通行



# LITERATURE REVIEW, PART II: RESEARCH MATERIALS

## Psychology, sociolinguistics, and discourse analysis

*JXCP: Journal of Cross Cultural  
Psychology*

### Communicating in the Global Marketplace

In the spring of 2010, I enrolled in this course, taught by Professor Andreea Ritivoi of the English and Rhetoric programs (whose personal work focuses on immigrant identity and narrative/rhetoric). In many ways, this course had a tremendous and fundamental impact on me. It changed how I view language and culture, as well as my interactions with people of all backgrounds. It expanded my sense of empathy and gave me a new set of constructs and vocabulary to use to define aspects of cultures and interactions. Some of the concepts we covered that came up in various readings pertaining to my thesis:

- “cross-cultural” vs. “intercultural”
- collectivist vs. individualist societies
- low-context vs. high-context cultures
- the interplay between language and culture
- modernization vs. westernization
- politeness strategies and face-saving

### Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology

This is a psychological journal featuring studies on a variety of cross-cultural and intercultural topics. I focused on articles that covered aspects of Japanese vs. western cultures, as well as painted a thorough picture of the psychological and sociolinguistic issues behind reverse culture shock. The concepts we studied in the Communicating in the Global Marketplace course (Spring 2010) provided a solid foundation that helped me to follow the specifics of these studies more thoroughly.

I also found similar studies online that pertained to Americans returning from extended stays abroad, and some that focused on returnees from Japan, but the results were essentially the same as those from the JXCP.

## Personal accounts and efforts

The majority of the resources were online, but there were a couple of excellent books as well.

### Blogs

Similar in nature to the books were the personal blogs and newsletters that I found. They varied in quality, detail, and depth, but they painted very personal and real pictures of people's experiences, lives, and transitions upon returning from Japan.

### Other Websites

There are a number of by-alumni-for-alumni sites and online efforts. Some of them have allowed alumni to share information and experiences with each other for years, and others came about in response to news that the Japanese government was threatening to end the JET Programme in 2010.

- JETWIT – originally for writers, interpreters, and translators (hence the “Wit” acronym), it's become the largest JET alumni-oriented blog on the web. Webmaster Steven Horowitz was eager to talk with me about his site and my thesis work. He created a “JET ROI” column and campaign to demonstrate JET's impact on the program's alumni.

- I THINK I'M LOST – one of the major messageboards to support the JET community.
- CHIISAI SUDACHI – this is the private messageboard for Tokushima AJET, the group with which I was involved while I lived in Japan. There's a sub-forum for JETs preparing to leave Japan, but posting tends to die off rather quickly for many people once they leave JET.
- BECAUSE OF JET – alumni and friends of JET talk about the program's impact on their lives.
- 100 ENGLISH DREAMS - A JET alum assembled a photography project that relates the stories, dreams, and faces of 100 young Japanese students of English.

## Books

### Importing Diversity: Inside Japan's JET Program

DAVID L. MCCONNELL

This is the most comprehensive text of the history of the JET Programme and its impact. It provides solid background material on the reasons for starting JET and its early/formative years, as well as the impacts and “ripple effect” that JET has had through its alumni and others involved with the program.



# LITERATURE REVIEW: MAJOR FINDINGS

There were four major findings I came away from after doing this literature review.

1. There is no such thing as a cure for reverse culture shock. It is a personal and psychological phenomenon, and everybody who experiences it does so in a unique way.
2. JET provides copious resources upfront to aid accepted applicants with moving to Japan. There are also many resources in place to aid current JET participants. (This seems to be a common situation in other similar programs.)
3. However, resources for returnees are scattered, unemphasized, and largely overlooked. This is true of most information on reverse culture shock online.
4. Beyond that, the majority of participants aren't made aware of the existence of reverse culture shock in a meaningful and memorable way.

I reorganized these and created a territory map, which affirmed my initial idea to create a reentry-related resource.

## ***Territory Map***

### REVERSE CULTURE SHOCK RESOURCES

- scattered
- some are great, some are poor
- generally underutilized



### COMMUNITY FORUMS

- PRO: two-way communication
- CON: not targeted/"guided" for reentry
- CON: people tend to stop posting after they leave Japan

### JET ALUMNI ASSOCIATIONS

- PRO: meet other alumni in your area, have access to a community of people with shared experiences
- CON: not available everywhere: a number of alumni can't attend meetings
- CON: few chapters explicitly address reverse culture shock

### BLOGS & MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- PRO: very pertinent information, in-depth recounting of personal experiences
- CON: one-way communication

### OPPORTUNITY AREA

- 2+ way communication
- targeted/guided towards reentry and reverse culture shock
- personal experiences
- if desired, keep JET a more active part of one's life after leaving Japan





酒造連  
日浦酒店  
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# DESIGN APPROACH

Throughout the course of my thesis, the main points from my literature review kept reemerging. The two I kept in mind constantly were #3 (resources being underemphasized and over-looked) and #4 (returnees not being aware of reverse culture shock).

From the beginning, I already was leaning towards creating a solution that connected JETs. My experiences and my observations of my friends' experiences led me to form hypotheses prior to starting my research, but I was still very careful to craft unbiased research materials. For the most part, the research backed up my hunches throughout the course of my investigation.

As a JET alumna, I had to be very careful with how I walked the objectivity-subjectivity line. However, when beginning my thesis in April/May 2010, it had been nearly three years since I returned (August 2007). That was enough time for me to detach myself, deal with my own reverse culture shock, and move on, while still utilizing my network of contacts and personal connections to Japan and JET. I did make some intuitive guesses and assumptions, but they were educated guesses. And despite knowing that I could very well use this resource myself, I was very mindful to never just "design for myself." Multiple conversations with my advisor and others also reminded me that it is completely okay for design to be subjective (to a degree) and emotional, and I embraced that wholeheartedly in this project.

A recurring issue I had was that of coordinating activities with people remotely. I was not able to conduct nearly as many interviews or online journaling sessions as I would have liked, due to losing touch with interested participants.

*JXCP: Journal of Cross Cultural  
Psychology*



## A hand-drawn map of Hokkaido, Japan, with the word "Hokkaido" written in green and "HIT" in red.



## Smith's

ed about <sup>HHH</sup> travel, do stuff in your <sup>HHH</sup>  
 RCS - be aware free time you may not  
 for people with it usually do - new  
 stuff <sup>HHH</sup>

take it in stride ||  
do what you must for closure

**ZETAA**  
reach out to other JET alumni  
people who lived abroad  
stay in touch w/ JET friends

ik about religion  
 + you in ||  
 + home || realistic ex

have job, volunteer  
post, hobby - plan

- Spend time w/ friends @ home
- establish a routine

re something  
look forward  
when you  
return 11

- fam/friends may not "get" it
- fam/friends also  $\Delta$
- "everything will be different" / alt. reality
- sociology: you want home to  $\Delta$  to suit you, i.e. where you want to live

give yourself  
time

don't jump to  
conclusions

keep ties to Japan ~~111~~  
(日語を勉強)  
socialize regularly ~~111~~

Flect on Your  
Time abroad !!!

your own personal space/  
privacy is 4 in you

about others' mindset/behavior

Japanese gestures/  
manners

Don't get caught  
in a twilight zone  
turn. B/B + home

expect some frustration

positive Coping mechanisms  
- "enjoy each other"

you experiences  
de always w/ you  
日at it will

return

-depression/ anxiety

it's the little

It will go  
on without you,  
and it may feel weird

11 not 4 of family

enjoy things  
unavailable  
in japan

things that are  
hard to prep f

business environment  
is very different than Japan's  
close rels in Japan will

to be for friends  
 about this  
 transition  
 (before + during)

friends going  
 home @ same  
 time

all the info  
 currently available  
 online

mediators  
 for tough  
 situations  
 Supervisors in Bt

wish there  
 were less to do

packed earlier

more contact  
 info

LORs

travel between  
 Bt + home

to make  
 transition  
 less dramatic

enjoy karma  
 about as @

it's normal

alert people  
 to this

sense of  
 'home' is  
 different

how tough  
 it'd be

ESID  
 even here

to have  
 stayed in  
 better conditions

Explaining  
 JET professionally

leveraging JET

job or something  
 to occupy self  
 make transition  
 easier

more time to start working  
 relay before starting work

family/friends  
 visiting helped them  
 understand the life

in business for Bt  
 my friends there

Work

to look

RCS

Wanted coping  
 mechanisms

Wanted to talk  
 to others, not  
 BE TOLD about  
 it.

preparation  
 of some  
 kind

returners'  
 conf. hoped

counseling  
 - for spouse

resources



# EXPLORATORY RESEARCH

## Survey

*Conducted with JET alumni in the US and Canada.*

- Questions: 35
- Respondents: 231
- Prefectures of Japan represented: 42 (out of 47)

Since this group is so scattered, I realized it'd be hard to get a solid response with several rounds of surveys. I conducted one large-scale survey, and got a tremendous response. I was able to elicit qualitative and quantitative aspects of their experience. They gave me concrete facts, rated various aspects of their experiences, and filled in freeform answers.

There's a joke among JETs everywhere that the program's unspoken motto is "Every Situation Is Different." I realized quickly that this also holds true for returnees' experiences.

My literature review also confirmed that as a psychological phenomenon, reverse culture shock is impacted heavily by many kinds of personal circumstances, such as:

- quality of experience in Japan
- relationship status
- where returnees would be going after Japan  
whether returnees had a job, grad school, etc.  
waiting for them upon their return
- availability/accessibility of a local JET Alumni Association chapter

## Interviews (*with JET alumni*)

*Conducted with JET alumni in the US and Canada.*

- Duration: 30-45 minutes
- Formal participants: 3
- Informal participants: dozens

This was a follow-up to the survey to get detailed personal stories and situations. I conducted formal interviews with three participants with different placements. Equally valuable were my informal conversations with JETs and other international sojourners, about their run-ins with reentry shock.

The interviews reemphasized that Every Situation Is Different, and reaffirmed the results of the survey. They didn't give me any new information, since many survey takers gave long accounts of their experiences.

## Journals

- Formal participants: 2
- Informal participants: dozens

Of my participants, there was one in particular who maintained her journal for over six weeks. In that time, she contributed some very emotional, personal, and valuable content.

