

iCLA Obento

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NEWSLETTER TOPICS

FROM iCLA TO
LOCAL KOFU

"FUTURE TALENT,
AI & WELLBEING"
CAREER EVENT

FACULTY
INTERVIEW:
PROF. TRANG
THANH TRAN

WINTER GALA
2025



The iCLA Obento is a newsletter dedicated to highlighting the successes of iCLA's community members, celebrating our unique backgrounds, and learning more about the members of iCLA's community. We hope you enjoy reading about iCLA's bright students and wonderful faculty members in interviews, news articles, and feature pieces.

iCLA OBENTO ARCHIVE



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From iCLA to Local Kofu: How an iCLA Student and Graduate are Connecting With the Community

Two iCLA community members are enriching the cultural life of the local area. Second-year student Sadib actively volunteers at festivals through the Kofu City Hall, recently speaking on stage at one of Kofu's biggest festivals. Recent graduate Kieren is fostering creativity with a music, art, and fashion event that celebrates local talent.

Sadib from Bangladesh

Nervous but excited, Sadib, an iCLA student from Bangladesh, stood on the stage at the Kofu Daisuki Matsuri, a festival that drew more than 52,000 attendees to Kose Sports Park. Facing a large audience, he spoke in Japanese about his home country and his experience living in Kofu as an international student.

Sadib first learned about the Kofu Daisuki Matsuri, one of Kofu's largest annual events, when staff from Kofu City Hall reached out to him. Earlier in the summer, he had volunteered at another local festival after seeing a call for participants on KoRyu Net, a networking platform for international students in Kofu. Impressed by his involvement, Kofu City Hall invited him to be one of the international student speakers at the October 25 Kofu Daisuki Matsuri event.

He said yes without hesitation.

"I was kind of nervous. Should I do it or not? But I didn't think about it much. I just said, 'OK, I want to do it,'" recalls Sadib.

Learning Japanese has been one of his biggest motivations since coming to Japan. Opportunities that push him to use Japanese in new and challenging situations, such as presenting before a large crowd at a popular local festival, fuel his confidence and help him set bigger goals for himself.



In the weeks leading up to the festival, Sadib practiced diligently at home and joined rehearsal sessions organized by Kofu City Hall. He prepared alongside two other international students, one from China and one from Vietnam. He enjoyed working with Kofu City Staff, who he said were fun and easy to speak to, which made the experience less nerve wracking.

During the rehearsal at Kose Sports Park, the Mayor of Kofu City also offered him reassuring words.

"He said, 'Don't worry, just give it your best.' He gave us a lot of encouragement," Sadib said.

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When the day arrived, on the stage, he spoke passionately about Bangladeshi culture, talking about foods, sports, and the longest sea beach in the world, Cox's Bazar. He also spoke about enjoying life in Kofu. The crowd was especially enthusiastic and encouraging when Sadib spoke about his plans to work in Japan after graduation, to his pleasant surprise. One of the highlights for him was being able to represent his country on the big stage.

“The most memorable thing was wearing the Bangladeshi flag in front of the Japanese audience,” Sadib recalled.



Sadib also joined to help Kokusai Kitchen, a booth organized by Kofu City Hall to showcase international foods. He assisted with preparing dishes and enjoyed talking with local visitors who were eager to meet international students.

Meeting new people and gaining new perspectives, he says, is another major reason he seeks out these opportunities. Back in Bangladesh, Sadib was already active in volunteer work as a member of both the English Language Club and Science Club. Getting involved in community events has come naturally to him, and his experiences in Kofu have been positive.



“I like getting involved because it leads to opportunities to meet new people. You can learn about their lifestyle, what they do and what they do not do. It's helpful, to be honest. No matter how much we study from books, meeting people gives you real knowledge.”

He hopes to participate in more events, not only to improve his Japanese but also to build connections with local people.

He emphasized that networking and understanding Japanese culture are essential to becoming part of the community. Through the participation of international students like him, Kofu's residents can also gain insight into the experiences and perspectives of those living here from abroad.

