

SCOA COUNSELOR MESSAGES 2015

Kristina Owsinski
Washington - Track

My time with SCOA is something I will never forget! SCOA allowed me the opportunity to travel to another country and create a two way street of diversity and understanding. By working with children in the creation of a fun camp environment, they were able to feel comfortable and safe in learning about a new culture while also opening up to share theirs. The children I worked with were unforgettable. Seeing the transformation of each kid gain confidence and build camp friendships made my time at SCOA even more impactful. They reminded me how important it is to be a role model and that even a smile can make the biggest impact in someone's life.

Not only did I gain meaningful relationships with the children but also with my fellow counselors. Team building, problem solving and most importantly having fun developed a strong meaning of family for us. These are friendships I will have for the rest of my life and for that I am so thankful! SCOA also provided me with the experience of a lifetime to explore Japan after the camp was finished. Traveling through Japan with the knowledge I gained from the children in each camp made me embrace and appreciate Japanese culture and the fact that I got to be a part of it. I learned a lot about myself through this experience and am so grateful I got to be a part of what SCOA stands for and has to offer!

Tori Edwards
UC Davis – Track

This is my second year being part of the SCOA family. I had the opportunity of being a senior and head counselor and enjoyed both positions. Not only do counselors experience great treatment by Keiko and JR, who make you feel comfortable in a foreign setting, but you also get the chance to meet amazing kids of all ages and make life-long friendships with other counselors.

The children I worked with are unforgettable. Through playing with them, getting to know their culture, and physically communicating with the kids through numerous activities, you are able to get to know the campers and create special bonds. I remember when each camp ended, I would become teary-eyed when saying good-bye to the campers. Though you spend such a short time with most of the campers, counselors are able to grow a close attachment to the kids. These campers love the American counselors and are excited that they are able to spend time with them at SCOA camp and experience American culture.

Counselors become a family unit throughout the camps. You spend the whole summer with other student-athletes where you discover and experience the amazing country of Japan. I have made everlasting relationships with my fellow counselors with memories made at camp that I will never forget. You may be scared at first, entering a new country, not being able to speak the language, and having to learn the daily tasks of the camp, but the counselors always have each other's back and makes it feel like you are never alone.

All in all, SCOA is an experience I will never forget and would recommend to anyone who loves kids and likes to get out of their comfort zone. There is a great deal of work involved, but it is so awarding at the end of the day. Being able to put smiles on the faces of the kids throughout the camps is a feeling that I will never forget. There is no other place where you are able have this experience of a lifetime.

Howard Lao
Washington - Track

My life changed for the better. It's really that simple. I'm extremely blessed and thankful to have had the opportunity to be a SCOA camp counselor this past summer, and every day I wish I could go back and do it all over again. But I can't be too greedy though, my time spent with the new friends I made provides me with happy memories for the rest of my life that I will never forget or take for granted. Not to mention the culture, the food, and the kids added just levels upon levels of smiles and laughter for me. There was never a dull moment at SCOA, it was long hours but it never felt like it was mundane because I enjoyed every second of it. You get to go to an amazing place, learn so much about it (and yourself) and to do what... Play your sport! How awesome. It was truly bittersweet when it came to a close and we said our goodbyes. Step out of your comfort zone, trust yourself and take the chance & GO!

Lauren Paul
UC Davis - Soccer

Applying to be a camp counselor at SCOA was one of the best decisions I've made. This experience allowed me to see places I never thought I'd see and meet people I never knew existed. SCOA provided me with an opportunity to share my gift and passion for soccer with Japanese children who love it just as much as I do. It is insane and incredibly powerful how soccer brought me close to these kids regardless of our age differences, backgrounds and languages. A connection was created that I have never felt before. Not only did I have connections with the campers but I also became great friends with the other camp counselors. I was able to work with an amazing group of counselors who were unique in their own way and contributed immensely to the success of the camps. Not only were they my co-workers and peers but throughout my time in Japan they became my second family. SCOA is an opportunity like no other and I am so glad that I was able to give back and learn so much about myself and another culture.

Claire Green
Arizona - Track

Saying that being at SCOA was the best summer of my life, or the most exciting opportunity I have ever had does not even begin to do justice to what an incredible experience it was. Before being a part of the SCOA family, I had never travelled outside of the US. Traveling is something I had always been interested in, so when I heard that there was an opportunity to not only travel to Japan, but to be a camp counselor and work with kids, I knew it was something I had to do! One of the scariest moments of my life was walking in to the airport to board a plane off to be a camp counselor in a country where I didn't speak the language. The minute I walked in to Narita airport and saw the group of smiling, excited athletes that were going to be my fellow counselors, I knew I had made the right decision. J.R. and Keiko do such an incredible job of selecting their counselors that the first five minutes of meeting everyone felt like a reunion between longtime friends.

Having the opportunity to work with all the amazing kids we met is something I will always cherish. By working with the campers, I got an opportunity to learn about the Japanese culture in a way I never would have if I had traveled to Japan as just a tourist. At every new session I was always a little nervous to meet my new campers, but it was amazing to see how quickly the language barrier was overcome each time. It was so rewarding to see how much each and every camper appreciated the experience at the end of a session.

My summer at SCOA was such an unbelievable experience I will always cherish, and I cannot wait to get back to Japan!!!