*I also browsed through blogs of JET participants. Though most stopped updating after leaving Japan, and most of the others barely talked about reverse culture shock, there were still some telling ideas and themes that I was able to glean from them.*

## MAJOR MOMENTS IN THE JET JOURNEY

**(from the perspective of a JET)**

## APPLYING

hear about JET - *how?*

11-12月 application - *paper till 2005, online*  
→ DC consulate

2月 interview notification (y/n)  
← application consulate

interview  
😊 → application consulate

3-4月 shortlist/waitlist (y/n)  
← application consulate

4月      reply form  
→ application consulate

5-7月 placement + JET info (JET ID#, visa info, orientation)  
← application consulate

5-6月 contracting agency & pred. are allowed to contact you  
← predecessor + contracting agency

6月 copy of contract, other mailed info  
← contracting agency

6月 informal Q&A with alumni  
☺ → application consulate

flight info, other logistics  
 ← application consulate  
 ←→ JTB

7月 visa  
→ application consulate

logistics, Tokyo orientation info  
← application consulate

7-8月 PRE-DEPARTURE ORIENTATION

DEPARTURE ☺ → 日本

## THE JET JOURNEY

7月 | A Tokyo Orientation

B	GIH
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8月 C  
CLAIR News Obon / Awa Odori  
Awa Life summer matsuri  
orientation, English camp

9月 2nd semester  
- speech contest  
Awa Life

10月  
CLAIR News  
Awa Life

- School cultural festival

11月  
semina  
CIR mid-year seminar  
Awa Life

12月  
mid-year ALT  
SEA mid-year seminar  
1月  
CLAIR News  
Awa Life  
Orphanage visits

winter break  
 New Year

3rd semester  
Awa Life

2月 | Yokohama returners' conference (OPTIONAL)  
CLAIR News  
Awa Life

3月	Awa Life Tokushima musical
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4月  
new fiscal & school year  
(STAFF CHANGE)  
CLAIR News  
Awa Life

5月      Awa Life      Golden Week  
Mima Touch Rugby  
Recontracting conference

6月 CLAIR News  
Awa Life  
Prefectural re  
conferences

7月	summer break
	JET Streams
	Awa Life
	Sayounara party

終り

- National JET / AJET
- Tokushima AJET
- Publications/mailings
- School
- National holidays

# FALL SEMESTER + CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT

## AUGUST

I began working on my research over the summer, by researching reverse culture shock and compiling the large-scale survey for alumni across North America. I began disseminating the link in late August, via the JET coordinator at Atlanta's Consulate General of Japan, as well as other forums and prominent JET alum blogs.

## SEPTEMBER

The results came pouring in, and I was stunned by the enormous outpouring from the JET community. Besides just survey results, JET alumni were sending encouraging e-mails, asking me to please keep them posted on my results, affirming that they really wished they'd had something to help them with their transition home, or just wishing me luck.

As a researcher, this confirmed what I already knew: people really wanted and needed something to aid with this. And on a personal level, as a fellow JET alumna, it was really touching that so many people would take the time to describe their experiences and to even wish me well personally.

## JET JOURNEY MAP / SERVICE TOUCHPOINTS

While the results were still coming in, I began to evaluate the JET Programme as a whole, from more of a service design standpoint. What sort of assistance were participants getting when they first signed on, to help them prep for moving to Japan? What kind of coordination and support was there while they were in Japan? And what existed to aid them with their eventual departure?

This led me to create a JET journey “map,” highlighting the application process and an average year on JET. It was a really excellent way for me to capture it all succinctly, and to find areas I'd overlooked or wanted to explore further. It also helped me to view it more concretely and holistically, as I began to seek out possible pain points in the process.

In the JET journey, I included dates and publications that pertained to all JET participants, Japanese holidays, and the local festivals and events among JET participants in Tokushima, where I lived.

*It's important to note that there is a fairly strong sense of community among many JETs either in their immediate area or throughout their prefecture. They're only rarely in isolated placements, such as towns an hour or more away from the nearest JET, or tiny islands several hours from Japan's main islands.*

*In my area, the deep mountain towns would request JETs that could handle isolated placements, as that can definitely have an impact on one's experience.*

*Ironically, any JETs placed in “Tokyo” are almost always on far-flung islands that still fall under the jurisdiction of Tokyo but are 1-2 hours from the main island, as the city doesn't need the internationalization that JET provides.*







I also reviewed the survey results as they came in. Various themes and phrases began forming for me:

- **Inform + aid.** These seemed to be two main areas of attention: this solution should inform them of reverse culture shock while they're still in Japan, and aid them with it after they've left.
- **Why didn't I pay attention to reverse culture shock before I left?** My literature review went on to address this, but so did the survey results: the available resources were scattered and easy to overlook or brush aside.
- **"Useful" and "strategically implemented."** These came up during my weekly thesis meetings with my advisor and co-advisees. What does it mean for this to be "useful," and how far before JET participants' departure from Japan should this be implemented to be effective?
- **Be cautious of speculation:** "it might have been better if I had \_\_\_\_." I was mindful of this when reviewing the survey results. Those are ideas people have put forth, but they don't really know whether they would've helped them or not.
- **What causes/triggers reverse culture shock at certain points?**
- **Employ directed storytelling ("tell me about the night before you left Japan") in any follow-ups or interviews.** These were the kinds of details that I felt would be important to evaluate people's transitions and adjustments.

## OCTOBER

The survey closed on October 1<sup>st</sup>. When all was said and done, I had 231 responses, nearly 200 of which were completely filled out (the others were incomplete or from current JETs).

The task of parsing all this data really overwhelmed me. I had no idea how to analyze it or present it all cohesively. Ultimately, my advisor urged me to follow my senses and the general ideas I was getting from the results, so I could keep moving forward and not be mired in all these details.

Some of the major ideas that came out of this were:

- **Look at what JET Alumni Associations already do, and see if I can improve upon them.**
- **Leverage the social "process" to get through reverse culture shock.** One very strong theme from the respondents was that of talking to others who've shared their experiences. Finding a way to harness this, and the inherent sense of community that many JET participants feel, seemed like a key strategy.
- **Seek out ideas that confirm/add to/change my knowledge base.** I was very careful not to make assumptions based on my own experiences with reverse culture shock. I strove to keep learning, to question the assumptions I was making, and to just keep pushing forward.

*These JETAA groups were formed almost at the start of the JET Programme. The main chapters exist in cities that have Consulates General of Japan (which coordinate the JET application and interview process), but sub-chapters have formed in other areas.*







- **Every Situation Is Different.** This unspoken JET motto came up again and again. People's personal situations (on multiple levels) had a very real impact on their own experiences with reverse culture shock. This made it impossible for me to generalize or assume much at all.

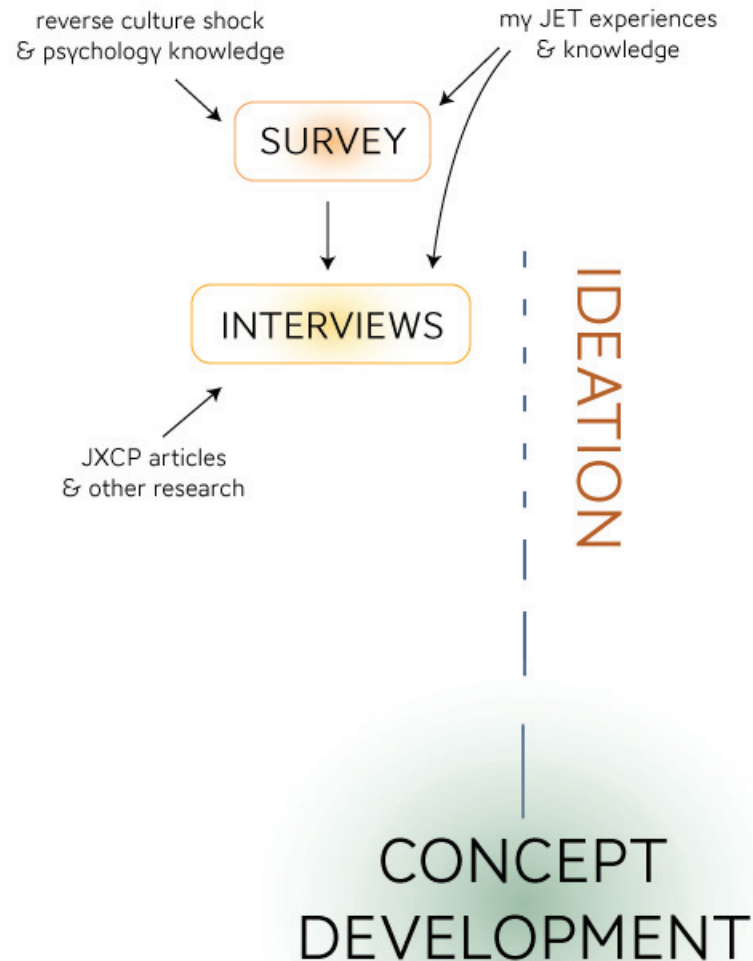
However, my next steps from this point were unclear.

During a meeting with the Nierenberg Chairs, two visiting School of Design faculty members, I explained my idea and how I felt unsure of where to go. I also expressed my concerns with being too close to the subject. Besides giving suggestions for how to proceed, they told me what I needed to hear:

## Design can be subjective.

It's a process of real-life problem-solving, but when you deal with subjects like psychology and strong emotions, it's impossible for it to be purely objective, nor should it be.

I sketched a basic “map” as a snapshot of my process as I viewed it at that time:









I also began researching resources that other programs provided for their returnees, including businesses sending employees on international assignments: for the most part, they prep them for going but not so much for coming back. Friends and colleagues who had been on programs like the Peace Corps reported a similar dearth in resources for returnees. Regarding the military, I abandoned my search when it became increasingly clear that the situation of returning soldiers involved post-traumatic stress disorder and serious injuries, and was far more intense than what I was looking at.

## NOVEMBER

Charlee Brodsky, a professor of photography in the School of Design, had come to talk to our Social Impact By Design class about the impact that photography can have on storytelling and promoting causes and messages. I met with her to discuss applying these ideas to my thesis. We ended up having a great and very inspiring meeting, and she gave me a lot to think about, both in terms of my final solution and possible research methods:

- **Find an object as a prompt or symbol.** Either I could provide objects, or people could gather (or photograph) ones with special meaning to them.
- **Leverage storytelling and real stories.** Have people engage in photographic storytelling: take a photo that describes either how they feel or a particular story or anecdote from their time in Japan. Additionally, just build heavily on people's experiences, as those are prompting the reverse culture shock they're feeling.
- **Take a more holistic and broad approach: don't just focus on the negative.** This was very valuable for me. I'd considered creating something JET alumni could share with their friends and families, to explain what their JET careers had been like, and potentially to prepare them for the culture shock they'd probably be feeling. To do that, it was crucial to take a step back and view the whole picture, both good and bad.
- **Who am I now, as opposed to before? How have I changed? How do I view things differently, and why?** Find ways to capture these shifts within people. This could be difficult, as it can be tough for people to navigate these differences when they're caught up in the worst of the reverse culture shock. But it could be an interesting form of therapy, too, and an exercise to make them reflect on what they were feeling while they were feeling it.







