

Presented by: **Oskar**

AIU Exchange

A student exchange experience report of:
Akita International University

Period: Spring 2026
Start date: April 1st, 2026

Student: Oskar Per Carlsson
*The person's name is listed with their permission.

APU Faculty: APM



Student Experience*

This report outlines a summary of the Spring 2026 semester exchange to Akita International University (AIU) and works as a summary of relevant questions and experiences that the student has experienced. The report will be outlined from an APU student's perspective, where the student will report on their experiences at AIU, reflecting on outlined themes selected by APU.



What will I go over?

- **What is AIU?**
- **AIU-life in pictures**
- **Detailed Report**
- **Individual Achievements**
- **Ending note**



But first...who am I?

I'm Oskar



I am a:

- 3rd year student
- APM Major
- Hiker, nature-lover

Values:

- New experiences
- Conservation, environment
- Equal development

I chose AIU because:

- Smaller classes
- Closeness with nature
- Unique environment





What is AIU?

- Located in northern part of Tohoku region in Akita Prefecture
- Public university holding mostly full-time Japanese students, and foreign exchange-students (75:25 ratio)
- Fully english-taught classes
- Best ranked university environment in all of Japan
- Average of 17 students per course with a 13:1 student faculty ratio
- Around 930 students, where 91% lives in on-campus dorm



AIU is famous for their beautiful library, my favourite place to study



AIU, personally:



- Isolated from the rest of the city, generally taking quite more than an hour to get to the city centre (without car)
- Filled with life and activities held by students and visiting guests/professors, and performances
- Multiple options to get food, snacks, and even drinks
- Feels like there are more international students than domestic students, lots of foreign professors
- Classes generally have either 20-30 or 5-10 students
- English quality of the courses vary depending on the professor, and some classes can be difficult to follow compared to others
- The environment is truly filled with nature, and very cozy
- The campus changes a lot with the seasons and its colors

AIU-life in pictures

This next section will show a lot of pictures that I took, and I want you to decide what AIU is for yourself!

