On Campus Activities at UTSA

I started my outreach with students on campus. As soon as I arrived at the site, my supervisor recommended that I should host roundtables in the office, where I would introduce different topics on Japan. There were a total of 9 sessions throughout the year and approximately 10-15 students came in each session. The topics varied from ‘How They Live in Tokyo’, ‘Religions’ and ‘Business Manners and Etiquettes’.

In addition to the roundtable, I conducted 8 cooking classes in the demo kitchen on campus. I taught 129 students how to cook rice balls, obento, korokke, sushi rolls, okonomiyaki, anmitsu and Japanese set meal.

Besides the events oriented by myself, I have also been helping the UTSA’s Japanese club with their social meetings. It was a lot of fun to host undokai (Japanese sports festival at school) twice in the gym. We tried radio taiso (warm-up exercise), tamaire (ball tossing), karimono-kyoso (multi-race) and more so the members could experience real undokai like in Japan.

The biggest event I organized at UTSA was ‘San Antonio’s Inaugural Japanese Calligraphy Contest’ on April 7th, 2018 with support from the Japan Foundation Center for Global Partnership (JFCGP) and the Japan America Society of San Antonio (JASSA). A total of 26 participants from local high schools, San Antonio College and UTSA competed by showing their skills in Japanese calligraphy. They had one hour to practice the assigned kanji and then submit one final work for judge. I was very happy that many people attended the event even though Japanese calligraphy is not familiar to Western society and was so surprised of their passion and enthusiasm in learning about our culture. Hosting a kakizome contest was one of my dreams as a JOI coordinator. I wanted to introduce people in the United States discipline and the beauty of Japanese culture through Japanese calligraphy. I personally have been learning the art of calligraphy since I was 8 years old. I hope this contest will continue for many years in order to spread our culture and traditions in San Antonio, Texas.
Community Outreach at Events

Outside of the campus, I have organized and attended 12 events (not including ones held at libraries) and reached over 17,000 people in the community.

One of the most interesting and memorable events was ‘Fiesta’, which started in 1891 as a one-parade event as a way to honor the memory of the heroes of the Alamo and the Battle of San Jacinto. For more than a century, it has grown into a celebration for the city’s rich and diverse cultures.

I joined two of the official Fiesta events in April, 2018; ‘Fiesta Ole’ and 'King William Fair Parade'. In the former, the event consisted of a luncheon and fashion show. I joined the show with Japanese exchange students at UTSA who were models wearing yukata and kimono to represent Japan as one of the countries that contributed to the rich multiculturalism celebrated in San Antonio. There were more than 500 guests that enjoyed the traditional clothes from the world.

For the parade, UTSA’s Japanese Club cooperated with the students of San Antonio College’s Japanese class and created 2 omikoshi, Japanese portable shrines seen in traditional festivals. On Saturday, April 28th, we enjoyed the 2 miles of marching with the hand-made omikoshi while wearing happi coats and yukata under the sun. There were more than 160 groups in the parade and tens of thousands of visitors who had a great time watching various entertainment at the historical district. Since the city is celebrating its 300th anniversary on May 1st, the parade was also filled with historic themes of the city's humble beginnings. I was greatly honored to be part of the city’s historical and traditional event while sharing Japanese culture.
Supervisor’s Comments

Since Chinatsu joined to our office in August 2017, she has organized and conducted many Japan-related programs and activities, from roundtable presentations to San Antonio’s inaugural calligraphy contest. The calligraphy contest was a big success! This contest will definitely continue in the future. She also helped to revive UTSA’s Japanese club, which is a student organization for those interested in Japan. She is highly motivated to take on new challenges and to move forward. As she mentioned above, it was difficult to connect with local K-12 schools at the beginning of the 1st year. However, through her steady effort with outreach activities, she found a way to connect with the local schools. I am looking forward to seeing her visit more schools to spread Japanese language and culture next year. I cannot convey what a hard worker she is and how much she has positively impacted people in UTSA and the San Antonio community through her Japan outreach activities!

Thank you Chinatsu san! - Erina Romanowich

Library and School Visits

Library visits were the main outreach activity during my first year while reaching out to schools was a little harder to accomplish. I have visited 15 schools (2,867 students) and 16 libraries (643 locals) providing presentations and tables at their events and programs. I always included hands-on activities such as origami, sushi cooking, chopsticks challenge and calligraphy.

It was always a challenge for me to visit libraries because even if the event was for a certain age group, the audience would often range in age. So, I would often have to change the contents of the event to make it appropriate for everyone. Despite the difficulties, it was always exciting not knowing exactly how many many people would actually show up to the event since the libraries do not take RSVPs.

Even though I wanted to visit more schools, it was difficult to connect with them in the beginning, until one local librarian who worked as an elementary school teacher for many years introduced me to the person who was in charge of school libraries. This person sent me contact information for other school librarians, and after contacting them, I could finally start visiting many schools and expand my outreach possibilities. Kids are always full of energy and I always enjoy interacting with them. I am looking forward to reaching out to more local schools in different districts in my second year.