For other iCLA students interested in getting involved with the local area, Sadib recommends staying aware of events happening in Kofu and Yamanashi Prefecture, and being willing to step outside one's comfort zone.

“You have to push yourself; otherwise, it's tough to understand the culture,” remarked Sadib.

Kieren from the UK



Photo Courtesy of Kieren

When iCLA graduate of Fall 2025, Kieren envisioned the event Show Me Kofu, his goal was simple yet ambitious: to bring Kofu's creative community together. He wanted a platform where local artists and iCLA's creatives could share their talents in music, art, and fashion.

Earlier this year, Kieren's proposal scored third-highest in Yamanashi Gakuin University's Student Challenge Program, a long-standing initiative encouraging student leadership and positive contributions to the campus community and local area. The project proposals went through a tough two-stage screening process in which they were reviewed by members such as the Dean or Associate Dean of each faculty and the President of Yamanashi Gakuin University. Student-led projects which are selected receive funding to realize their proposals.

Kieren brought this idea to life on November 22nd at Kameyaza, a newly-opened venue in the heart of Kofu.

"The venue that we had access to before was good enough for the music but was too small for other things," explained Kieren, "We were looking for a potential bigger venue for a wider variety of things, especially one that had two floors, which Kameyaza does. Kameyaza opened this year and so it just seemed like the perfect place with the location because it's so close to Kofu Station as well."



Photo Courtesy of Kieren

The event featured three components: live music performances, an art gallery, and a fashion show, each led by Kieren and fellow iCLA student collaborators.

Local engagement was central to the project. Show Me Kofu was about having iCLA students showcased alongside some of Kofu's artists. Many of the musicians that came to perform, Kieren had met through other live music events where he DJed. One of the artists joining the art exhibition was someone he had met painting near Kofu Station.

From iCLA to Local Kofu

“I got to see just how many talented musicians and other creatives are in Kofu. I figured that it would be cool to be able to gather more of these people in the same place. It was also an opportunity to highlight some of my favorite people in Kofu. That was a driving part of this, the iCLA performers and the local Kofu performers.”

Promotion extended beyond campus, welcoming attendees from both iCLA and the local community. The event was shared on Kofu City Hall’s international student network, KoRyu Net, and Instagram page, Cool Kofu, while local performers helped spread the word through their own networks.



Photo Courtesy of Kieren

Show Me Kofu was a big success, with the venue fully packed with over 120 guests, artists, and event helpers from both iCLA and the local Kofu community. With a diverse line up, the event resonated with both the iCLA community and the general public. Local performers told Kieren they appreciated the unique energy brought by an international crowd, and that this became one of their favorite events.

Kieren expressed gratitude to Dr. Crystal Law, Dr. Mike Blow, Dr. Sam Stocker, Dr. Sanjay Jhingan, Tim and the fashion team, You and the art exhibition team, the music team, the food and drinks team, the transportation team, the graphic design team, lighting team, photography team, and many more for contributing to the event’s success.

By involving the broader Kofu community in Show Me Kofu, the event created an opportunity for creative collaboration and building bridges to energize Kofu’s culture for both iCLA students and local residents.



Photo Courtesy of Kieren

For iCLA students who also want to engage in music and arts in the community, Kieren says seeking out opportunities to create connections is key.

“It’s the type of thing that really snowballs. Once you have some connections, it opens up a lot more. If you can get any experience, go for it, and just watch it grow from there,” recommends Kieren.

Faculty Interview: Professor Trang Thanh Tran

The newest faculty member to join the iCLA community, Global Business and Economics Professor Trang Thanh Tran joined iCLA from Fall 2025.

Professor Trang Thanh Tran's courses in Fall 2025 include Microeconomics, Intermediate Microeconomics, and Labor Economics: Jobs, Wages, and Why They Matter.



Please tell me about yourself!

Actually, there is not much to say about myself. I was born in a small village in central Vietnam, just like many other people there. I went to Ho Chi Minh City for my undergrad, which is a common path for many in my region who want to leave a poorer area and get a better education. After that, I received a scholarship to study for a Master's in Economics at Ritsumeikan University. Later, I moved to the Czech Republic for my PhD, and now I am here at iCLA.