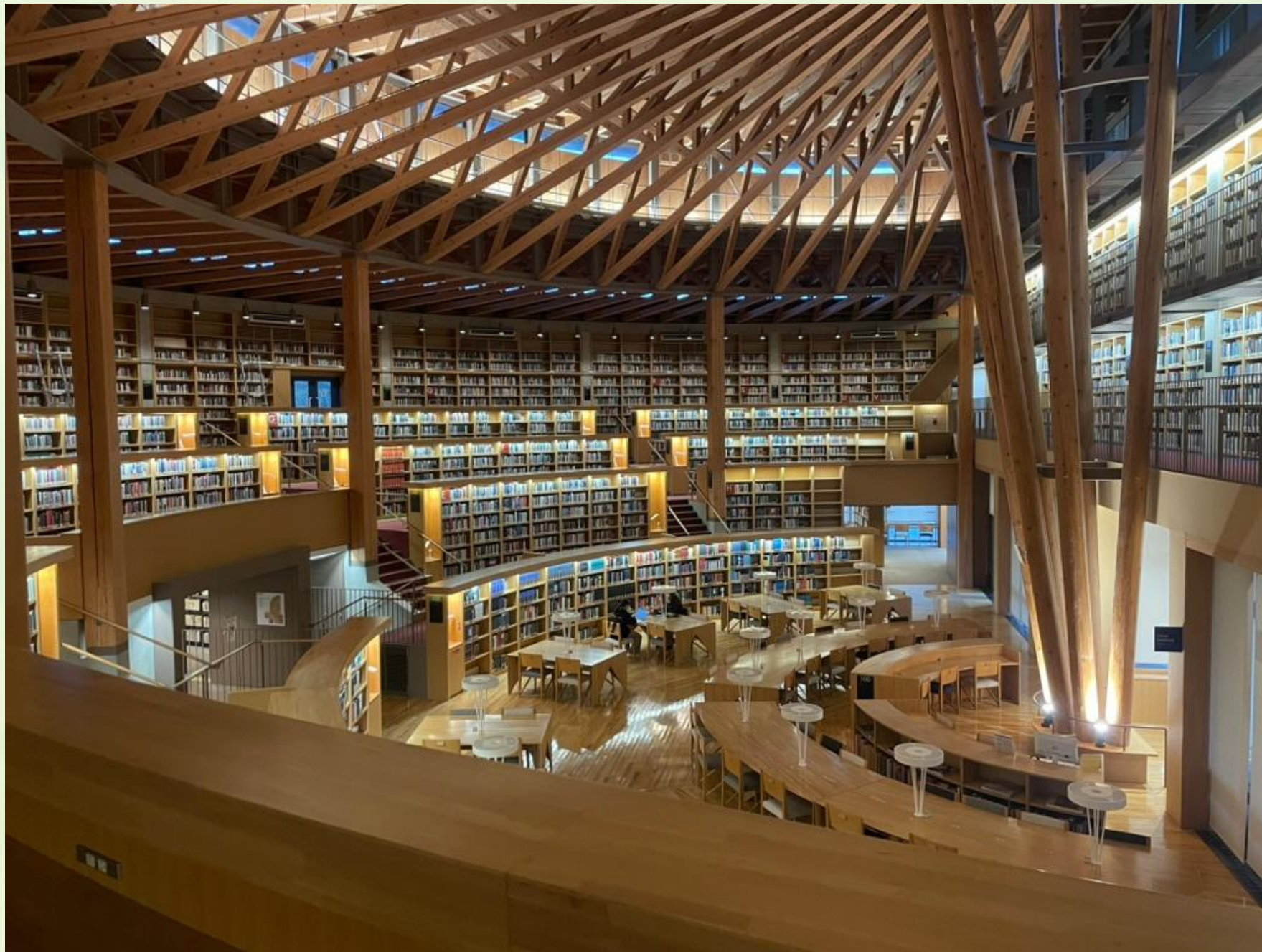




Dorm room in the Tsubaki Village area when I moved in, most furniture are included and the rooms are cleaned before arriving



The weather and environment outside of Tsubaki Village in early April



The library at AIU, a lot of wood and open area, lights are warm



Front of AIU campus in beginning of April, a lot of rain and quite cold weather



Welcome sports event at the nearby sports dome, all new students gather together to do a sports-day organized by the RA's



After the matriculation ceremony Kanto festival performance, the Kanto team practices a lot on campus for everyone to see, so this is a common sight



Potlucks (food parties) with students in the shared kitchen of the Komachi Dorm, quite a common occurrence



One of the 3 bus trips organized by the school that students can pay a small sum to participate in, cherry blossoms



A LOT of opportunities for roadtrips and day-trips,
including this one to the longest mine in Japan



Hiking with the circle Wandervogel at AIU, some friends
decided to take a swim in the lake



Fundraiser event for a friend's brother who passed away, a lot of people ran a half-marathon, donated money, and cheered on the runners



Some more hiking in the nearby areas, no sightings of any bears, despite the increase in appearances



Helping a local farmer with rice-planting by hand, this means you have to step into the mud and watch out for some frogs!



Of course, we're awarded with home-made, very delicious food (the best onigiri I've had in my life)



Getting to Akita by propeller plane was way more common than I thought (I travelled with it 5 times in total)



And I had the chance to meet San-chan and Kantaro-san when they were visiting AIU (I met him at APU too)



Hiked the most famous peak in Touhoku, Mt. Choukai at 2236m, and I did this together with some friends from back home



And this really cute book-car that came and sold books, clothing, and some other stuff on-campus. This was quite unique, as mostly we only see food-trucks here



