Visa Application:

The process is really simple and hassle-free. There will be an acknowledge email immediately after you accepted the offer, but the visa application will not begin until September because the Japanese immigration regulation requires that you enter Japan as a student within three months of the issue of your COE (Certificate of Eligibility) to study at Keio University. So just wait for KBS to initiate the process.

In early September (in my case), KBS will email you some application forms along with detailed instructions. This is to apply for the above mentioned COE, an important document you need to submit when applying for student visa in Sydney. Except the photos which you have to post to them (costs around two Australian dollars by air mail), all other forms can be done electronically.

KBS will handle the COE application in Japan and post your certificate to AGSM student experience office once it’s done. After that, you need to go to the Japanese Consulate in Sydney to apply for a student visa. You should always check their website for up-to-date information. Generally it takes three days to get the visa back, and you are ready to go.

Enrolment Procedure and recommended subjects:

The course enrolment is very simple, as there are very limited options of English courses offered at KBS. All the courses description can be found from KBS website. Most exchange students to KBS choose English courses, but you can choose Japanese courses if you have certain level of Japanese capability. Some local Japanese students will also take the English courses but only to prepare their English for the outgoing exchange to US b-schools.

One important policy to notice though is you are allowed to drop course, but you are NOT allowed to add course after the first week trial. This means if you cannot decide which courses to take during the enrolment, it is better to enrol all the courses you might be interested in and drop some after the first week.

The professors also welcome non-registered student to audit their courses. I actually audited two more courses, and found other KBS students are doing the same. You can even choose to participate in group work for non-registered courses if you can commit your time and effort.

I took four courses this term, the minimum workload required by AGSM:

- Financial Management in Japan. This is a course lectured by a somewhat maverick-type professor educated at Tokyo University and Harvard, arguably the best university in either country, and (I hope) that might explain why he can be that special. No numbers or financial reports are examined in the course, and you really need to understand Japan to a certain degree to appreciate all the class discussions, which range from TEPCO and Olympus scandals, to Yoshinoya beef rice and J-pop bands. I feel it is more like an economics course than a financial one, but the final assignment is a Japanese stock pitch so you still need finance knowledge to do the analysis and presentation. We had two young guest speakers in this course. One is from Black Rock and the other is a business idol in Japan, an HBS MBA graduate about to IPO his insurance company at the age of 35. Overall this course is interesting and could serve as an introduction to the finance practice of Japanese companies.

- Production Management in Japan. Depending on your background, this course can be very interesting or very boring. The lecturer is a consultant with many decades’ experience helping Japanese companies through Kaizen method (continuous improvement). He has many examples and stories and can answer almost every question you ask despite sometimes English communication is not quite smooth. There are no fancy formulas or mathematics like we had in the Operations Management course back in AGSM, but all the real world practices are so persuading that in the end I am really confident in Made in Japan products. The guest speakers we had are also experienced veterans from the industry. One is a happy small business owner whose products have more than 60% of Japanese market share, and the other one is a senior manager from Nissan who helped building up Nissan plant in India and other countries. There is only one scheduled plant visit this year, maybe because of the earth quake (the KBS students said they also had their usual plant visits cancelled this year). But I
managed to get the lecturer to organize an optional Nissan plant visit for all the exchange students. I feel this is the kind of course you cannot take in any other business schools if you want to know something unique about the production.

-Entrepreneurship in Japan. I read from the previous AGSM testimonial that this course is the best course offered in KBS. I would agree with that but also want to point out that fundamentally this is a business plan competition and a lot of interactions between students are required. Different topics of entrepreneurship are discussed in the class and the final assignment is a business plan pitch in front of some famous entrepreneurs in Japan. In the third week each student needs to come up with ideas to be screened by the lecture, who had worked as a venture fund manager for one of Japan's most prestigious company. Those whose ideas were selected then become CEO and need to form her/his company by recruiting from cohort, with a mixture of international and local KBS students. Then the company needs to develop a business plan to compete in the final presentation. This course also has the most extensive reading requirement and can really give you the feeling of starting up a company. The guest speakers we had are successful entrepreneurs in Japan (not necessarily Japanese) whose stories are very impressive (and one of them is even in the Stanford case).

-Individual Field Study (IFS). This is a special topic research project conducted under the supervision of a KBS professor. Before you come to Japan, you need to select a professor/topic and write a research proposal. If accepted, you will need to talk to the professor after arrived at KBS to define the topics, scopes, outcomes, time frame and the ways to conduct the research etc. I feel this is a great opportunity to learn about Japan in depth if you are really interested in this country. For example, the healthcare topic is supervised by a professor who formulated the Medicare policy for Japan. I did a research on the digital camera industry in Japan in terms of strategic management. The professor arranged me a meeting and interview with senior management at Nikon. I also attended several seminars and did some research both online and on the shopping floors. My final outcome is a 5000-word report. I believe the workload of this project is more than that of a course and that's probably why several other exchange students this year gave up the IFS after the first week. But the good thing about IFS is you can be more flexible with your time.

Among other courses I audited, I feel the Marketing in Japan is also interesting. Japan is so unique in many ways and this course can partly solve your puzzles when living in Japan, like why there are 50 different flavours of soups under one brand. This course traditionally has a group project of consulting Daimaru department store at Tokyo station. The station renovation is about to finish in mid-2012 and the department store will expand by then, so there is a lot to do in the project. The guest speakers of this course are also from famous marketing agencies and gave some interesting insights.