I spent some time researching all the websites of the JET Alumni Association chapters and sub-chapters across the US and Canada. What really surprised me was how few of these chapters explicitly mentioned reverse culture shock in any way. I contacted each of them to ask about their activities to support returnees. A fair number responded quickly and were eager to talk about the dynamics and activities of their chapters, which varied greatly, either due to geography or the community dynamic. There seemed to be three major categories:

- Some chapters were quite active (New York, DC, and the west coast chapters).
- Some chapters met a few times a year.
- Some either had stronger sub-chapter representation due to geography (Florida), or mainly existed so that the few and far-flung JET alumni in their region had someone to talk to if they needed (Alaska).

I also began my interviews, and met with three of my Pittsburgh JET contacts. They all had very different situations: one was a CIR, and the other two had different ALT placements.

From discussions and meetings emerged a couple of other intriguing ideas:

- Could I do for returnees experiencing reverse culture shock what was done to aid accepted JET participants prior to moving to Japan?
- Why were some people impacted so heavily that they couldn't readjust?

I kept both these in mind as I proceeded with my research and subsequent work.

## CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT

From the beginning, I had a sense of what I wanted to do, but I brainstormed and explored further. The three concepts that seemed to be logical extensions of my research were:

- An in-depth returners' toolkit, to be distributed to all JETs prior to leaving Japan
- A web-based support community and resource
- A service model update to the end-of-JET process, which would impact AJET and the governmental organizations that run JET

*CIR: Coordinator for International Relations. This is one of the two main roles for JET participants. They assist local government offices with international relations duties, and must have prior proficiency in Japanese.*

*ALT: Assistant Language Teacher. They typically work in public schools to assist full-time Japanese teachers of English (and occasionally other languages).*

# We're not in Kansai anymore: designing for reverse culture shock



Smitha Prasad  
ADVISOR: Prof. Dan Weaver  
Master of Design Candidate, Communication  
Planning & Information Design, 2011  
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## What is the JET Programme?



The Japanese Exchange and Teaching Programme places foreigners from across the world in predominantly rural locations all over Japan. Their role is to teach in public schools, as well as to spread international awareness and facilitate cultural exchange.

## Reverse Culture Shock

This is a psychological phenomenon that's very similar to the more widely known culture shock experienced when a person or a group moves to a new place. The big difference, however, is that it affects people who have "acculturated" or spent enough time in another culture to internalize it and adopt it as a part of their own identity.

Essentially, it can affect anybody who's had an experience—whether through traveling or through learning something substantial—that makes them see their home through a different set of eyes.

The stages of reverse culture shock can traditionally be characterized by wave forms.



1. **Disengagement**: coming to terms with the fact that you're leaving the new culture and "home" life.

2. **Rejection**: rejection and denial upon being in a familiar environment.

3. **Rejection**: rejection and denial upon being in a familiar environment.

4. **Rejection**: rejection and denial upon being in a familiar environment.

Reverse culture shock is every bit as painful as traditional culture shock, if not more so. In many cases, it is a more significant trauma because the person's identity has been so much changed while abroad. Depending on the length of exposure, the adjustment to reverse culture shock can take anywhere from several weeks to over a year.

## Research

### SURVEY

Distributed among JET alumni in various countries, predominantly outside of Japan, with the following questions:  
- How long have you been in Japan?  
- How long have you been in Japan?  
- How long have you been in Japan?

JOURNALS (ongoing)

INTERVIEWS (ongoing)

### Expected Reverse Culture Shock



### Actual Reverse Culture Shock



## IMAGINE SPENDING YEARS ABROAD.

The culture, language, food, transportation, and even the smells in the air are all different. Eventually, the culture shock fades and you adapt, changing your routine and assuming new habits and norms.

Then imagine coming home. After being away for so long, returning should be so comforting...

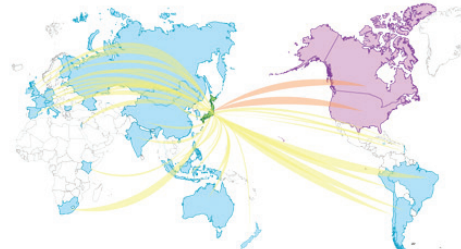
But home changed while you were away. Perhaps your favorite cafe closed, new buildings may have been built, familiar sites may feel different—or maybe you just view them differently.

Aspects of your home culture bother or startle you. Your family and friends probably won't have changed much, and they may not understand how and why you've changed.

You start to feel frustrated, irritated, angry and upset. This doesn't feel right. And there is nobody you can talk to about it. You start to miss the place—the home—you just left.

THIS IS REVERSE CULTURE SHOCK. Hundreds of thousands of people across the world experience it: exchange students, businesspeople, military, missionaries, travelers...

For my thesis, I am using the JET Programme as my case study, and developing a resource to aid North American JET returnees as they complete 1-5 years of living in Japan and experience reverse culture shock upon their return home.



Countries participating in the JET Programme in 2011.

## Findings

### THERE IS NO ONE SCENARIO OR SOLUTION.

- extremely individualized experience  
- influenced by personal circumstances (e.g. psychology)  
- some were unhelpful, others expected for years



### COMMUNITY AND BELONGING

- people want to seek out others who can empathize  
- recommended JET TA leaders, for those who had access to them  
- want a community to turn to that can help and support, especially when there are no other local resources, but also regardless



### SOME IMPACTING FACTORS

- where they returned (domestic? new place?)  
- point of job status  
- relationship status  
- quality of life in Japan  
- ease of adjustment to the local culture



### AVAILABLE RESOURCES

- most people demand reverse culture shock  
- many spend the year overseas, if I provided what had been more recent of its effects



## Next Steps

Complete all necessary research and journaling activities over the impending winter holidays.

### CURRENT CONCEPT IDEAS

In-depth returnee toolkit to be distributed to all JET alumni in January.

Web-based support community and resource.

Service model update for end of JET preparations.

Service model update for end of JET preparations.

Service model update for end of JET preparations.

Service model update for end of JET preparations.

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Service model update for end of JET preparations.



# WINTER POSTER SESSION

Some great conversations occurred at this session. What was especially interesting was when people volunteered stories of their own travels and how they stumbled after coming back, which made me realize that this is something people like talking and commiserating about. Additionally, I got a lot of solid constructive feedback and suggestions for where to go next:

- **Make people realize it'll happen to them.** Simple as it seems, it really is important: awareness is an extremely important first step.
- **Empower people.** Make people feel that they can do something about it, preemptively or while in the middle of it. It's deceptively simple but crucial: help people to help themselves.
- **Pushing people towards an alumni network vs. pulling people into the network.** How forceful did I want to be?
- **Balance between a therapeutic resource and an intervention out of experience.** Essentially, should the resource be proactive or reactive? Should it elicit and harness personal stories, or just deal with the symptoms?
- **Make returnees realize that it may have been bad at the time, but now it's just part of their story/strength/character.** Help returnees realize that this is another chapter of their story.
- **Look at military integration models.** I had done this to a degree, but knowing that there would be a lot of physical, mental, and emotional issues to deal with, I opted to avoid it.
- **Prep people about reverse culture shock before they go over.** Realistically, most JET participants I know remembered very little from their early orientation sessions, and had to "re-learn" everything for themselves over time. There's no guarantee they'd remember it when they were preparing to leave.
- **Prompt AJET to take an active role, so as not to make users seek it out by themselves.** AJET does offer some information on reverse culture shock already, but optimizing their efforts would be good.

There were three main lessons I came away with:

- **Categorization.** Break down and categorize types of or triggers for reverse culture shock.
- **Empowerment.** Help people to take control of their own experiences.
- **Competition.** Examine how other programs handle reverse culture shock.







# GENERATIVE + EVALUATIVE RESEARCH

## Interviews (*with “Friends of JET”*)

- Formal participants: 3
- Informal participants: multiple

To make the platform useful for friends and family of JETs, I interviewed people whose close friends participated in JET. We talked about their own interest in Japan, how they communicated with their friend(s) while doing JET, and their level of interest in Japan after their friend(s) returned. Overall, they affirmed that they’d find this platform, but mainly to learn about their friends in particular. They were open to learning more about the details of day-to-day life in Japan that their friends experienced.

## Guided storytelling

- Duration: 45 minutes
- Formal participants: 4
- Informal participants: dozens

I facilitated a conversation/group interview with area JET alumni. They talked about their time on JET and what made them decide to come home, and helped each other recall memories and stories about reentry. We also talked openly about my ideas for the platform, and they were very honest about what they liked and what they didn’t think they would use. They also cautioned me to not pack too many features into the site.

## Card sorting

- Formal participants: 10 (5 JET alumni, 5 other former travelers)

To help with the site’s information architecture, I set up two parallel online card sorting sessions via OptimalWorkshop, one with JET-specific jargon for JET alumni and one general one for other returnees. I asked them to sort through a series of possible site options, and pull out what they wouldn’t use and categorize the rest in ways that were logical to them. This ended up being pretty useful, especially the results of one participant who had fun with his/her answers (“for delicate spirits,” “this is like an art student thing,” “for people who have no friends in real life”) but ended up revealing some great insights in the process.

## Informal/contextual observations

As I mentioned previously, I felt most comfortable in situations where I could help guide an activity subtly and informally, or when I could observe situations unobtrusively. This worked especially well at JET alum events I’ve attended. Just observing alumni spending time together and seeing what memories, cultural references, and stories surfaced was a really valuable experience.



# about RCS

- description
- "symptoms"
- get past it

Self-imposed

testimonials ..... photos

- by location (日本 & 外国)
- by category  
FOOD, SCHOOL, DAILY, 文化,  
日本人の友人, SETS

modern

blog/tweet  
sort of feed  
profiles - PH  
forum(-ish)  
mentor network  
blogroll

Self-expression  
ART, WRITING...  
mood/level  
today I feel...

# Welcome.

# returnee resources

preparing friends/family for it

- jobs
- pre-departure checklist/timeline
- pension refund
- other logistics (金銭, etc.)

etiquette/customs  
manners, etc.

Pop culture catch-up



this all relies so heavily on trust.  
how to foster & harness that?

"FYI, this may throw you off when you get back..."  
- user-operated list

not everyone may have had a good/strong SET group

Will they want to seek out others MORE or LESS?  
ESID

"please pardon me  
today/right now/etc,  
I was in Japan for \_\_\_\_\_ years,  
and am readjusting to life here."  
- type-cast

Various phrases

- Sorry if I'm awkward
- strong culture shock
- don't get some...

"your one-stop shop for life after JET or something - compile existing AND

add new posts



# SPRING SEMESTER

The idea that I'd been leaning towards from the start was the online resource.

