

Saying Thanks for a Professor Who Changed His Life

A grateful alum's lifelong fascination with all things Japanese started during his first term at Dartmouth.

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Giving

Global Dartmouth

Ryan Goldstein '93 remembers his first Dartmouth class in detail. He took a seat in a Reed Hall classroom at 10 a.m. on September 18, 1989, for the first day of Emergence of Modern Japan.

Standing in front of Goldstein and the other 71 students in the classroom that morning was Steven Ericson, a newly arrived assistant professor of history. Ericson also remembers the class vividly—it was the first day of teaching his very first Dartmouth course.

Neither man could have imagined how that course would alter the direction of Goldstein's life or that the two of them would become close friends.

"I live full-time in Japan. I speak Japanese every day. I run our law firm's Tokyo office. I collect Japanese antiques. The whole course of my life traces back to that first class I took with Professor Ericson in my freshman fall," says Goldstein. "What made Professor Ericson such a remarkable teacher was his ability to make history feel alive and relevant, particularly by showing how modern Japan is still uniquely shaped by its Edo period traditions."

In gratitude, Goldstein has endowed a fund to help underwrite Department of Asian Societies, Cultures, and Languages curricular and cocurricular activities. Expenses covered by the fund include field trips, student research grants, seminars and workshops, and visiting speakers.

Goldstein is naming the fund for Ericson to celebrate his service as a teacher and mentor. The formal recognition must wait, however, because Dartmouth endowments can't be named for current faculty. Ericson is in the midst of Dartmouth's three-year program to help faculty transition into retirement, meaning the fund won't be named until the

end of the academic year when he has finished teaching. In July 2028, it will become the Steven J. Ericson Fund for Asian Studies.

“I’m very honored and humbled—and flabbergasted,” says Ericson. “I told Ryan, ‘You don’t have to do this.’ He insisted. He’s one of my prize students, and I’m delighted we’ve stayed in touch over the years.”



The old friends reconnected when Goldstein returned to campus for his son's graduation—a perfectly timed reunion as Ericson approaches his retirement.

Dartmouth's go-to alum in Japan

The then-18-year-old Goldstein selected Emergence of Modern Japan as one of his first classes because Japan's booming economy was global news in the late 1980s.

“I knew almost nothing about Japan growing up, but I knew Japan had emerged as this economic miracle. People everywhere were interested in learning about what Japan had achieved,” Goldstein says. “On the other hand, you had Japan-bashing in reaction to the country's amazing growth. I remember TV coverage of angry Americans smashing Japanese cars with sledgehammers.”

Goldstein signed up for more classes with Ericson, started taking Japanese language courses in his sophomore year, participated in a Japan FSP during his junior year, and worked as a research assistant to Ericson. “I was on financial aid, so I had work-study responsibilities. On several occasions, Professor Ericson hired me to help with his research,” he says. Ericson even recruited Goldstein to help coach one of his children's ball teams.

After graduating summa cum laude and being accepted into Harvard Law School, Goldstein remained hungry to learn more about Japan. Ericson connected him with a professor in Japan who agreed to sponsor Goldstein for a scholarship. That led to his admission to Waseda University as a graduate student, and Goldstein chose to defer his law studies for two years. He immersed himself in all things Japanese and fell in love with the country, both its present-day vitality and its history. He was, and remains, particularly fascinated with the Edo period, which began in the early 17th century and continues to shape Japanese life, and which Goldstein first learned about in Ericson's classroom.

“From sumo as we see it today to Edomae sushi, so much of what defines Japan has its roots in this period,” says Goldstein. “Even today, seating at Japanese business meetings reflects samurai-era customs from the early Edo period. The highest-ranking person sits farthest from the door because, historically, the people nearer the entrance would serve as a buffer if an attacker entered the room.”

Goldstein returned to the U.S. to earn his law degree at Harvard and then made his way back to Japan, where he has lived since. He currently is managing partner of the Tokyo office for the global law firm Quinn Emanuel. Ericson, who has a son who teaches at Kyoto University, often visits Goldstein in his adoptive homeland.

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— Steven Ericson

Associate Professor of History

Over the past three decades, Goldstein has become Dartmouth's go-to alum in Japan. He heads the Dartmouth Club of Tokyo, hosts events for visiting students, and helps arrange internships. Although Dartmouth undergrads pursuing an internship in Japan today are more likely to have a passion for anime than economics, he's happy to help them however he can. He's also a member of the Dickey Center Board of Visitors, and several years ago he established an internship administered by the center.

“He threatened to name it the Ericson Internship Program. I said, ‘No way, not until I’m retired or dead,’” Ericson recalls.

When Goldstein recently came back with this second naming opportunity, Ericson agreed to it since he is well into his transition to retirement. Ericson will teach three more courses over the next 18 months, with his final course set for the fall 2027 term. It will be Emergence of Modern Japan.

Goldstein says he'll be in Hanover to sit in on the final day of that class.

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