CAPLA Study Abroad

Cities of the Future - Tokyo

Location and Dates

Tokyo, Japan
May 23 - June 2



Program Overview

Cities of the Future - Tokyo is a short-form study abroad program offered during the University of Arizona's winter break. The program examines sustainable urban development through the lens of smart city planning, technology, and governance, using Tokyo as a global case study. This program builds on three years of successfully delivering *Cities of the Future* in a longer summer format, first in Berlin and subsequently in Japan. The Tokyo program distills core academic content from the longer format into an intensive, focused experience that emphasizes applied learning, site-based analysis, and comparative insight. The 10-day winter format allows students to engage meaningfully with international urban development practice without the scheduling and financial barriers associated with longer programs.

Academic Structure and Program Design

Cities of the Future in Tokyo is a three-credit course that examines contemporary approaches to sustainable urban development through the lens of smart city planning, technology, and governance. Using Tokyo as a living laboratory, the course explores how data-driven systems, infrastructure innovation, and coordinated public–private partnerships shape urban form, service delivery, and long-term resilience.



Guided Walking Tour of Tokyo Station Redevelopment District

Academic Focus and Themes

The program centers on the following themes:

- Sustainable real estate development and climate-responsive planning
- Smart city systems and digital urban infrastructure
- Mobility, transit-oriented development, and energy efficiency
- Data governance, implementation, and public–private partnerships
- Urban resilience and disaster preparedness
- Comparative and transferable smart city strategies

These themes are explored through site visits, practitioner engagement, and applied research grounded in Tokyo's urban context.

Program Approach and Learning Context

A core objective of the program is to support transferable learning across urban contexts. Students are encouraged to evaluate how smart city approaches observed in Tokyo may inform planning, development, and policy decisions in other cities, particularly within the United States. Assignments explicitly require students to assess the feasibility, scalability, and limitations of applying smart city technologies and governance models across different regulatory and cultural environments. This comparative lens ensures that the program remains directly relevant to students' academic and professional trajectories.



Guided Walking Tour of Otemachi–Marunouchi–Yurakucho Redevelopment District

Course Title: RED 497B / 597B – Special Topics in Urban Development: Cities of the Future (3 credits)

Course Description

This course explores the relationship between smart technologies, sustainable development, and urban governance through an intensive, place-based study of Tokyo. Students examine how one of the world's largest and most complex metropolitan regions integrates digital infrastructure, mobility systems, energy efficiency, disaster preparedness, and data governance into everyday urban operations. Students analyze smart city initiatives at multiple scales, from district-level redevelopment projects to metropolitan and national policy frameworks, while critically assessing the social, environmental, and governance implications of technology-led urban development. Emphasis is placed on understanding implementation mechanisms, institutional coordination, and the conditions under which smart city strategies may be transferable to other urban contexts, particularly in the United States.



Site Visit to Haneda Airport Innovation District, group photo with Deputy Mayor of Ota City

Learning Objectives

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Analyze smart city technologies as components of urban development and infrastructure systems

- Evaluate the role of governance, policy, and public–private partnerships in implementing smart and sustainable development
- Understand how cultural, regulatory, and institutional contexts shape technology-driven urban strategies
- Assess the environmental, social, and equity implications of smart city initiatives
- Examine urban resilience and disaster preparedness through data-driven planning approaches
- Apply comparative analysis to evaluate the transferability of smart city strategies to U.S. cities.

Program Lead



Brian Bidolli, MBA, MCP, MPA, AICP
Lecturer, Real Estate Development
College of Architecture, Planning, and Landscape Architecture
University of Arizona

Brian Bidolli serves as Program Lead and primary instructor, overseeing academic structure, course delivery, evaluation, and coordination with University of Arizona Study Abroad and CAPLA administration. He is a Lecturer in the Real Estate Development program at the University of Arizona's College of Architecture, Planning, and Landscape Architecture, where his teaching and research focus on sustainable urban development, smart cities, governance, and international planning practice. Brian has successfully led three study abroad programs for the University of Arizona, including multiple offerings in Berlin and Japan, providing him with direct experience designing, delivering, and managing intensive, place-based international coursework. These programs have emphasized urban development, sustainability, and comparative planning, and have established durable academic and institutional partnerships that support continued program delivery.

Brian's academic background spans urban planning, public administration, business, and technology. He is a graduate of the City University of New York and holds a master's degree in city planning from San Diego State University, a master's degree in public administration from California State University, and a dual Global Executive Master of Business Administration from Georgetown University and ESADE Business School in Spain. He is currently a doctoral candidate at Technische Universität Berlin, where his research in organizational development and technology focuses on the application of machine learning and artificial intelligence to public policy analysis and value capture systems. This academic training informs his approach to smart city planning, data-driven governance, and comparative urban development.

In parallel with his academic work, Brian's professional experience engages the intersection of urban policy, economic development, infrastructure investment, and implementation. He currently serves as Executive Director of the Norwalk Redevelopment Agency in Norwalk, Connecticut, where he leads redevelopment initiatives focused on downtown revitalization, resilience, and sustainable growth. He previously served as Executive Director of the Connecticut Metropolitan Council of Governments (METROCOG), directing regional transportation, land use, and economic development initiatives across Fairfield County. Internationally, Brian was a Robert Bosch Foundation Fellow based in Berlin, where he worked as a consultant to the SAP Future Cities Program, supporting smart city and sustainable development initiatives across Europe, Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and North America. This experience provided him with sustained engagement with international governance models and smart city implementation strategies.

Guest Speakers & Site Visits

The program is enriched through engagement with a select group of guest speakers and host organizations who bring direct, practice-based insight into Tokyo's smart city and sustainable development initiatives, as well as essential local cultural context. Previous guest speakers include representatives from the Tokyo Metropolitan Government's Bureau of Digital Services, Smart City Institute Japan, PwC Japan, and the Mitsubishi Development Agency. The program also incorporates a cultural awareness and professional orientation component led by local professionals. Additional guided site-based learning and cultural engagement further contextualize Tokyo's approach to smart and sustainable urban development. Collectively, these speakers and activities ground course concepts in real-world governance, development, and implementation experience while equipping students with the cultural fluency necessary for meaningful international engagement and comparative analysis.

Program Cost

The program costs $4,995 per student (plus the cost of your flight) which includes tuition, accommodations, local coordination, site visits and excursions, and required insurances. Additional detail and the application to apply for the program is available at: arizona.via-trm.com/program_brochure/34883.