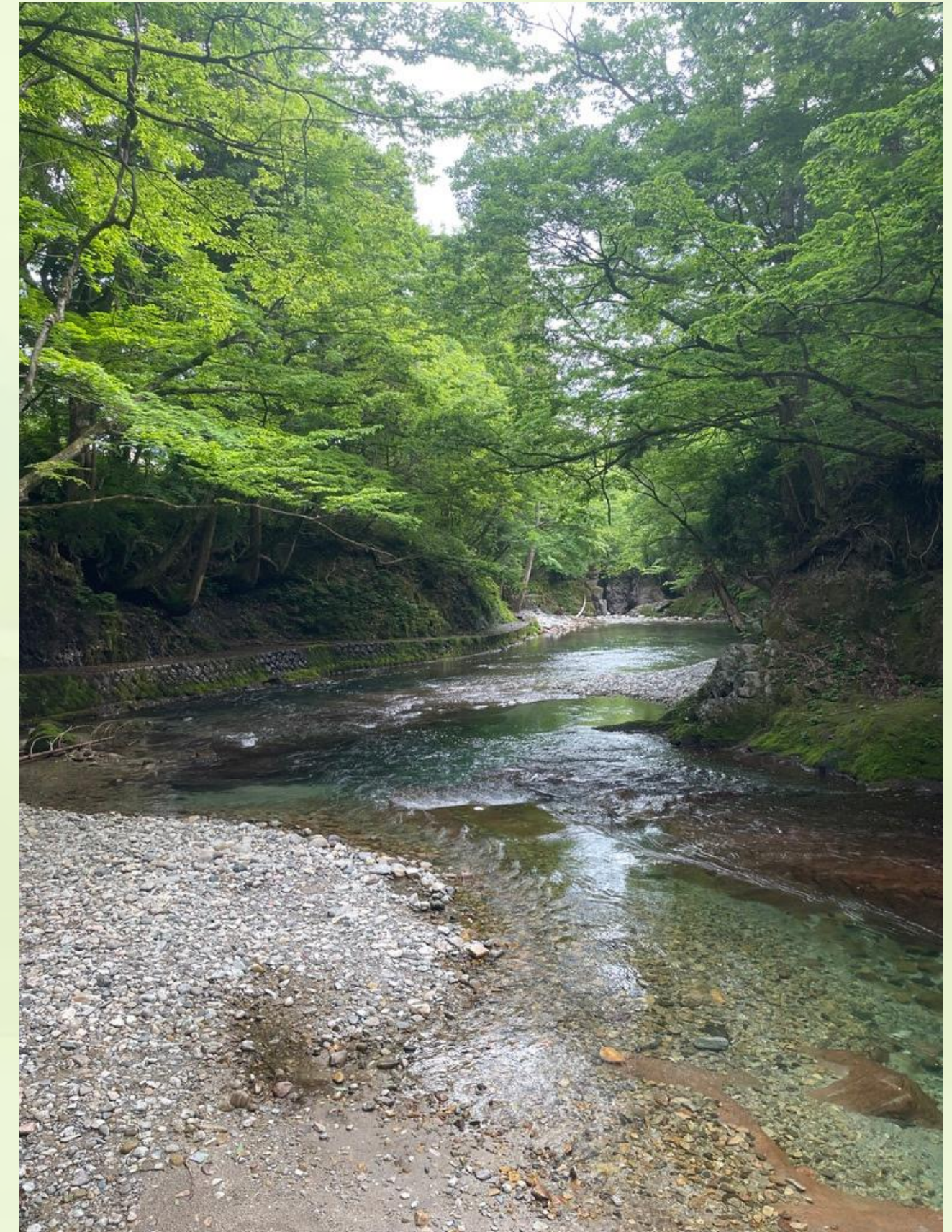
Band performances on campus are frequent, and nearly 10% of all AIU students perform frequently



Walking along the rice-fields to get to the trainstation



The classroom can be outside, too! I had many times when I went outside in certain classes to have discussion in the nice weather



Very cool and manageable summer heat, didn't get warmer than 30 degrees and was generally quite nice to be outside



In the evenings, the campus often gets very quiet and doesn't have many students around.
It can feel a bit lonely, but the nature surrounding the campus is beautiful.