Though I did seriously consider the returners' toolkit and service model update, finally I came back to this original idea. **The returners' toolkit** ran the risk of being neglected, as many other mailed documents from AJET had been, and **the service model update** involved changes not just within AJET, but Japanese governmental organizations (which I stood next to no chance of achieving). The returnees I talked to had really benefited from reaching out to others, so the online resource was the obvious path to take.

## JANUARY

I immediately begin outlining the content areas of the website, and finding ways to capture and shape its user experience. My first sitemap consisted of:

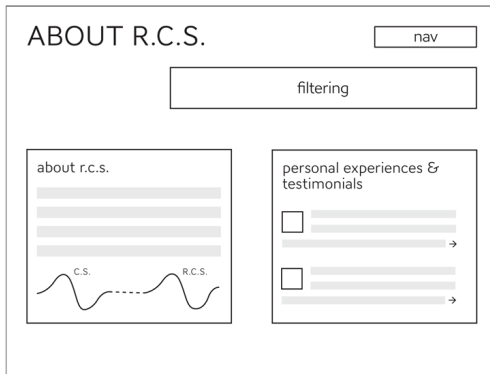
- information on JET (for visitors) and on reverse culture shock (for JET alumni and visitors)
- testimonials
- blogroll
- photos
- messageboard (some unique variant)
- member/profile sections
- mentoring (information and signing up)
- checklist before you leave Japan (interactive?) – from there, links to relevant resources and info

My second, more streamlined sitemap consisted of:

- about
- returnee resources
- experiences
- community

At this point, I hit upon something fundamental and vital: **the rhetorical challenge behind the visual/verbal interplay on the site**. The site format seemed straightforward, but it was how the content was crafted and presented that would make or break it. *What will make visitors stay once they open the site? What will make them even visit the page? How can I make them realize they need this information?*

*AJET: Association of Japan Exchange  
and Teaching*

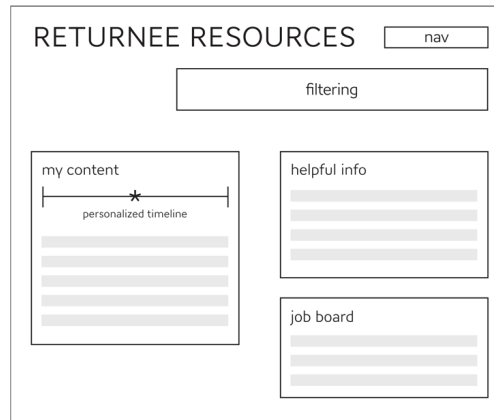


#### about R.C.S.:

empathetic, holistic information on the phenomenon of reverse culture shock

#### experiences & testimonials:

firsthand accounts & testimonials from other members



#### RETURNEE RESOURCES:

to aid returning JETs through the physical and mental preparations associated with leaving Japan

##### my content:

snapshot of personalized timeline  
links to logistical info & resources

##### helpful info:

relevant and pertinent resources submitted by other members

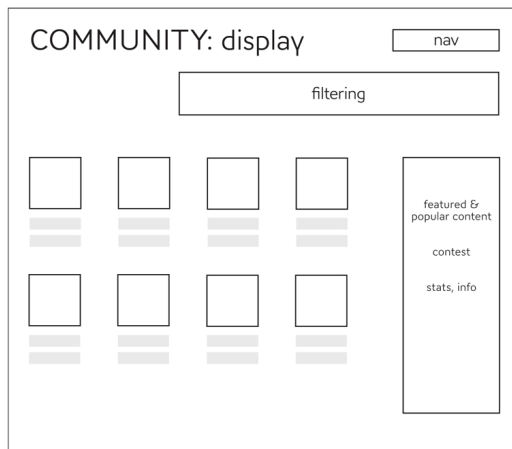
##### job board:

jobs passed on by other members



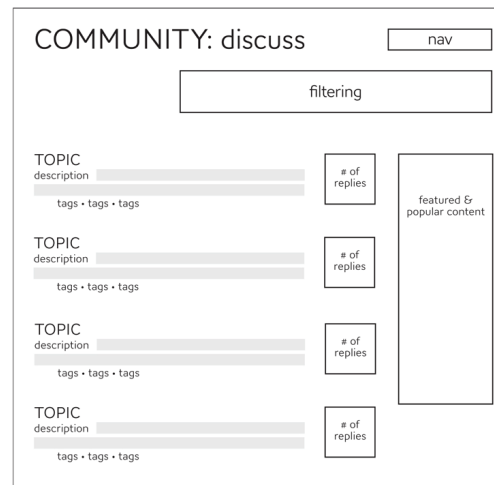
#### COMMUNITY:

snapshot of activity across the entire Community section, as per your own filters & settings



#### COMMUNITY: display:

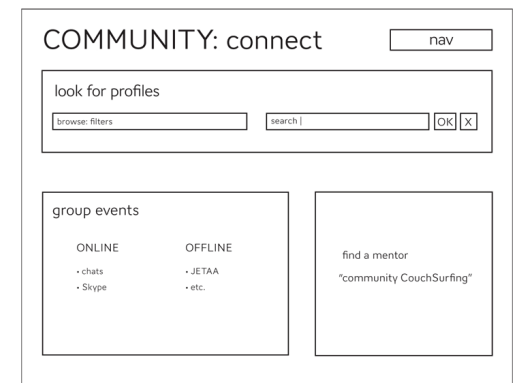
photography, artwork, writing, movies, and other creative works  
post your own, and view (and comment/"favorite") others' work  
participate in group themes and contests



#### COMMUNITY: discuss:

recent topic activity: brand-new topics, updated topics within your own specified filter settings, or flagged/system-wide topics (by administrators)

MetaFilter/Quora model: all content in one place, filtered & navigated per the user's preference (instead of a forum-based messageboard model)



#### COMMUNITY: connect:

look for other members' profiles via browsing or a keyword search  
(you can also connect to others from the rest of the site, but this is the explicit search mechanism)

##### targeted connections:

seek out mentors among past returnees  
a "CouchSurfing"-type program among JET alumni

##### group events:

see listings of online events (group chats or Skype events with others from the site)

see lists of events organized by JET Alumni Association chapters

view offline meetups that are scheduled/coordinated via the site



## FEBRUARY

As I continued with refining my concept, I began thinking about mood boards and other ways to capture the feel of the site. Before long I realized that featuring names and photos of JET alumni throughout the site could be a really powerful way to create empathy and a connection with visitors.

In parallel with my thesis, I began work on a project for my Care in Design course. I decided to utilize my thesis research and create an image of care around reverse culture shock. This introduced another level of thinking: how could I introduce care in how I approached this solution?

I also began planning out more generative research activities. I organized a directed storytelling event one evening and had four of my JET alum friends over who were largely unfamiliar with my research. I also had them do a group collaging session and then talked to them openly about my concept.

As this idea of gearing this towards JETs and their family and friends kept resurfacing, I decided to conduct phone interviews with a few people whose close friends were JET alumni.

## MARCH

By now I'd settled on a more condensed version of the main navigation:

- welcome
- about reverse culture shock
- returnee resources
- community

I'd created basic wireframes to map out features and functionality. To get feedback, I set up card sorting sessions online, and several JET alumni and other non-JET international returnees participated.

## A MEDITATION ON reverse culture shock

The process of adjusting to a new place  
has its ups and downs.

When I landed in Atlanta, my family and one of my best friends were waiting at the airport with a banner and flowers to welcome me home.

My first few weeks home were a whirlwind of warm reunions and dinner and coffee outings, as well as scoping out what Atlanta's Japanese restaurants and grocery stores had to offer. I already could sense that I was viewing things differently than before I went abroad, but was still glad to be home.

Those who deal with reverse culture shock and don't recognize it at the time are caught up in a **chaos narrative**, of which they may be unaware until after they overcome it and reflect upon their experiences.

ARTHUR FRANK

### Step 1: Disengagement

LETTING GO OF YOUR HOST CULTURE  
AS YOU PREPARE TO MOVE HOME



## APRIL

The same mental paralysis that had held me back in the fall gripped me again. I felt nervous about sketching and experimenting with paper and digital prototypes, but ultimately pushed through.

I also continued working on the aforementioned Care in Design project. It was a nice retrospective on why this work was important to the world and to myself. I decided to do a motion piece, using some quotes from my fall survey respondents.

One big development, though, was that I settled on a name for this concept: **OKAERI**. This is a Japanese term that means both “return” and “welcome.”



# okaeri

お・か・え・り

noun, honorific, interjection; abbreviation [origin: Japanese]  
1. return  
2. welcome home

**REVERSE CULTURE SHOCK**  
occurs after people have been away from their home culture for a period of time. Upon their return, they come to realize that their mental image and perception of home don't match the reality they find there, and they begin to see the changes within themselves as a result of their time away.

**THE JET PROGRAMME**  
is the world's largest international exchange program. JET (Japanese Exchange & Teaching) Programme participants come from 40 countries and are placed primarily in rural and suburban towns across Japan. They work in public schools as assistant English teachers, but the central role of all participants is to work to foster grassroots international exchange within their communities.

**OKAERI** is an online platform for alumni and current participants of the JET Programme. By tapping into the trust, generosity, and sense of community among JET participants, **OKAERI** enables people to help themselves and each other through the processes of reentry and post-JET readjustment.

With **OKAERI**, JET alumni can **learn, share, communicate, and engage**. They can be open about their experiences with reverse culture shock, and they can actively shape their view of and interaction with the site, in order to maximize their own readjustment process and user experience.

## Coverage of Okaeri



“When I was having a rough time, it was my friends who had a similar experience who just by saying, “Yeah, I know,” helped me feel better about things.”

M. 25-29, TOKU SHIMA

“The feeling of isolation after my return was much worse than that felt when I first arrived in Japan.”

M. 25-29, AKIHI

“instead of being told “what to expect” or “how to deal” with coming home, I would’ve rather sat in a circle and chatted with the other leaving jet participants, chatted about apprehensions, opportunities, and memories, what we’re afraid of, what we want to do, and how things up until that point have put us on a somewhat similar path to returning home. the variety of perspective is, in my opinion, the best tool to have when dealing with difficulties.”

M. 25-29, AKITA

“I feel JET prepares you to leave [for Japan] very well... I wish they would do the same about coming home... realize everything will be different upon your return. It will be like stepping into an alternate reality.”

F. 25-29, MUGATA

### ABOUT R.C.S.

nav

filtering

about r.c.s.

personal experiences & testimonials

my content

personalized timeline

helpful info

job board

### About Reverse Culture Shock:

Get empathetic and holistic information to help you understand what this phenomenon is about.  
Read firsthand accounts and testimonials from other members.  
For non-JET Alumni: Learn a little about the JET Programme.