What sparked your interest in studying Economics?

Honestly, economics did not come to me early, but rather quite late. Even though I studied economics as an undergraduate, in many developing countries the education is often very practical and focused on getting a job, not on deep academic thinking. I only started to think seriously about economics during my Master's. Thanks to my supervisor, Prof. David Flath, and his courses, I finally naively understood what economics really is. It was completely different from my undergraduate experience, which was full of practical formulas. That is when I decided to continue with economics.

Tell us about your main research interest within Economics, and why such research is important.

I started with math and formulas and thought I would follow that path during my PhD, but it turned out that it was not for me. Later, I became more interested in issues in developing countries. The big question in economics is often why some countries are rich and others are poor. I do not have the ambition to answer such big questions, but I want to understand why economic theory sometimes cannot explain what happens in developing countries. Economic theories and models are supposed to describe how economies work in any country, but in practice they often fit developed countries better, even though developing countries account for most of the world's population. Right now, I am working on informality, which is a kind of "gray area" in many developing countries.

What sparked your interest in studying Economics?

I did not really plan it; it just happened. My teaching goal is very simple: I want to motivate students to at least understand basic economic concepts, or at least to change how they think about economics. Economics is a social science and it sits at the core of many things in our daily lives.

Faculty Interview: Professor Trang Thanh Tran

According to your faculty profile on the iCLA website, you studied at Ritsumeikan University. Is there anything about Japan that drew you to study here and then consequently stay and teach?

One of the life-changing moments for me was studying at Ritsumeikan University. It was also my first time living abroad. Japan has always been a dream country for people of my generation; its nature, culture, and people are all very fascinating. Later, after spending my PhD years in the EU, I realized again that Japan is probably the place where I would like to stay in the next period of my life.

If you could specialize in another subject, what would it be and why?

Maybe martial arts? I really like Aikido. In general, I am not a sporty person, but somehow I love practicing Aikido.

I started in Vietnam, continued at Ritsumeikan University, and sometimes also practiced in Prague. For me, Aikido is not just a self-defense method. The way you learn Aikido and its movements can also be applied to how you behave and act in real life.

If you were to recommend one book related to Economics, what would it be?

Recently I have been reading a book called *Hate the Game: Economic Cheat Codes for Life, Love & Work* by Daryl Fairweather, recommended by a friend of mine. Many people see economics as a dry subject that only relates to things like GDP, inflation, or unemployment. But this book may change your perception. It shows how economic concepts can be applied to almost everyday decisions: work, career, or even a marriage.

The author explains how she used principles of economics and game theory in many of her own major life decisions. It is quite fun to read and definitely feels relatable.

What is one thing you like about teaching at iCLA so far?

First, the students. Here I meet students from many different backgrounds. At the beginning, and still now, it has been challenging for me, because I struggle to find the best way to approach and motivate them. But at the same time, this also incentivizes me and keeps my teaching spirit alive. Something that is tough but fun at the same time always makes life more “juicy” and interesting. Second, I am in a very friendly and comfortable environment with very kind colleagues. That helps me a lot to settle down and adapt to the new workplace.

What would you tell a student who is going to enroll in your course?

Hmm. I cannot promise that it is an easy course. It may feel painful at first, but hopefully fun at the end.

Do you have any tips for students who are thinking of going into a career related to Economics?

This is not only for economics but for any subject: learn, observe, and evaluate. Do it patiently and consistently.



iCLA Hosts “Future Talent, AI & Wellbeing” Career Event in November

A special industry and student connection event was held on November 19th!

Led by Dr. John Ricketts and the iCLA Career Support Team and attended by distinguished students, the gathering brought together representatives from Flywire, Smart Sodanshitsu, Inc., Jit Co., Ltd. and the Kofu City Hall.



The event opened with keynote presentation by Data Science professor Dr. John Ricketts, whose research centers on AI and wellbeing.

He discussed the use of AI technologies as a beneficial tool to read big data for the purpose of improving wellbeing, showcasing projects created by students, such as one which looks at universal basic income, or aging.