Detailed Report

Now we've taken a look at some pictures of how I have experienced AIU, let's go into some more detail of what I have experienced life outside of these photos. This will generally cover **Academics, Classrooms, Study Environment,** and other **life-hacks** for a nice life at AIU.

This section will be heavy on text and is written in detail for those interested. Feel free to skip to a topic that interests you!

The topics I will go over:

- The closeness and interaction between faculty members and students
- The academic level and style of classes at AIU
- Daily life in Akita, including living costs and the overall living environment
- Positive points where I felt AIU was different from APU
- Any moments when I felt, “I’m really glad I chose to come to AIU”
- “Life-hacks” that I wish I knew before coming

The closeness and interaction between faculty members and students

Oskar's comment:

I've experienced the study environment to be quite unique compared to APU. As an APM student, at APU I frequently sit in classes with sometimes 200+ students, and it feels difficult to get a closer connection with the professor. AIU is different in this aspect both because the class sizes are smaller, and because the campus is smaller, meaning one will interact with and meet the same people frequently on campus. I personally enjoyed this aspect but had some other students that said it was tiring to say hi to so many people every day.

The closeness also provided a more natural bond between the students and the professors, and I had multiple instances where it almost felt like a larger group-work setting when we were inside the classroom, having opportunities to discuss with everyone. This also created a friendly atmosphere where you started getting to know all the students in the classroom as the semester progresses. Furthermore, I had opportunities to go on Gohankai's (ご飯会) with some of my professors and classmates as well (as an entire class), and I felt that we could bond outside of the classroom in a more natural setting.

I preferred this type of atmosphere and environment, since I wish to get to know those whom I learn together with, and it provided everyone with opportunities to speak up, fostering a learning environment that is more inclusive and can prosper with many ideas without taking up too much time. This also meant that those who didn't want to talk sometimes had to talk, and that those who loved talking, could talk even more (someone like me).

The academic level and style of classes at AIU

Oskar's comment:

AIU holds similar level and style to class-structure as APU does and differs perhaps in how many classes one has each semester. In general, a 3-credit course means you have two classes a week, at 75 minutes each. They are either split up to Monday-Wednesday, Tuesday-Thursday, or you have a double-length class on Friday only. The classes normally have weekly assignments that you have to do, and attendance in general is compulsory. You also have a closer relationships with the professor, meaning that you can get feedback on your personal progress. In addition to this, you're generally allowed to miss 4-5 classes a semester, meaning that you have to attend around 24-25 classes per course, per semester.

The academic level seems to be quite similar to APU classes. The courses are divided into 100, 200, 300, and 400-level courses, where higher number indicates higher-level (and higher-semester) difficulty. I found this to be consistent, as the 300-level courses I took required more essay work, more assignments, slightly more complicated concepts, and a bit more challenging. Still, the work is nowhere near as difficult as they could make it be. I could get by doing the bare minimum in certain classes, and I sometimes spent less than 1 hour a week on assignments for certain classes. Having taken 16 credits, I felt it would not have been an issue to take up to 20 credits and still being able to enjoy my free time.

My opinion on the academic level and style of AIU is somewhat of a mix. While I enjoy interacting with a smaller classroom and find it generally more stimulating as a learning environment, the classes are not that challenging and enjoyable. Students in general don't engage as much as I hoped they would in a smaller classroom, and the splitting up of so many classes with mandatory attendance felt like I was back in high school. Still, I have learnt a lot this semester. Despite the classes not being up to the standard I've grown up with in my home country, I've found new interests and topics I want to discover more, and I felt I could spend this semester at AIU productively and learn a lot. After all, it all depends on how much effort you put into yourself and your own studies.

Daily life in Akita, including living costs and the overall living environment:

Oskar's comment:

Just like APU, AIU is located far away from the city in a remote location, but despite this, AIU feels slightly more connected to the nearby areas than one might think, even though getting around is a slight inconvenience. The living in Akita feels more remote, but is cheaper overall to live in. Furthermore, almost all students live on-campus, making the environment quite unique and close-knit.