### RETURNEE RESOURCES

nav

filtering

my content

personalized timeline

helpful info

job board

### Returnee Resources:

Find logistical information to help you through your major tasks:

- Closing your bank account
- Canceling your cell phone account
- Applying for your pension refund
- Shipping your suitcases to your departing airport

Create and manage your own personalized timeline:

- View JET-wide milestones and deadlines.
- Receive friendly system tips to help your last few months run more smoothly.
- Add your own important occasions and dates.

View resources from other members, like articles or job listings.

### COMMUNITY: index

nav

filtering

recent discussions

your activity

your contacts' activity

featured display items

### Community:

Connect and share meaningful information and memories with others who've been there.

**DISCUSS:**  
An open-ended forum. Create your own categories and filters, so you can view only what you're interested in.

**DISPLAY:**  
Share your artwork, photography, writing, videos, and more. View work by other JET alumni, and participate in contests, themes, and collaborations.

**SELF:**  
Edit your profile, privacy settings and personalized timeline.

**CONNECT:**  
Search for other members, based on keywords or commonalities.

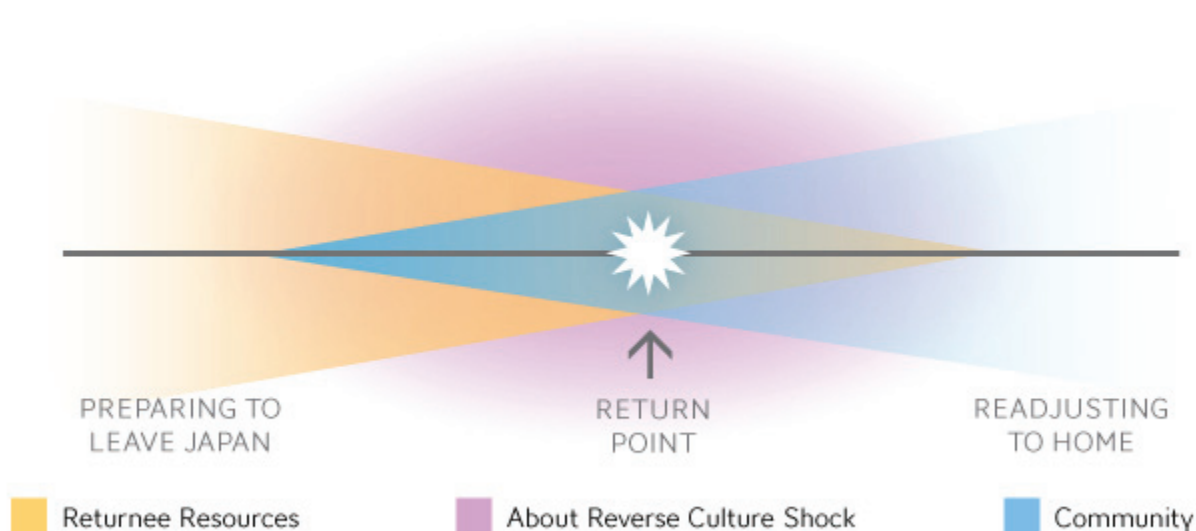


# SPRING POSTER SESSION

Before I knew it, our next poster session had arrived. I knew that my prototypes weren't ready to be presented, so I displayed my wireframes instead. I also developed a basic diagram to describe the basic areas of the return process that my resource would target.

The aim of this session was not evaluation, but feedback, both from the general public as well as from a panel of faculty. I think that my panel seemed interested in my concept, but they were unable to provide much specific feedback since my concept wasn't far enough along for them to really evaluate.

After the session, I scheduled a meeting with Suguru Ishizaki, a professor of rhetoric and a practitioner of interaction design, and one of my faculty panelists at the poster session. He gave me very solid guidance on honing my rhetorical strategy, both with the site and with how to draw people in. We talked about the entry point for a first-time visitor and realized that I needed to shift the emphasis from "about reverse culture shock" to "returnee resources." We also discussed engagement strategies—the first step being making JET alumni aware of its existence, and the second step being how to get them to visit.





お・か・え・り

A RESOURCE FOR RETURNEES  
BY JETS + FOR JETS

LOG IN

REGISTER

ABOUT REVERSE CULTURE SHOCK

RETURNEE RESOURCES

COMMUNITY

## Hey there.

Everyone's JET experience will come to an end eventually.

We all remember everything we had to do to prepare—emotionally and logistically—for when we first moved to Japan and joined the JET Programme, and how up and down those first days and weeks were for each of us.

But leaving Japan requires a lot of preparation, too. Whether you're returning home or going someplace new, there are a lot of things to get done that may be tricky to navigate, due to the difference in language and culture. Beyond that, letting go of the JET experience and your life in Japan may be hard—and coming home may be

harder than you expect, too. Major things back home may have changed, and small things may catch you off-guard. For a lot of people, it may be unexpectedly rough for a while. Okaeri strives to make your preparations and transition to Life After JET a little easier. You aren't alone: at least 1000 other JETs will be leaving along with you, and thousands of alumni have already been there.

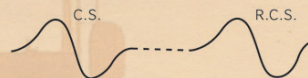
Take a look around. As they say, knowing is half the battle.

[Link to some info](#) | [Some more info](#) | [Helpful advice](#) | [It gets better, I promise](#)

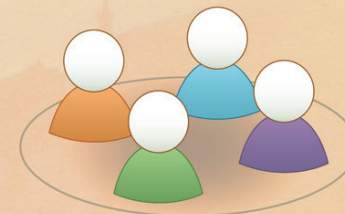
### Returnee Resources



### About Reverse Culture Shock



### Community





# FINAL CONCEPT: WELCOME

OKAERI focuses heavily on **communication** and **trust**. Every section of the site depends on the sharing of experiences and information within the community. OKAERI's structure also harnesses the trust inherent among the JET community at large.

However, OKAERI isn't a social networking site: users can network and communicate easily throughout the site, but people are also urged to connect offsite and offline.

Besides sharing memories through the text and media posted on the site, the layout is also intended to be fairly evocative. The backdrop of the site will feature high-res rotating photography of different scenes from Japanese life.

## Welcome

From the beginning, the visitor knows that this site is by JETs, for JETs, and knows that this is meant for her. There'll be some kind of welcoming content, like a short video intro to reverse culture shock. It's possible to get a brief snapshot on pertinent updates sitewide since her last visit.

# Helpful Info

YOUR PER

17 April 2011

IEW/EDIT »

A FRIENDLY NUDGE:  
pack and ship home  
your winter things.



## UPCOMING EVENTS | FILTER...

08 March 2011	Tokushima Musical: Ishii
09 March 2011	Tokushima Musical: Matsushige
15 March 2011	Tokushima Musical: Mugi
16 March 2011	Tokushima Musical: Hiwasa
22 March 2011	Tokushima Musical: Wakimachi
17 April 2011	A friendly nudge: pack and ship home your winter things.
24 April 2011	National JET: Tokyo Orientation Assistant application deadline
06-08 May 2011	Golden Week: Weekend trip to Hiroshima
14-15 May 2011	Tokushima Touch Rugby Invitational Tournament
21 June 2011	Tokyo: Mai's wedding
25 June 2011	A friendly nudge: book your plane ticket home.
18 July 2011	A friendly nudge: work on farewell speeches for your schools.

Want to submit a link? »

## JET-SPECIFIC

Pension Refund - Wikishim  
submitted by Andorus

Federal Tax Guide for Am  
submitted by clairish

JET Alumni Association In  
submitted by jetaai

JET Alumni Association N  
submitted by jetaany

## GENERAL

Expat Expert - books and  
submitted by Andorus

The Art of Coming Home  
submitted by Andorus

# Job Board

Want to submit a job? »

## JAPAN-RELATED

Bi-Lingual Clerk Opening  
2011 April 11 | submitted by J

Global Business Manager



# FINAL CONCEPT: RETURNEE RESOURCES

## Personalized Timeline

This is a highly customizable personal tool. Starting from the final JET recontracting deadline onward, this features JET-wide events and dates by default. Users can also import events for their own prefectural JET group, and add other dates and milestones of personal significance. The system will also offer friendly prompts on occasion, to help smooth over the process of preparing to leave Japan.

## Helpful Info

This section features links and other resources contributed by the JET community, aimed to make it easy to access information for the move home.

## Job Board

JETs and JET alumni can post listings for different kinds of jobs here. Many JET-specific resources just focus on jobs related to Japan, but this will be an open listing, to cater to the diversity of talent across the JET community.

# About Reverse Culture Shock

You're probably familiar with culture shock, and most likely experienced some when arriving in Japan. Reverse culture shock is pretty similar, except that people experience it upon returning home (or to a familiar environment or culture), after spending a long time in a previously unfamiliar place (or country, environment, or culture).

Two major factors that can lead to a traveler feeling reverse culture shock are:

- if a traveler ends up "acculturating," or immersing and adapting him/herself, to the new host culture, by changing his/her habits and assuming new norms
- if aspects of the traveler home have changed, or if the traveler's perception of home has changed due to acculturating

No matter what, it occurs because of change: within you and/or within previously familiar people and environments.

[Link to some info](#) | [Some more info](#) | [Helpful advice](#) | [It gets better, I promise](#)

## Testimonials from other JET alumni



When I was having a rough time, it was my friends who had a similar experience who just by saying, "Yeah, I know." helped me feel better about things.

KPi30000 | [read more](#)



instead of being told "what to expect" or how to deal" with coming home, i would've rather sat in a circle and chatted with the other leaving jet participants, chatted about apprehensions, opportunities, and memories. what we're afraid of, what we want to do, and how things up until that point have put us on a somewhat similar path to returning home. the variety of perspective is, in my opinion, the best tool to have when dealing with difficulties.

JessInJapan | [read more](#)



# FINAL CONCEPT: ABOUT REVERSE CULTURE SHOCK

## About Reverse Culture Shock

Visitors can read through detailed, pertinent, and empathetically crafted information on the phenomenon of reverse culture shock.

## Testimonials from other JET alumni

This is a dynamically rotating section of personal accounts and stories posted by other JET alumni in the Community section. First-person accounts have a lot of power in terms of making connections and getting a message across.

