



Graduate Student Spotlight



Tomomi Naka

PhD - Anthropology

BA, Law - National Institute for Academic Degrees

MA, American Studies - Doshisha University

MA, Anthropology - The University of Iowa

Winner of Honorable Mention in the Humanities Division at the 2007 James F. Jakobsen Graduate Conference

Please describe your thesis project in a short sentence.

I investigate the relationship between religious beliefs and economic decisions among three Mennonite congregations in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania.

How did you decide to go to graduate school?

My experience of study abroad to the U.S. was perhaps most influential. When I was in my junior year in Japan, I did my study abroad at the College of Wooster in Ohio. While I struggled a lot to adjust to a new setting, it was a great time for me to focus on my studies. Because I did not work elsewhere during that time, I devoted myself to learning. I also had good help from faculty members and writing tutors there to develop my arguments based on what I learned in the class. This experience changed my attitude toward learning at college and led me to consider pursuing my education.

What are your long-term goals beyond your graduate degree?

I would like to be involved in higher education, either teaching or supporting faculty members or students. I would like to bring my experiences in graduate training to Japan someday and work for the improvement of higher education in Japan with other scholars and officials.

What made you decide to go to graduate school at Iowa?

I came to Iowa for a couple of reasons. I wanted to study at a good program where I would receive good support from professors and fellow graduate students. The Department of Anthropology has great faculty members and a strong graduate association. I was also somewhat familiar with Iowa, because I had taken Summer Intensive English classes at Coe College when I was an undergraduate student. Lastly, I wanted to study about Mennonites and Mennonite related groups and the Midwest was a great place for this.

How has being a graduate student at Iowa prepared you to achieve those goals?

I was fortunate to be in a graduate program that has strong student involvement. Through regular brown bag meetings and social occasions, I came to know quite a lot of interesting researches. Serving as a president, and a student representative for the faculty meeting has helped me to learn about graduate students and faculty members' commitment in expanding the graduate program. Working at the Center for Teaching during 2006-2007 greatly helped me to explore pedagogical issues in college education. These are some experiences that helped me to pursue my goals.

Hometown: *Osaka, Japan*

Advisor: *Michael Chibnik*

What are some of your interests outside of school?

I like walking along the Iowa River.

You are a winner of one of the top awards at the Jakobsen Conference in a previous year. What did you enjoy most about the Jakobsen Conference experience?

I enjoyed the discussion among session members. My panel was made up of people from Religious Studies, American Studies, and Anthropology. It was interesting to hear about research relevant to my paper and I appreciate the comments I received from other participants.

Are there any particular challenges you've faced as a graduate student at Iowa?

Some challenges I have are language issues, time management, and developing my scholarly interests and research. Reflecting my experiences in graduate school, I think that little comments by fellow graduate students and faculty members has greatly helped me to go on. For instance, a number of graduate students took their time to listen to my concerns, give advice on how to refine my research projects and grant application, and to deal with challenges in teaching.

Not a few faculty members also gave great encouragement when I was struggling with my research, writing, and teaching. They were helpful to me in moving forward.

Do you have a particular mentor who has played an important role in the development of your thesis or your career trajectory?

My former writing tutor and friend, Mary Moran, played an important role in my graduate school life. (Mary Moran graduated from English Department in 2006). We had twice a week meeting at the Writing Center for more than 2 years. She questioned me often when I was revising my papers. Her questions have helped me to think through what I wanted to say and helped me to clarify my ideas in this process.

From her, I learned how helpful it is to talk aloud about my ideas to refine my thoughts.

Please note any significant honors you've received .

Seashore Dissertation Year Fellowship, University of Iowa, 2007-2008, Young Center Graduate Summer Fellow, Elizabethtown College, August 2007, June Helm Award for Service and Excellence in Anthropology, University of Iowa Graduate Student Anthropological Association, May 2007, Obermann Graduate Fellow, Obermann Graduate Institute on Public Engagement and the Academy, University of Iowa, January 2007, Graduate College Summer Fellowship, University of Iowa, July 2005, Multi-Year Ambassadorial Scholarship, Rotary International, August 2000-May 2002