Katy Nogaki
UC Davis - Gymnastics

Being a senior camp counselor for SCOA was one of the most fulfilling and rewarding experiences I have ever had. With no prior experience of being a camp counselor, I was intimidated at first by the thought of not being qualified enough for the position, but those doubts ceased once I saw the smiles and heard the laughs of the campers (their smiles and laughs were contagious)! Seeing the kids having fun was a breath of fresh air because it reminded me to appreciate the little things in life and to live in the moment. All the kids that I was able to spend this summer with allowed me to feel a sense of purpose, which made me so unbelievably happy because I knew that I was making a difference in their lives at the same time the campers were making a difference in mine for the better. Overall, I had an amazing summer working with the kids and expanding my horizons by being immersed in a completely different culture. I am so thankful that I was able to be a part of this amazing opportunity to meet other athletes my age as well as all of the awesome campers that I may not have ever met if it weren't for SCOA. This experience has inspired me to travel to other countries and explore the beauty and uniqueness of other cultures!

Colin Dolese
Stanford - track

What do you want to do while you're still young? When confronted with this question many people rank travel near the top of their list, but do they know what form this travel should take on to satisfy their desire? Are they after beaches and fancy hotels, tourist traps and English speakers, or are they looking for something... more? It was in pursuit of this "something" that I traveled to Japan this past summer to be a counselor at a sports camp for elementary school aged children.

I was one among a dozen other counselors who were all American student-athletes from West Coast schools. The trip was certainly not a vacation, as the days were long and the work was often quite involved – although that did not stop it from being immensely rewarding. But looking back over all the things I did I can't help but feel like it was the only real traveling I've ever done. I climbed to the top of Mt. Fuji. I learned to communicate through a mixture of body movement and simple language, and then got to use this skill on hundreds of Japanese children that genuinely appreciated my efforts. I became good friends with the other American counselors as well as Japanese counselors who worked with us at the camp. I traveled up and down and across Eastern Japan, including to the little town of Rikuzentakata, which was devastated by the 2011 Tsunami, where I heard firsthand the stories of survivors. I learned about Japanese culture from children who were thrilled to answer any questions I had, and I got to teach them about my own culture in the process. And at the end of it all I spent three days in Tokyo, the only part of the trip that might have felt more like traditional travel if I wasn't surrounded by people I had just shared an incredibly unique experience with. This made the more common things, like wandering through shops and seeing the sights, much more meaningful. Through all this I came to realize that travel alone is not necessarily what we're all after when we list it among the things we want to do while we still can. We're looking to somehow connect with the places we go, and this "trip" I took to Japan, and everything it entailed, allowed me to do just that.

Kana Horie
UC Santa Barbara - Cheer

Being a camp counselor at SCOA was an unforgettable experience that I feel incredibly blessed to be a part of. I never thought I would be able to teach cheerleading in another country, especially Japan. The number one moment I will cherish forever is the reaction of the kids after I tell them that they will be performing the cheer and dance that I taught them in front of the entire camp. Of course, they get extremely nervous, but more importantly, they become extremely determined in perfecting the material to the best of their abilities. I loved seeing them practice certain parts over and over and over again until they got it right, and the satisfaction in their faces after their performance was very rewarding for me as the teacher. There were definitely obstacles that came with the language barrier that was there between the kids and I, but the support of my fellow camp counselors made it bearable. Not only was I able to create unique memories with the kids, but camp also created life-long friendships with everyone that I worked with the make SCOA what it was this summer. Because we were all going through the same struggles, be it getting your team of kids to get really into the team competitions, or getting up at 5am in the morning to get a work out in before starting the day with the kids, all the counselors became a close knit family very quickly. If I could, I would do it all over again in a heartbeat!

Elaine Krebs
USC - Rowing

My experience in Japan with Sports Camp of America made a significant impact of my life in three major ways: First, I learned what is truly necessary for meaningful communication. In today's society, we often rely so much on technology or written communication, but I learned how much can be said with a smile and few simple gestures. It's made me much more aware of how I interact with people on a daily basis, even those who speak my own language. Second, I regained perspective on what is really important in life. These kids don't care what you wear, what grades you have, or what you just posted on Facebook. All they cared about is laughing with you, being picked up, holding your hand, or making sure they beat you Red Light-Green Light. I know I was supposed to be teaching them, but they were the ones who taught me, and I miss those kiddos every day. Lastly, I learned a great lesson in trust and humility. Post-camp, I embarked on a two-week solo journey through Japan in which I was completely at the mercy of the generosity and helpfulness of the Japanese people. I don't speak Japanese and most people didn't speak English, but so many strangers fed me or literally walked me to the train

platform I needed to be on. I still think about my time in Japan all the time, and I know it will continue to impact me for a very long time.

Jenessa Jeppeson
UC Santa Barbara - Softball

There will never be enough space on this page to fit everything that I would want to say about my experience at SCOA this past summer so I will try and keep it short. SCOA changed my life, without a doubt. Every single camper and counselor truly touched my heart in the most amazing ways and will always have a place in my heart. Making the decision to work with SCOA was hands down one of the best decisions I have made for so many reasons.

Traveling to a new country and being completely immersed in the culture is a real eye opening experience. All the new types of food were great too! Traveling throughout Japan to different locations to work with so many amazing kids was wonderful because we got to see so many different aspects to Japan. I have concluded that every single place I have seen in Japan is absolutely stunning. I was nervous before I began the trip because I did not know anyone or much about Japan but everyone I met truly impacted my life in a positive way. Spending everyday with fellow counselors really creates a special bond between everyone and I now consider each of them a part of my family. It's great that we all became so close and we still keep in touch!

When I began this journey this summer I believed that I was going to be the one doing all the teaching, but I actually learned a lot from all of the campers and also learned a lot about myself. I still think about all the smart campers and how they taught me to stay eager to learn and always channel my inner child. Although this experience only lasted several weeks, I will hold the memories and lessons with me for a lifetime. Seeing the joy on each camper's face during an activity and how proud they are when they remember a line for their skit is so rewarding. If I had the chance to experience everything that SCOA has to offer again I would do it in a heartbeat!