# Your Contacts

Viewing 1-5 of 24. [View more »](#)



kpi30000  
Kiet P.  
Tokushima  
Cleveland, OH



OdoruAho  
James S.  
Tokushima  
Honolulu, HI



Mockingjay  
Katniss E.  
Shimane  
Nashville, TN



rabblrouser  
Nick P.  
Fukuoka  
Atlanta, GA



suugaku  
Danny H.  
Fukushima  
Seattle, WA

## RECENT ACTIVITY

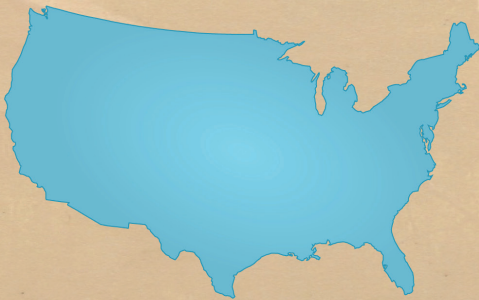
kpi30000 created a new journal post: [My neverending ramen obsession](#)  
2011 April 19, 5:42pm

Mockingjay replied to a thread: [What have you been reading lately?](#)  
2011 April 19, 3:47am

## BY PREFECTURE (JET PLACEMENT)



## BY CURRENT LOCATION (U.S. ONLY, FOR NOW)



SEARCH PROFILES (name or keyword)

# Other Ways to Connect

Here are a few other ways you can reach out to others:

### IN-PERSON MEETUPS

- JETAA Pittsburgh: Nihongo-kai
- JETAA Pittsburgh: Monthly happy hour
- Okaeri event: Pittsburgh meetup

### ONLINE EVENTS

- April Skype session

# Community: DISCUSS



pension book

Andorus



Changing the status of your visa (3rd-5th years wanting to stay a little beyond)

Dr. Horrible



Possible post-JET job opportunity

MarioPA



I have a library problem

laviajera



ツナマヨ

Mockingjay



Returner's Conference

Krisso



Sending crap home

OdoruAho



My weird date

laviajera



Returning to your career after JET

julieem



Food intolerances after leaving Japan?!

thebeej



# FINAL CONCEPT: COMMUNITY

## Discuss

This is the heart of the site. People can post any and all questions, topics, and other content in a lightly moderated forum based on the models of MetaFilter, Quora, and Posterous. Thanks to robust privacy settings, they can control who sees their postings and how they can be organized and categorized.

## Display

Many JET alumni captured their time in Japan through photography or other mediums like artwork or writing. This is a place for people to share their personal creative works about their JET experiences. They also have the option to participate in community-wide contests and collaborations.

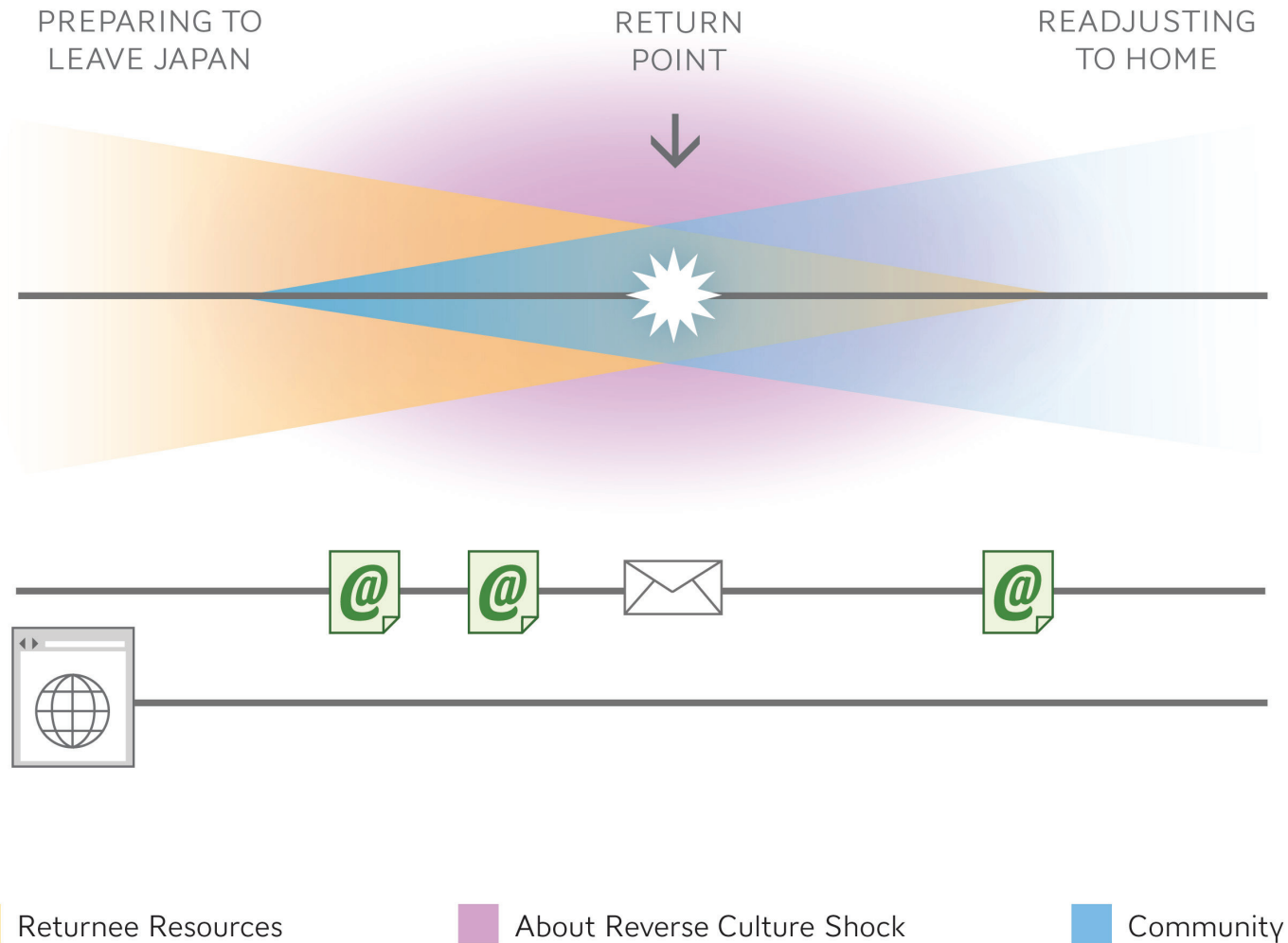
## Self

Besides being a user's profile, this section displays a snapshot of your activity across the site. Users can also edit their account and privacy settings here.

## Connect

Search explicitly for other users, based on their placement in Japan or current location, or via a keyword search. Users can also access the mentorship network and a CouchSurfing-style program.

# *The Okaeri System*





# NEXT STEPS + FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

During my previous meeting with Suguru Ishizaki, we'd discussed both the website and the overall system within which it does—and could—reside.

Suguru was curious about whether reverse culture shock is part of a larger “package” and how intertwined it is with reentry. Just him posing this question helped me to articulate a model I hadn't even realized that I'd been crafting all along.

In talking about how to share information with friends and family of JET returnees, Suguru pushed my ideas further: instead of just sending people to the website, JETs could request that an e-mail or actual letter be sent to their loved ones to inform them about reverse culture shock and other useful information. In light of this, we realized that I should frame this website as one part of a larger OKAERI system.

As we explored this system, we ventured further into the realm of service design and touchpoints within the OKAERI system. This was a really inspiring line of thought: it helped me articulate other ideas I had about the site, and opened up further possibilities for how to keep thinking about the site beyond just the scope of this thesis.

**I am very interested in making OKAERI a reality in the near future.**

It addresses a real need among the JET community, as well as among other international travelers. I intend to continue developing OKAERI along the lines of what Suguru and I discussed, and proceed with user testing, iterative design, and refinement of the interface and functionality. I hope to create a design document and reach out to other developers to help implement OKAERI in the months to come.

A wooden sign made of horizontal planks, painted dark brown. The text 'HUNKY DORY' is painted in large, white, bold, sans-serif capital letters across the middle planks. Below it, on the bottom plank, the text '2F' is painted in smaller, white, bold, sans-serif capital letters. The sign is being held by two people. One person's hands are visible at the top, wearing light blue jeans. Another person's leg and foot are visible on the right, wearing dark pants and a black flip-flop. The sign is on a dark asphalt surface.

**HUNKY  
DORY**

**2F**



# REFLECTION + CONCLUSION

I believe that OKAERI is a successful prototype for a potential community resource to aid with reverse culture shock. It fulfills the main need areas that I'd identified by midyear. By remaining open-ended but maintaining a caring and personal tone, OKAERI is a valid response to the "Every Situation Is Different" issue. Despite the wide variety of placements and personal circumstances, people can still come here and find a friendly and supportive community to turn to about the reentry experience.

Overall, I'm satisfied with OKAERI and the possibilities I'm continuing to discover. I feel like I've hit upon a combination of outward simplicity and elegant complexity in how I handled some of the site's communication issues. I don't doubt that user testing will reveal more issues, and I'm looking forward to working through them as they come up.

There are of course areas that I wish I'd handled better. The biggest one was time: I wish I'd had a more solid prototype and ready for our mid-April poster session. I also wish I'd started work on the written content far earlier, and I would've liked to have done one or two rounds of user testing by now.

This thesis was a personal journey for me. Though I had some reservations about working on a topic that I'm already so close to, I'm ultimately very glad that I did. Developing the plan for OKAERI helped me connect with my JET friends on a new level, and enabled me to meet JET participants around the US and the world. It also fulfilled my personal academic goal of doing work with design, communication, culture, and technology. It's thanks to my thesis work that I've begun to carve a niche for myself as an intercultural designer.

I also came to realize that I've grown as a designer. The entire thesis process has synthesized a lot of skills and pieces of knowledge that I'd studied or just picked up in my time at Carnegie Mellon. I've also become a lot more comfortable with uncertainty, and I've learned how to let go of assumptions and view situations from micro and macro viewpoints.

Beyond that, it's interesting to see how I've grown as a person. Focusing on a topic that's so rooted in psychology, emotion, and subjectivity has really expanded my ideas of empathy and care. It gave me a chance to examine my own bout of reverse culture shock, and to understand how it impacted me.

I'm grateful for everything this thesis experience has taught me, and I hope to carry these lessons with me in my future endeavors.





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# APPENDIX I: SURVEY QUESTIONS

## Introduction

Hello! I am an alumna of the JET Programme. For my graduate thesis, I am designing a resource to help North American JET alumni cope with reverse culture shock upon their departure from Japan. If you are an American or Canadian JET alum, I would sincerely appreciate it if you could fill out this survey about your overall experiences before, during, and after JET. Your participation would help my research greatly.

The following survey should take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete. Should you choose to elaborate on your answers, it will take longer.

In the interest of anonymity, please do not provide names or identifying information for any individuals anywhere in your survey responses.

Thank you very much for your time!

Smitha Prasadh  
Master of Design Candidate  
Carnegie Mellon School of Design  
ALT - Tokushima 2005-07  
E-mail: thesis@smithaprasadh.com

## Personal Information

1. What is your gender?  
*M / F / Other*  
If you chose Other, please elaborate.
2. What is your current age?  
*18-24 / 25-29 / 30-34 / 35-39 / 40-44 / 45-49 / 50-54 / 55-59 / 60+*
3. What is your education level?  
*Bachelor's degree / Master's degree / Doctorate / Other*  
Please feel free to comment or elaborate.
4. Do you identify with any other country or culture besides/as well as that of the US or Canada?  
Please explain.