Following the presentation, a meaningful roundtable discussion brought together the invited industry professionals to talk about some challenges their organizations currently face in the rapidly changing tech landscape. The international students contributed insights drawn from their own experiences, offering a global perspective. The representatives found it helpful to hear a student’s perspective, and the session highlighted iCLA students as AI Natives who are valuable assets in the workplace.

iCLA Hosts “Future Talent, AI & Wellbeing” Career Event in November

iCLA students also gained invaluable career experience speaking directly with professionals in fields such as government, manufacturing, service, or financial technology, and understand how they can apply their knowledge and skills to real world issues in the industry.



After the event concluded, the guests remained to chat with students, and these conversations allowed professionals to get to know iCLA students on a more personal level. It provided a valuable chance for students to learn more about the operations of the companies and gain a clearer sense of the career opportunities available in the field.

The event also served as an important stepping stone toward future collaboration between iCLA and the organizations, including potential internships and career pathways for iCLA students.

Enchanted Evenings: Winter Gala 2025 at iCLA



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The Winter Gala 2025 was held on December 5, bringing together students, faculty, and staff for a festive celebration to conclude the Fall Semester!

This year's theme, Fall Fairytale, filled the iCLA building with an enchanting atmosphere. Students attended the event dressed up as magical characters and creatures. Beautifully crafted storybook decorations such as castle backdrops, enchanted poisoned apples, whimsical mushrooms, lanterns, and fairy lights transformed the space.

The evening opened at 17:30 with the art exhibition displayed across the first and second floors. Works produced throughout the semester in courses such as Painting and Sculpting, Drawing, Graphic Design, Art Studio, and more were on display. The range of pieces, from sculptures, paintings, and sketches to Ikebana, photography, and even short films, really showcased the remarkable diversity of talent within the iCLA community.

Later in the night, the second-floor lobby became the stage for live performances featuring bands, solo musicians, the Koto class, Music Club members, and more.

Guests also enjoyed refreshments, offering a selection of Japanese and Western snacks and beverages.

Finally, the Winter Gala 2025 concluded with a fun Murder Mystery Workshop planned by the Gala Committee. Participants searched for clues hidden around the building to solve the case and win prizes. The interactive activity added excitement, intrigue, and friendly competition to the end of a fantastic fairytale evening.



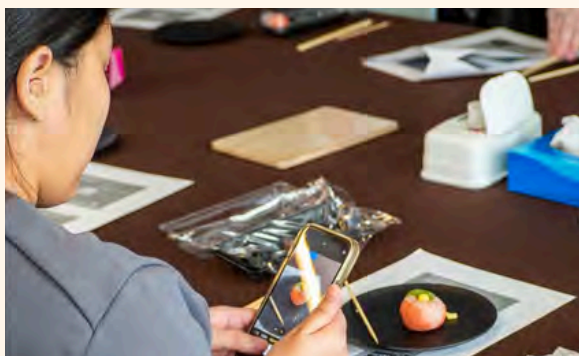
A big thank you to the Gala Committee, Dr. Mike Blow, Dr. Sam Stocker, and the administrative staff for organizing a memorable evening of music and art!

Enchanted Evenings: Winter Gala 2025 at iCLA





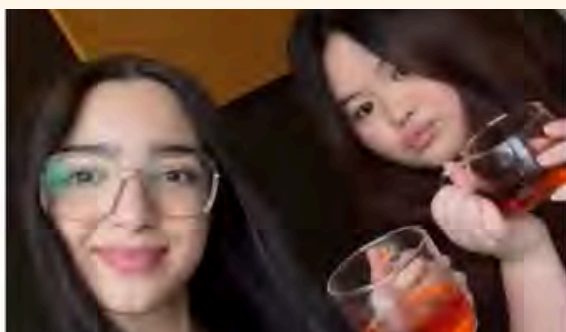
SOCIAL MEDIA FEATURES



Nerikiri Workshop was held in LAC, which students made early winter themed sweets!



Joint O-Chat Time with Yamanashi Gakuin Junior College was held in LAC.



Join our Floor Assistants Hind and Natalie for a relaxing laundry day!



Read our Alumni Spotlight Interview with Ahmed

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