

## Introducing the Global Base Studies Project (GBSP)

[Apply Here](#) (Deadline February 28 at 11:59PM)

With support from the Tyler Center for Global Studies, we aim to send several students to conduct fieldwork and research on the social, political, and historical complexities of American military bases in Japan. At CSUMB, we propose to initiate an entirely new program that will allow students to study and learn about this global base presence. CSUMB is the ideal institution for the Global Base Studies Project (GBSP). The campus sits on the site of the former Fort Ord, which during the twentieth century was among the largest military bases on the west coast. When the base closed in 1994, the surrounding communities suffered a significant economic and population decline, a clear indication of the role the base played in developing and sustaining communities like Marina, Seaside, and Monterey. The opening of the university in 1994 marked a turning point in the history of this region, as did the designation of the Fort Ord National Monument in 2012. The Environmental Protection Agency designated the former Fort Ord as a Superfund Site, the result of decades of base-originated environmental pollution. Given the complicated legacies of the region, students at CSUMB are uniquely positioned to draw from this history to better understand global base dynamics and issues.

The U.S. maintains hundreds of military bases around the world. Military bases and nearby basetowns are complicated spaces. Local communities in “host nations” often serve as “rest and relaxation” spaces for service-members. “Local nationals” often provide integral labor on military bases, including as maintenance personnel, interpreters, cooks, and clerical staff. Cultural interactions, the sharing of music and foods, sports and films, can often serve as non-threatening experiences in these cultural “contact zones” (to draw from the scholar Mary Louise Pratt). While media reportage and scholarly work on bases tends to focus on geopolitical strategy and national security, the GBSP hopes to understand bases in a more intimate way. Only rarely does America’s massive global base presence enter the national conversation, often only momentous events like the withdrawal of U.S. armed forces from Afghanistan in 2021 or military accidents like the Cavalese crash in 1998, when 20 people fell to their deaths after a US jet from an Italian base sliced a gondola cable. While most Americans do not frequently engage with the country’s global base presence, the same cannot be said for those communities around military bases in “host” nations.



**The fence around the U.S. military's Akasaka Helipoint in Roppongi, Tokyo.**

The faculty mentor for this program is CSUMB Associate Professor Dustin Wright, a historian of Japan. For the last fifteen years, Wright has been researching the history and impact of U.S. military bases in Japan, which have dotted the landscape there since the end of World War II. Wright wrote his PhD dissertation (UC Santa Cruz, 2015) on the history of anti-military base protests in western Tokyo and is currently writing a book (to be published by Stanford University Press) on the history of anti-base protests throughout Japan. Wright is also the Associate Director of the Okinawa Memories Initiative, a public history project.

The 2023 trip will include visits to basetowns in Japan, including those around Yokusaka, Yokota, and the now closed Tachikawa Air Base (all in the greater Tokyo region). We will also visit Uchinada, a small port town on the Japan Sea that once hosted a major anti-base protest. Other sites may include Iwakuni (Yamaguchi Prefecture) and Sasebo (Nagasaki Prefecture).

## **GBSP Fellows**

In 2023, the first cohort of GBSP Fellows will conduct field research in Japan related to the continued presence of military bases.

### What are the Fellows' obligations?

1. Be able to travel to Japan to conduct research in summer 2023. The trip duration is yet to be determined, but will likely be at least two weeks immediately after the Spring 2023 semester ends.
2. Develop an individual research plan with clear outcomes.
3. Use Spring 2023 to become familiar with base histories, base issues, and potential sites for visit during the summer.

4. GBSP Fellows will give research presentations on their summer research to the CSUMB community during the 2023-2024 academic year on their research. Dustin Wright will work to share the research of GBSP Fellows with collaborative educators at the Defense Language Institute and the Naval Postgraduate School.
5. Lastly, when possible, students should incorporate this research experience for their required senior capstone projects.

## **Preliminary Work for GBSP**

Preliminary work on this project is already underway at CSUMB. During the Spring 2022 semester, Wright taught a “Special Topics” course in which an eight-student cohort worked to catalog and create an inventory of the files of the late political scientist Chalmers Johnson (professor emeritus of UC Berkeley and UC San Diego). Johnson was a scholar of Japan and China and was a self-professed “cold warrior” who, in addition to his academic work, served as CIA consultant during the Vietnam era. After he retired in the early 1990s, and after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Johnson began to question the need for the United States to maintain such a large foreign base presence. He wrote a bestselling trilogy of books that focused on “blowback” and the unintended consequences of America’s “empire of bases.” With collaboration and training from CSUMB Archives Specialist Robin Guthrie, Wright’s class worked with several boxes of correspondence, news material and activist records related to a deeply contentious anti-base movement that erupted in Okinawa in 1995, after a thirteen year-old girl was raped by three American servicemen. The assault triggered a turning point in U.S.-Japan relations and led many Okinawans to demand a reduction of military bases in their prefecture. Nearly thirty years later, this debate and grassroots base reduction campaign remains an ongoing issue.

CSUMB Archives and Special Collections also houses the Sam Farr Papers. Congressman Farr played a major role in securing millions of dollars of funding and nearly 14,000 acres of the former Fort Ord in order to develop a university on the former Army base, which would eventually become CSUMB. The archive of Chalmers Johnson will help to add a global dimension to the base-related collections already on our campus.

We believe that a successful research trip in 2022-2023 will put us in a better position to secure additional funding to have more resources to continue the GBSP and provide more global undergraduate research experience for CSUMB students. We plan to apply to the National Endowment for the Humanities, California Humanities, and others.

### **Contact for the Global Base Studies Project:**

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Artistic rendering of a 1950s anti-base protest in the fishing village of Uchinada, Ishikawa Prefecture.