## JET Placement Information

5. What type of job(s) did you have on JET?  
*ALT / CIR / SEA*
6. What language(s) did you teach?
7. If you were an ALT, at what school or schools did you work?
  - *Elementary School/Shougakkou*
  - *Junior High School/Chuugakkou*
  - *High School/Koukou*
  - *Kindergarten/Yochien*
  - *Preschool/Hyoikuen*
  - *Community Conversation Classes/Eikaiwa*
  - *Special Needs School/Tokubetsu-shien Gakkou*
  - *Other*

Please elaborate on your work situation (number of schools and classes, etc.).

8. From when to when were you in Japan? (Please list the years: ex. 2001-2004.

## Quality of Life

9. How would you rate the following?  
 Your time abroad in general (1–7)  
 Your professional experience in Japan (1–7)  
 Your personal/social life in Japan (1–7)  
 Your living situation (1–7)  
  
 Please feel free to comment. (To maintain privacy,  
 avoid using real names or identifying details.)
10. How regularly did you communicate with your  
 family while abroad?  
  
*Daily / Several times a week / Several times a month  
 / Several times a year / Less than once a year / Never*  
  
 Please feel free to comment. (To maintain privacy,  
 avoid using real names or identifying details.)
11. How did you communicate with your family?  
  
*Phone / E-mail / Online chat / Skype / Letters / Other*  
  
 Please feel free to comment.
12. How regularly did you communicate with your  
 friends while abroad?  
  
*Daily / Several times a week / Several times a month /  
 Several times a year / Less than once a year / Never*  
  
 Please feel free to comment. (To maintain privacy,  
 avoid using real names or identifying details.)
13. How did you communicate with your friends?  
  
*Phone / E-mail / Online chat / Skype / Letters / Other*  
  
 Please feel free to comment.

14. How would you rate your Japanese level prior to  
 joining JET?  
  
*None / beginner / Intermediate / Advanced / Fluent*  
  
 Please feel free to comment.
15. How would you rate your Japanese level after com-  
 pleting your time on JET?  
  
*None / beginner / Intermediate / Advanced / Fluent*  
  
 Please feel free to comment.

## Locations

16. Where in Japan did you live? (Please list just the  
 都道府県: the prefecture (i.e. Shizuoka, Hyogo)  
 or governmental district (i.e., Tokyo, Hokkaido,  
 Kyoto, Osaka).)
17. What type of JET placement did you have?  
  
*Urban / Suburban / Rural*
18. What impact did the climate of your JET placement  
 have on your experience? (1–7, *Minimal to Strong*)  
 Please feel free to comment or elaborate.

## Culture Shock

19. How strong did you expect culture shock to be when you arrived in Japan?  
(1–7, *Minimal to Very strong*)
20. Did culture shock have an impact on your day-to-day life and routine? If so, how so?
21. How long did it take you to overcome this culture shock? (In an overall sense, as opposed to individual moments.)

## Reverse Culture Shock

22. How strong did you expect reverse culture shock to be when you left Japan? (0–7, *None to Very strong*)
23. Please rate each of the following steps of reverse culture shock as they pertained to your experience after leaving Japan. How strongly, if at all, did you experience these? (0: *N/A or not yet*, 1–7: *Not at all to Very strongly*)

- DISENGAGEMENT: “My departure date from Japan is coming up soon. It’s time to start packing, saying my goodbyes, and just preparing mentally and emotionally for this. I have to leave this home behind and I don’t know when I’ll see it again...this will be difficult.”

- INITIAL EUPHORIA: “I’m home! I can’t wait to see everyone again! I have so many stories to tell them about my time abroad...”
- IRRITABILITY/HOSTILITY: “This doesn’t feel right and I don’t know why. Home doesn’t feel the same, and my relationships with my friends and loved ones have changed. I’m depressed and frustrated—I thought coming home would be easier than going abroad in the first place! I wish I could go back to Japan, where things make sense.”
- READJUSTMENT/ADAPTATION: “Slowly, this is starting to feel like home again. My perspective, routine, and views are different than before I went abroad. But I can balance aspects of my Japanese life with my life here and move forward. There are challenges, but it’ll be okay.”

Please feel free to elaborate.

24. Has reverse culture shock had an impact on your day-to-day life and routine? If so, how so?



## Reflection

25. What advice do you have for others preparing to leave Japan and return home?
26. Prior to your return home, what do you wish you had known or had with you to help with the transition?
27. Do you have any other comments you'd like to include?

## Completion

Thank you very much for taking the time to fill out my survey!

For the next steps in my research, I'm looking for volunteers willing to provide accounts of their readjustment processes and experiences with reverse culture shock. I'd like to conduct one-on-one interviews with JET alumni, as well as engage in a virtual journal-keeping activity\* (written or digital) with recent returnees.

\* Blogs (written, photo, etc.) or other regularly maintained online spaces that display your thoughts and experiences would be eligible!

If you're interested and willing to participate in either or both of the above, please include your e-mail address below, and I will get in touch with you with more information. Otherwise, please leave the following questions blank.

(Submitting your e-mail address now does not commit you to anything. I will not store or use your e-mail address for any purpose beyond this research.)

- I'm interested in taking part in further research activities. My e-mail address is:
- I'd like to participate in (choose all that apply):  
*Interview / Journaling Activity*

# APPENDIX II:

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (JETS)

This is a sample set of interview questions that I submitted to the IRB, as an example of the subject matter I was interested in covering. The actual questions varied based on the context of the interview/conversation.

- Why did you decide to do JET?
- Had you spent time abroad prior to JET?
- Did you have an interest in or involvement with the Japanese language or culture prior to joining JET?
- Was your local JET community active? supportive?
- Has JET/Japan had an influence on your career and/or studies after returning?
- Do you view the US differently after having participated in JET?
- If you identify with another country or countries, do you view it/them differently?
- Are there any aspects of your lifestyle, culture, world view, or values that made life after Japan easier?
- Are there any aspects of your lifestyle, culture, world view, or values that made life after Japan harder?
- What did you take to Japan with you? what did you bring back with you?
- What were some of your major activities, or aspects of your routine in Japan? What, if anything, differed from your routine at home? How?
- How did you spend your leisure time before, during, and after?
- Did you have any daily necessities in your routine at home that you couldn't do in Japan? Or any necessities you developed there that you can't do here?
- If you could assemble a "relocation kit" for your return home, what would it include?





# APPENDIX III:

## CULTURAL PROBE / JOURNAL

I conducted this activity via the open-ended blogging site Posterous. When participants first viewed their individual Posterous blog I set up for them, they saw four tags that corresponded to the given prompts, and the following two posts:

### Hey there!

This is a test post, just to set some things up. Feel free to customize the look and feel of this as much as you want, to make it your own. (That includes the title, if you don't want your whole name there. But this journal is private, so nobody but you and I can view it.)

Be sure to use the four tags to "catalog" your work.

Thanks so much for your help! I'm looking forward to seeing what you do with this and what your experiences have been like. :)

- Smitha

### Journal Prompts and Required Information

This is meant to be very chill and open-ended. There is no right answer, and this isn't meant to be some polished creative piece by any means--honesty and openness (as much as you're willing to divulge) are what will really help my research the most!

#### REQUIRED INFORMATION

- Name:
- Gender:
- Age (20-24, 25-29, 30-34...):
- JET position(s):
- JET placement (just prefecture/todoufuku is fine):
- Years on JET:
- Prior to JET, where did you live?
- After JET, did you return to where you had lived previously? If not, where did you go?
- Where are you now? (if not in the same place)
- What do you do? (working? student? looking for a job? other? feel free to elaborate...)

## PROMPTS

Please choose at least one to work on. (More would be great, but whatever you can manage would be appreciated!)

Please be sure to tag your posts with the corresponding prompt (or prompts).

### 1. QUESTION

Think about your daily routine. What new things do you now that you picked up while abroad? What things do (or don't) you miss doing that you did while in Japan? Why?

### 2. DAILY OBSERVATION

What makes you think of JET and Japan? Please post as many examples as you can, or whatever you're able to recall.

Of these moments, what are positive memories? What are negative/frustrating? Why would you categorize them as such?

Did you experience any moments of explicit culture shock today?

### 3. DIGITAL COLLAGE/"MOOD BOARD"

Post anything that best describes you and your readjustment process.

Examples: your own photos (feel free to take appropriate ones, too), found images online, personal artwork, your writing, others' writing, music or video, color swatches, restaurant menus, anything at all. Put thought into it or be spontaneous--it's totally up to you.

### 4. FREEFORM

Anything you want to say or post that relates to reverse culture shock and transitioning back to western life.

# APPENDIX IV:

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS ("FRIENDS OF JET")

- How much prior knowledge of Japan had you had before your friend joined JET?
- How much interest did you have in Japan?
- How frequently were you in touch with your friend before s/he went on JET?
- How frequently were you in touch with your friend while s/he was in Japan?
- What did you usually talk about with your friend? What were you most interested in talking about and learning, with regards to his/her experiences?
- When your friend returned, were you aware of any reverse culture shock s/he was feeling? Any struggles or frustrations?
- Would you have been interested in a resource that informed you about day-to-day aspects of your friend's life abroad and prepped you for his/her return transition?





# APPENDIX V.1:

## ONLINE CARD SORT (JETS)

### Welcome

Thank you for agreeing to participate! The activity shouldn't take longer than 10 to 15 minutes to complete.

Your response will be a huge help as I start solidifying my prototype for my thesis project.

### Instructions

This is in the context of an online resource to aid returning JETs before, during, and after their departure from Japan.

Your task is to organize a list of items into groups that you feel belong together (and to separate out the ones you don't feel are relevant or interesting).

On the next screen you'll see the list of items.

Drag items from the list on the left into the workspace on the right. Drop the items into groups. Give each group a name.

NOTE: you don't have to include every single item, but please do group the ones you think are irrelevant into some kind of "discard" group.

Remember: there is no right or wrong answer. More than anything, I am interested in what it is you do (and don't) find to be interesting and helpful.

If you have ideas for things I haven't mentioned, please feel free to e-mail me at [thesis@smithaprasadh.com](mailto:thesis@smithaprasadh.com), with "Card sorting" in the subject line.

