

Introduction to Japanese Society Through Language and Culture

Last Updated: Mon, 01/05/2026

Course prefix: ML

Course number: 2500

Section: B

CRN (you may add up to five):

35919

Instructor First Name: Joy

Instructor Last Name: Maa

Semester: Spring

Academic year: 2026

Course description:

This course provides an overview of Japanese society, its key cultural values, socialization processes, and the role of language in expressing and maintaining social structure and cultural identity. Students will examine how people learn cultural norms, how schools and communities reinforce shared values, and how these forces influence behavior, identity, and decision-making. Through case studies, media examples, and hands-on analysis, the course connects big-picture cultural principles to real-world issues in contemporary Japan—from workplace dynamics and group communication to education, technology, and changing social expectations. The course consists of three major components: (a) learning core cultural concepts, (b) understanding how they operate in Japanese society, and (c) analyzing and explaining current social phenomena and concerns. By the end of the course, students will be able to interpret Japanese social phenomena through a cultural lens and compare them to practices in other societies, gaining tools for cross-cultural understanding useful in global engineering, business, and everyday interaction. This course is taught in English and can be used to fulfill the Humanities requirement or towards the Japanese minor.

Course learning outcomes:

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Define fundamental Japanese cultural concepts;
- Apply their understanding of Japanese cultural values to examples in real-life and media;
- Identify and categorize patterns of socially constructed behaviors;

- Explain how cultural values and expectations are maintained and transmitted in a society;
- Reflect critically on their own cultural values and biases.

Required course materials:

None

Grading policy:**Description of Graded Components****1. Participation and Attendance (20%)**

Students are expected to come to class fully prepared to participate in class discussion. Students who are late to class, leave early, or engage in activities that indicate their inattention or non-participation (e.g. falling asleep, text-messaging, doing homework, reading irrelevant materials, etc.) will not receive full credit. To receive full credit for attendance, students should arrive on time and be present for the entire class. To receive full credit for participation, students should be actively contributing to class-wide and group discussions and activities.

Beginning in Week 2, attendance and participation for each class will be graded as follows:

- *Attendance*: On-time (1pt)/Tardy or leaving early (0.8pt)/Unexcused absence (0 pt)
- *Participation*: Out of 2 pts

If you arrive late, you are responsible for notifying the instructor, otherwise you may be marked absent. Excused absences (e.g., doctor's visit) are granted case-by-case and generally require documentation, and students must contact the instructor.

Note: 5 or more unexcused absences will automatically result in a 5% reduction of total grade. 10 or more unexcused absences may result in an automatic failing grade.

2. Reflection and Analysis (20%)

Reflection and analysis (R&A) assignments are short, regular written responses intended to help you review and synthesize the key concepts and ideas from each class session—including both lectures and assigned readings—and to deepen your engagement by applying these concepts to your own experiences. R&A prompts will be distributed in class one session before they are due and must be completed in handwritten form. Although these assignments are graded primarily on effort and

timely completion, students are expected to demonstrate accurate understanding and appropriate use of relevant concepts and terminology.

3. Mini-Presentation (5%)

Mini-Presentations are informal opportunities for students to apply course concepts to real-world situations. Students will select a short case study (fictional or nonfictional) that illustrates a key idea from previous lecture and briefly share their example with the class or in small groups. Presentations should clearly explain how the case connects to the concept and highlight why the example is meaningful or relevant.

4. Project (15%)

This project provides students with an opportunity to engage more deeply with a cultural concept, theme, or issue explored in the course. Students will apply key ideas from lectures and readings to the analysis of concrete examples from Japanese society, language use, media, or social practices. The project emphasizes careful use of course concepts, critical analysis, and clear explanation. Students will submit a project proposal (20% of this component), the project itself (70%), and a presentation at the end of the course (10%). Specific project formats and guidelines will be provided later in the semester.

5. Unit Exams (40%)

Unit exams are designed to assess your understanding of key concepts, themes, and analytical skills covered in each unit of the course. Exams are in-class, written, and closed-book, closed-notes. They may include a combination of short-answer, identification, and essay questions. These assessments evaluate both your recall of course material and your ability to apply ideas discussed in lectures, readings, and class activities.

Attendance policy:

Refer to grading policy.

Academic honesty/integrity statement:

Students are expected to maintain the highest standards of academic integrity. All work submitted must be original and properly cited. Plagiarism, cheating, or any form of academic dishonesty, including the use of GenAI unless otherwise specified, will result in immediate consequences as outlined in the university's academic integrity policy.

Core IMPACTS statement(s) (if applicable):

This is a Core IMPACTS course that is part of the Humanities area. Core IMPACTS refers to the core curriculum, which provides students with essential knowledge in foundational academic areas. This course will help master course content, and support students' broad academic and career goals.

- This course should direct students toward a broad Orienting Question:
 - How do cultural values, socialization processes, and language shape a society and cultural identity?
- Completion of this course should enable students to meet the following Learning Outcome:
 - Students will effectively analyze key cultural values and concepts as they operate and manifest in social practices and specific texts.
- Course content, activities and exercises in this course should help students develop the following Career-Ready Competencies:
 - Intercultural Competence
 - Critical Thinking