A day in the life of an AIU student is usually filled with classes, studies, hanging out with friends, eating/cooking food on campus, club activities, and some exercising. Because most people stay and live on campus, it feels quite lively and there is always something going on. The reality is that your every-day might not be much different than this, and you will get immersed in the “university-life” of being a student here quite early on.

AIU is located in between the Akita AEON mall and Akita Airport, meaning it is convenient to travel and do groceries. The downside is that the city center is thus far away, but can be accessed by car within 40 minutes, by bus within 60-70 minutes, by train (around 60 min if you walk to the nearby station), and sometimes by free shuttlebus from AIU, taking around 50-60 minutes. These options make living in Akita fairly accessible despite its rural location.

While AIU is isolated, most students live on campus, making the environment feel very closely knit and friendly. You see the same people frequently, everyone has about the same living conditions, and you share spaces with others. Parking is available on campus, so a lot of students have cars and ways to get around. Grocery shopping gets a little bit trickier since you have to go away from the campus, but the options are fairly easily accessed. In addition to this, everything is cheaper in Akita than in Beppu. The rent is about the same to that of AP House 1, 2, and 5, while groceries and restaurants can generally be cheaper. The cafeteria on-campus is also accompanied by a small “AIU-shop” while having a café that sells a variety of foods for a good price.

With that said, the living environment feels relaxed and calm. There are plenty of smaller gatherings, parties, events, and social occasions to just relax and spend time away from studying. I felt that the environment gave me a sense of relief and escape from how certain other bustling areas can be and generally was a stress-free environment. If you're looking for a lot to do, then your options are limited, but in exchange you can get an environment where you don't have to worry too much about pressures surrounding you, and you can enjoy the nature around you.

Positive points where I felt AIU was different from APU:

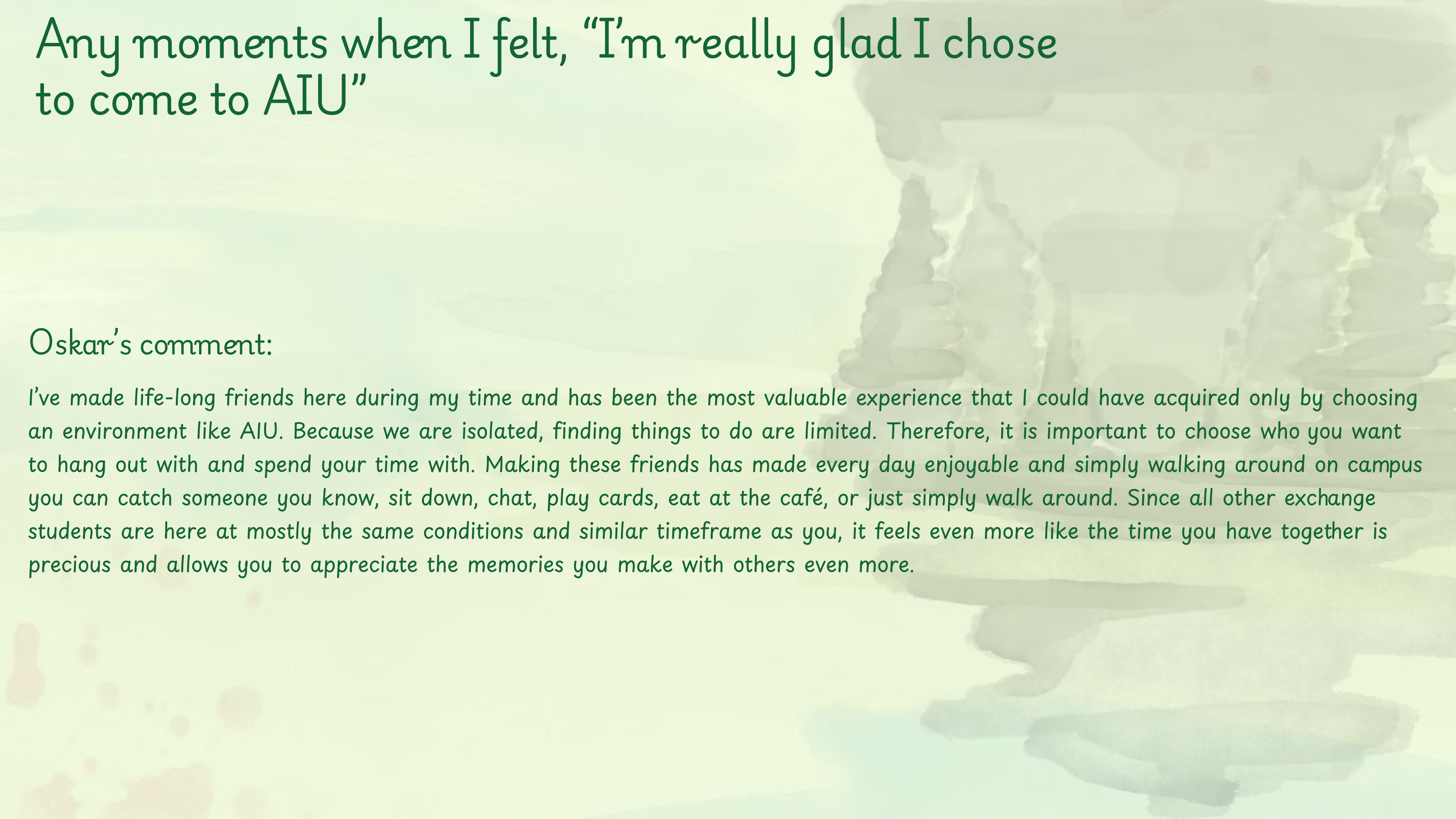
Oskar's comment:

AIU has their benefits in how the courses are structured differently, the environment it provides, and the beautiful library it holds. The courses are provided in smaller settings with an upper limit on classes (generally 40). The closeness with the professor and other students helps foster an environment where knowledge can be shared and exchanged easier with those around you. I deeply enjoyed this approach, and attending class felt more natural and engaging to me, helping me take in the contents and learn what the instructor hoped for us to learn.

The location of the campus is one thing that I deeply appreciated with AIU, where the closeness to nature allowed me to relax, and have easy access to enjoy the outdoors. This type of atmosphere also fosters a kind of solitude, and seeing the forest right outside the window of my classroom always helped me find a little quieter so I could focus easier. In addition to this, the campus also has a multitude of different places you can study outside, with internet accessible at almost every location. I could then enjoy the outdoors and fresh air while getting assignments and work done, or perhaps just playing cards with some friends outside.

Lastly is the library, which has been very important to me at my time here at AIU. It's an incredibly beautiful location that holds many new works and updated literature that any student could access. It has also been my go-to location for when doing deeper studying and has an additional area that is very relaxing and quite comfortable to spend time at.

One could summarize that my appreciation goes a lot to the environment that AIU provides. Everything from class structure to the closeness with nature and multitude of beautiful locations to study at, I have enjoyed being part of such a beautiful campus and helped me realize how important the correct environment is for my education.



Any moments when I felt, “I’m really glad I chose to come to AIU”

Oskar’s comment:

I’ve made life-long friends here during my time and has been the most valuable experience that I could have acquired only by choosing an environment like AIU. Because we are isolated, finding things to do are limited. Therefore, it is important to choose who you want to hang out with and spend your time with. Making these friends has made every day enjoyable and simply walking around on campus you can catch someone you know, sit down, chat, play cards, eat at the café, or just simply walk around. Since all other exchange students are here at mostly the same conditions and similar timeframe as you, it feels even more like the time you have together is precious and allows you to appreciate the memories you make with others even more.