### List of Cards

Mentorship

Tatami Timeshare/JETAA "couchsurfing"

Meeting other JET alumni online

Posting questions and getting answers from other alumni

Exchanging jokes/JET or Japan references

Reading about other returnees' experiences with the transition

A messageboard for JET alums

A "safe space" to talk about ups and downs with regards to returning from Japan

Posting/viewing art, photos, and videos of people's Japan experiences

Group chats (chatroom/IM)

Group chats (audio/video, like Skype)

A group blog

A webzine/newsletter

Locating JET alums based on where in Japan they were

Locating JET alums based on where they are now

Locating JET alums based on common interests

Locating JET alums based on some other criteria

Creative collaboration with JET alums

Information on reverse culture shock

Job board

Help with utilizing the JET experience in future jobs

Checklist to help prepare for leaving Japan

Personalized, editable checklist





# APPENDIX V.2:

## ONLINE CARD SORT (OTHER TRAVELERS)

This is identical to the card sort for JET participants. The only difference is that these cards include generalized terminology in place of any JET-specific jargon. I also modified the instructions slightly, in light of some confusion over the instructions with the JET card sort.

### Welcome

Welcome to this study, and thank you for agreeing to participate! I'm a 2nd-year master's student in the School of Design at Carnegie Mellon University. For my thesis, I'm developing a resource to aid people as they go through reentry and reverse culture shock as they return from extended stays abroad. I am targeting the JET (Japanese Exchange and Teaching) Programme, but would like to create a resource that's useful to people who lived abroad as part of other programs or for other reasons.

The activity shouldn't take longer than 10 to 15 minutes to complete.

Your response will be a great help to my thesis research, as I work on building the final prototype.

### Instructions

Your task is to organize a list of items into groups. The items are all possibilities for features of a website/online platform aimed at people returning home after an extended stay abroad, to help them with reentry and reverse culture shock.

There are two main things I'd like you to keep in mind:

- Is this item relevant or useful to you? (Please create a "discard" group for anything that seems irrelevant or not useful.)
- What categories, if any, do the relevant items seem to fall into?

Please include the following info in the comments section:

- The country (or countries) where you lived, and the program, if applicable
- When you were abroad (mm/yyyy - mm/yyyy)
- Your general satisfaction with your time abroad (scale of 1–7: 1 = very dissatisfied, 7 = very satisfied)
- Any other comments you feel are relevant, about your experience and this activity

On the next screen you'll see the list of items. Grouping them is easy:

Drag items from the list on the left into the workspace on the right. Drop the items into groups (remember: you can add multiple items to one group). Give each group a name.

There are no wrong answers. I'm just interested to see how useful these would be to you. :)

If you have ideas for other categories, or any other comments you'd like to add, please type them up while doing the activity, or e-mail me at [thesis@smithaprasadh.com](mailto:thesis@smithaprasadh.com).

## List of Cards

Mentorship

“Couchsurfing” among alumni of your program

Meeting other alumni of your program online

Posting questions and getting answers from other alumni

Exchanging jokes or program/country references

Reading about other returnees’ experiences with the transition

A messageboard for alums

A “safe space” to talk about ups and downs with regards to leaving the program

Posting/viewing art, photos, and videos of people’s experiences

Group chats (chatroom/IM)

Group chats (audio/video, like Skype)

A group blog

A webzine/newsletter

Locating alums based on their placement while in the program

Locating alums based on where they are now

Locating alums based on common interests

Locating alums based on some other criteria

Creative collaboration with alums

Information on reverse culture shock

Job board

Help with utilizing your experience abroad in future jobs

Checklist of major events/milestones to help prepare for leaving the country and program

Personalized, editable checklist to help prepare for leaving the country and program

# APPENDIX VI: MOOD BOARDS

## Reverse culture shock





# OKAERI



Solidarity and community



Types of potential site/  
community activities  
(comforting, connecting,  
helping)



Sharing personal creative works  
(art by David Titterington)



Connecting people and  
channeling memories  
(below art by David Namisato)



Potential/suggested visual  
and color scheme and visual  
theme for the site: rooted in  
natural images & earth tones



KEEP  
CALM  
AND  
CARRY  
ON

Emotional tone:  
supportive and  
comforting



# APPENDIX VII: OKAERI INTERFACES



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A RESOURCE FOR RETURNEES  
BY JETS + FOR JETS

LOG IN

REGISTER

ABOUT REVERSE CULTURE SHOCK

RETURNEE RESOURCES

COMMUNITY

YOUR PERSONALIZED TIMELINE | [VIEW/EDIT »](#)



UPCOMING EVENTS | [FILTER...](#)

- |                |  |
|----------------|--|
| 08 March 2011  | Tokushima Musical: Ishii                                       |
| 09 March 2011  | Tokushima Musical: Matsushige                                  |
| 15 March 2011  | Tokushima Musical: Mugi  |
| 16 March 2011  | Tokushima Musical: Hiwasa                                      |
| 22 March 2011  | Tokushima Musical: Wakimachi                                   |
| 17 April 2011  | A friendly nudge: pack and ship home your winter things.       |
| 24 April 2011  | National JET: Tokyo Orientation Assistant application deadline |
| 06-08 May 2011 | Golden Week: Weekend trip to Hiroshima                         |
| 14-15 May 2011 | Tokushima Touch Rugby Invitational Tournament                  |
| 21 June 2011   | Tokyo: Mai's wedding   |
| 25 June 2011   | A friendly nudge: book your plane ticket home.                 |
| 18 July 2011   | A friendly nudge: work on farewell speeches for your schools.  |

## Helpful Info

Want to submit a link? »

### JET-SPECIFIC

Pension Refund - Wikishima (Tokushima AJET)  
submitted by Andorus

Federal Tax Guide for American JETs - sarcenet.org  
submitted by clairish

JET Alumni Association International - jetalumni.org  
submitted by jetaai

JET Alumni Association New York Welcome Back Guide- jetaany.org  
submitted by jetaany

### GENERAL

Expat Expert - books and articles to help expatriate families adjust  
submitted by Andorus

The Art of Coming Home - Craig Storti (Google Books)  
submitted by Andorus

## Job Board

Want to submit a job? »

### JAPAN-RELATED

Bi-Lingual Clerk Opening at Consulate General of Japan - Seattle  
2011 April 11 | submitted by JETAA PNW

Global Business Manager - Washington DC  
2011 April 11 | submitted by Justin Manger

Listening Therapy Facilitator - Bellevue  
2011 April 6 | submitted by JETAA PNW

English Teacher, YMCA - Hakodate-shi, Hokkaido  
2011 April 4 | submitted by Leah Timberlake





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A RESOURCE FOR RETURNEES  
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RETURNEE RESOURCES

COMMUNITY

## About Reverse Culture Shock

You're probably familiar with culture shock, and most likely experienced some when arriving in Japan. Reverse culture shock is pretty similar, except that people experience it upon returning home (or to a familiar environment or culture), after spending a long time in a previously unfamiliar place (or country, environment, or culture).

Two major factors that can lead to a traveler feeling reverse culture shock are:

- if a traveler ends up "acculturating," or immersing and adapting him/herself, to the new host culture, by changing his/her habits and assuming new norms
- if aspects of the traveler home have changed, or if the traveler's perception of home has changed due to acculturating

No matter what, it occurs because of change: within you and/or within previously familiar people and environments.

[Link to some info](#) | [Some more info](#) | [Helpful advice](#) | [It gets better, I promise](#)

## Testimonials from other JET alumni



When I was having a rough time, it was my friends who had a similar experience who just by saying, "Yeah, I know." helped me feel better about things.

KPi30000 | [read more](#)



instead of being told "what to expect" or how to deal" with coming home, i would've rather sat in a circle and chatted with the other leaving jet participants, chatted about apprehensions, opportunities, and memories. what we're afraid of, what we want to do, and how things up until that point have put us on a somewhat similar path to returning home. the variety of perspective is, in my opinion, the best tool to have when dealing with difficulties.

JessInJapan | [read more](#)



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A RESOURCE FOR RETURNEES  
BY JETS + FOR JETS

LOG IN

REGISTER

ABOUT REVERSE CULTURE SHOCK

RETURNEE RESOURCES

COMMUNITY

## Community: DISCUSS

ADD A NEW POST

	pension book	Andorus	Today, 2:39pm
	Changing the status of your visa (3rd-5th years wanting to stay a little beyond)	Dr. Horrible	Today, 12:52pm
	Possible post-JET job opportunity	MarioPA	Today, 9:14am
	I have a library problem	laviajera	Yesterday, 5:27pm
	ツナマヨ	Mockingjay	Yesterday, 5:23pm
	Returner's Conference	Krisso	Yesterday, 2:12pm
	Sending crap home	OdoruAho	Saturday, 9:42pm
	My weird date	laviajera	Saturday, 7:32pm
	Returning to your career after JET	julieem	Saturday, 5:43pm
	Food intolerances after leaving Japan?!	thebeej	Saturday, 11:21am

You are currently viewing  
all posts.

FILTER POSTS:  
[new filter](#) | [apply existing filter](#)

SEARCH POSTS:

OK

X





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A RESOURCE FOR RETURNEES  
BY JETS + FOR JETS

LOG IN

REGISTER

ABOUT REVERSE CULTURE SHOCK

RETURNEE RESOURCES

COMMUNITY

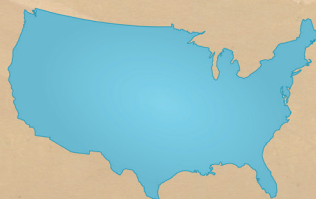
## Community: CONNECT

Search and browse user profiles, based on location or keyword.

BY PREFECTURE  
(JET PLACEMENT)



BY CURRENT LOCATION  
(U.S. ONLY, FOR NOW)



SEARCH PROFILES (name or keyword)

OK X

## Other Ways to Connect

Here are a few other ways you can reach out to other JET alumni.

### IN-PERSON MEETUPS

JETAA Pittsburgh: Nihongo-kai  
JETAA Pittsburgh: Monthly happy hour  
Okaeri event: Pittsburgh meetup

### ONLINE EVENTS

April Skype session

### MENTORSHIP NETWORK

Find a mentor  
Be a mentor

### TATAMI TIMESHARE: U.S. EDITION

Sign up  
Search for other members

## Your Contacts

Viewing 1-5 of 24. [View more »](#)



kpi30000  
Kiet P.  
Tokushima  
Cleveland, OH



OdoruAho  
James S.  
Tokushima  
Honolulu, HI



Mockingjay  
Katniss E.  
Shimane  
Nashville, TN



rabblrouser  
Nick R.  
Fukuoka  
Atlanta, GA



suugaku  
Danny H.  
Fukushima  
Seattle, WA

## RECENT ACTIVITY

kpi30000 created a new journal post: [My neverending ramen obsession](#)  
2011 April 19, 5:42pm

Mockingjay replied to a thread: [What have you been reading lately?](#)  
2011 April 19, 3:47am

suugaku posted work to Display: [Japan summer festival roadtrip photos](#)  
2011 April 18, 3:14pm

kpi30000 commented on a journal post: [Onigiri!!!!](#)  
2011 April 18, 9:02am

[View older...](#)