I do not have time to audit the entire Japanese Business Environment course, but I feel this course is quite serious. The professor is very well prepared and this course follows the chronicle of Japanese economic boom and bust. A lot of exchange students I talked to said this is a typical Japanese course offered by a typical Japanese professor.

KBS has a 9-week semester so time passes faster than AGSM. When the courses are equally appealing, the time slot of the course is another consideration when choosing which courses to take. For example, most exchange students choose the courses offered from Monday to Wednesday, so the weekend can be used for travelling around the country.

**Workload at exchange school:**

Overall, the workload of doing four courses at KBS is not comparable to what we have experienced at AGSM. Readings and assignments are totally manageable, and not all courses have mid-term or final exams.

The busiest weeks seem to be the final two weeks when almost every course had an assignment (mostly group presentation) due. But again, it is manageable. I think one reason is the English proficiency. Overall exchange students have better English capability than KBS students, so it makes life easier when everything needs to be done in English.

**Accommodation options:**

Even if there are other options, I would recommend to stay at the KBS house, the international student dorm for KBS exchange students, unless the other option is free and not far from KBS. The KBS house is in a good neighbourhood, within walking distance to the train station and KBS building. It was built for residency EMBA students, so equipped with everything a student may need in a semester of 9 weeks. The building is not quite new but it is in good maintenance and very clean. The price is reasonable considering it includes utilities, internet and laundry services etc., and you do not need to sign any contract or provide a large amount of deposits as the
case if you find something by yourself.

It is a decent above Japanese standard one-bed studio, with a balcony, toilet/shower and kitchenette. If weather is good, you can see Mt Fuji from the room. I did not find any problem with the room air-conditioning which the previous testimonial complains about. Because of the earth quake, incoming exchange students to KBS this year is less than 20, so every applicant got a room. I heard otherwise you may not be able to secure one spot.

**Campus Facilities**

The KBS building (officially called the Collaboration Complex) is new and quite comfortable to live in. Other than the classrooms, syndicate rooms and libraries for MBA students, it also hosts students from other departments. It has a convenience store and a café in the ground floor and abundant of eateries around. A well-equipped gym with a swimming pool locates at the underground floor but it is not owned by Keio and the minimum contract is 3 months, so I did not try.

All the exchange students have an assigned locker and a mailbox on the 4th floor of KBS building, while the student administration office is on the 2nd floor of the same building. The Keio student cafeteria is not far away from KBS building and it is a good option for lunch. In between the cafeteria and the KBS building is the Keio Hiyoshi Library. I have visited it several times and borrowed some books, all in Japanese. But the library is crowded all the time so it is better to use the KBS library or syndicate room on the 4th floor of KBS building.

One thing to note is printing at KBS is not free. They have a pay for printing system using prepaid card so you may need to ask your KBS buddy for help if you need to print.

**Careers Services:**

I think Career Service is non-existent, as the Japanese recruiting system has its own way and season, and also depends on if you are a new graduate or experienced graduate. From time to time there are some notices on the bulletin advertising some companies are recruiting, but all the positions require Japanese language capabilities. However, there are some exchange students going for interviews they secured by themselves.

**Student life:**

The exchange life is fast in KBS as they have a 9-week semester. The KBS students have a buddy system and they are trying hard to make the life for exchange students memorable. Officially we received welcome party and farewell party, and in-between some extra optional parties. Everyone needs to pay for the expense, sometimes it is expensive even in Australian standard (e.g. minimum 30 AUD and up to 100 AUD for one party). Lunch is reasonably priced so it is quite popular for exchange students and KBS students to have lunch together after classes.

I think entry level Japanese might be necessary as the previous testimonial emphasized, but I personally feel it is not a big obstacle. Talked to other exchange students and found they enjoyed their life even though they cannot read or speak Japanese. I feel the whole Japanese society, including the transportation systems, convenience stores and restaurant menu/vending machines, is well designed for dummies to compensate that English is not widely used among Japanese people. Of course if you want to understand the country and people, language is a must.

**Things AGSM MBA students should consider/be aware of when applying to this school for exchange:**

One important consideration here is if you like to experience an exotic country that is so different from your own country, no matter where you are from. It is not exaggerating that Japan is so unique in the world, with a lot of things - tradition, culture, food, electronics, mobile phone and train systems - existing only in Japan. Most foreigners may feel overwhelmed simply standing at the crossroads of Shibuya. If you feel you cannot withstand that shock, then the exchange at KBS may not worth your time and money.
Another consideration is if you want to learn about the business management different from the Anglo-American way. Needless to say the MBA education is rooted in the US/UK. So do not expect KBS to teach you how to value a company or construct financial products. However, Japan offers another perspective on how a business can be managed and expanded. I found some big name b-schools, like Wharton, Booth and LBS, have Japan trek annually and they always come to KBS.

If the earthquake of 11 March 2011 is a concern for you to travel to Japan, monitor the news report closely for latest development. One year after the earthquake I personally feel the life at Tokyo is back to normal except they are saving energy everywhere. Earthquakes are still regular in Japan though. During my stay at KBS house, I had been woken up by earthquake in the morning several times. It was shocking for the first time, but for the later ones nobody would bother to react.

**Highlight:**

It is difficult for me to highlight something for the exchange at KBS because I had been quite familiar with Japan. Nothing really came as a surprise (except that Tokyo has not changed for decades, but that is a long story). Overall I would say the Japan is so unique in the world so the experience at KBS may make you aware of something that you have never thought of, both in the business environment and in daily life.