“Life-hacks” that I wish I knew before coming - Part 1

Oskar's comment:

Abe-bus: A new bus-service run by students/graduates and is a free for all students to use. You can get around with this service quite often and can be helpful especially when you need to get to the city or airport as there is generally no bus going directly from AIU.

Flea-market: In the beginning and end of semester, there is a circle that reuses old items and gives away what was collected at the end of the previous semester. They generally do this in the first 3 weeks of the semester, and I highly recommend to get some of the essentials from here at this time. When you move out, give it back to them and help future incoming students out!

Theme-house: I highly recommend picking one, as I forgot to do it. You get placed in a house where students are generally better roommates, and your living spaces will be cleaner and more comfortable than if you get a place where there is no theme-house.

Groceries: The cheapest grocery store is the one next to the mall, J-Maruei, and only accepts cash. Use this one for your grocery shopping if you wish to save money.

“Life-hacks” that I wish I knew before coming - Part 2

Oskar's comment:

Printing-service: There is free printers and a scanner on the 1st floor outside of the library and on the 2nd floor inside the computer lab. Use these for any printing and processes you have to do without having to worry about going elsewhere or paying to print.

Talk more in class: Now you have a chance to talk and engage more frequently with your classmates and professors. I have gotten to know my professors better and helps creating a more enjoyable studying environment where I also learn more about what the professor thinks on certain topics and can discuss it openly with other classmates.

Summary:

Putting everything together, AIU has been an experience that I wish for all APU students to consider taking part in. As an international student it has been quite interesting to engage with so many different students, and if you're especially looking to naturally improve your English, this is the place to do so. While APU is more bustling and has a larger campus and student body, AIU offers a familiarity and comfort that can't be acquired in many other places. This comfort is something I wish to promote and can help students realize that despite both educational institutions being “international universities”, they differ in so many ways in how they promote this “internationality”.

Individual Achievements

This section outlines 3 things that I felt I have achieved through my exchange.



Individual Achievements

- **Broadened interest for future studies:** Through my studies at AIU, I found out new interesting areas of interest, including international cooperation and development, sociology, and conservation. I felt myself more intrigued about how international cooperation efforts work in the real world, the challenges posed, and how the challenges are looked upon from different angles. In particular, sociology offers a mindset where there is no right and wrong answers, and I felt that it has helped me understand that there is no simple or best solution, rather that it is so much more complicated than that.
- **Confidence in critical thinking and essay writing:** I have written many essays and reports throughout my time at AIU, and it has genuinely given me the confidence in doing research compared to how I felt before I started my exchange at AIU. The research and writing I have done has also allowed me to more critically think about the facts and data that I found, and helped me analyze contents across courses to better understand if what is said is true or not, or how it might be framed differently. I felt I became a more confident learner.
- **Understood myself and my interests better:** I realized that I didn't like certain things as much as I thought I would. I also realized the values and morals that I guide my life by better, and have allowed myself to say no to things that I don't want to spend energy and time on. In particular, I have realized that I prefer doing most of the work I do by myself, and rarely rely on summaries, AI, or other methods that would not stimulate my learning. I have also decided to move away from teaching languages through conversation (similar to SALC) as I found it was very unnatural to me. I think it's important to cross off things that do not interest you in life.
- **Bonus: Lifelong friends:** Some of the friends I made at AIU will be my friends for life.

Ending Notes...



My experience at AIU has been a very memorable, one that I don't regret in the slightest. I have learnt so much about myself and those around me, and it has helped me open up a broader understanding of what is important to me, and how I want to change my life's trajectory towards one that I more deeply resonate with.

It is very important that you decide for yourself if AIU is a place for you or not. This presentation might help you decide that, or not. Please trust in yourself when deciding what feels right, and don't rely entirely on what other people say.

AIU is not for everyone, but it was a place for me, and I can't recommend it more to anyone who wishes to see a similar, yet different atmosphere to that of APU.

AIU is a home away from home.

Presented by: **Oskar Carlsson**

Thank You

I hope my experience at AIU can inspire others to set out on the same journey as I did :)