Sushi Cooking Class at Library
Chopsticks Challenge at School
Origami Christmas Card Making at Library
Calligraphy Class at Local College
Multi-culture Fes at Library
JOI ANNUAL REPORT

Yr.16 Chinatsu Oku
University of Texas at San Antonio
August 2018- July 2019

Topics:
1. 'Taste of Japan'
2. Library and School Visits
3. Events in the Community
4. Summary & Supervisor's Comment
1. 'Taste of Japan'

The “Taste of Japan” series aimed to educate the San Antonio community about Japanese food, food culture, and traditions. The series garnered generous support from the education grant courtesy of The Japan Foundation Center of Global Partnership in New York, and from many local organizations. 5 events were held between February and April for the Taste of Japan series:

1. Movie Screening
2. Bento Lecture & Workshop
3. Monthly Cooking Class (4 times)
4. Monthly Bento Photo Contest
5. Teacher’s Workshop

We celebrated the opening reception for the series with a screening of the Japanese film, A Tale of Samurai Cooking: A True Love Story (Bushi no Kondate). Additionally, we were honored to have The Consul-General of the Consulate-General of Japan in Houston, Hideo Fukushima, in attendance. I gave a short presentation on Japanese washoku (traditional food) before playing the movie and led a panel discussion following the film.

Our guest panelists included the president of Japan America Society of San Antonio (JASSA), Nobuaki Yoko, and the head professor of Japanese language at UTSA, Dr. Makiko Fukuda. Following the event, the audience was able to better understand the important role of Japanese food as it relates to Japanese culture.

Another memorable event of the series was the Bento Lecture & Workshop, featuring the nonprofit organization Table for Two USA. Table for Two was founded in Japan, and they promote healthy eating worldwide through well-known Japanese foods such as bento lunch boxes and rice balls (Onigiri). Mayumi Uejima-Carr, Table for Two USA President, and Chef Andy Matsuda, owner of the Sushi Chef Institute in Torrance, California, shared valuable food knowledge and expertise with the participants. It was a great opportunity to host them as our guest speakers.
2. Library and School Visits

I have always enjoyed teaching Japanese cultural classes and meeting new people at each class. In the second year of my JOI tenure I was able to continue my growth as an educator and cultural ambassador, as many schools and libraries (including previous locations from my first year as a JOI coordinator) reached out to me to facilitate Japanese cultural classes. My new peers also shared my information within their social circles, allowing me to expand outreach opportunities and teach as many people as possible.

Some popular classes include Japanese calligraphy, origami, and sushi onigiri making. These events were popular amongst audience members of all ages and it was always a joy to see the curiosity, excitement, and eagerness to learn from participants.

On one occasion, when I gave an origami class at Central Library in San Antonio, a woman asked for my information and kindly sent it to educators in another school district. A few days later, a teacher at a middle school from that district emailed me asking for help with her Origami Club that she and her students had started as an after-school activity. I was so happy to visit the club, and I was able to try a lot of challenging origami with her and her students. The bonds I created within her class changed my view of how small the world can seem. Our mutual interest in Japan allowed us to cross paths numerous times as she and her daughter attended other events that I hosted such as the movie screening of ‘Taste of Japan’.

San Antonio is a culturally diverse city, abundant with cultural holidays and months, such as DreamWeek (January), Black History Month (February), Women’s History Month (March) and Asian Pacific American Heritage Month (May). My participation in these celebrations of cultures presented many opportunities to contribute to expanding San Antonio’s knowledge regarding Japan.

Furthermore, due to the diversity present in San Antonio, I was always accepted and people were never too shy to engage in learning about Japanese culture. I hope my work as a cultural ambassador influences a new generation of people to be more culturally aware, especially in regards to Japan in the community of San Antonio. This has been a once in a lifetime experience for me and a great pleasure to make connections like this through outreach.
3. Events in the Community

To better facilitate cultural events in the community, my office maintained a close relationship with JASSA. One of JASSA’s missions is to promote friendship between Japan and San Antonio by holding events and festivals. Their annual Japan fall festival held in downtown called ‘Aki Matsuri’ is an example of an event that provides a place for locals to experience Japan. Every year, there are many vendors, organizations, and volunteers to welcome guests to Aki Matsuri.

I personally hosted a Japanese calligraphy table at Aki Matsuri last November, and sold bookmarks and paper fans that I decorated with people’s names and their favorite kanji. After the event, JASSA expressed interest in the San Antonio 2nd Annual Japanese Calligraphy Contest, which I would be hosting in the spring. JASSA generously donated funds in support of the upcoming contest. 27 participants at UTSA were able to experience one of Japan’s traditional events, ‘Kakizome’, where they practiced and submitted their work to be judged on-site. Three talented winners were selected from two age groups. With so many skilled participants, it was clear from this event that many people in San Antonio have a great deal of respect for Japanese culture and art.

In the fall, I also visited San Antonio International Airport as a guest speaker for the 'Sister City Snack and Chat' event. I gave a presentation about San Antonio’s sister city, Kumamoto, and the influence the two cities have had on one another since being united in 1987.

During the presentation, I shared the history between the two cities, JASSA’s initiative regarding Japan’s cultural presence in San Antonio, and cultural differences between the US and Japan, such as the rules and procedures within airports in the United States and Japan. I was grateful for the opportunity to speak at this event, and appreciated the efforts being made by the community as a whole to welcome everyone to this event.
4. Summary & Supervisor’s Comment

As I have engaged in San Antonio as a JOI coordinator since August 2017, the total driving distance of outreach has reached 6,135 miles visiting over 200 locations (schools, libraries and community events) and I have met more than 26,700 people of all ages (including an audience at a parade!). Over the last two years, it was great to meet so many people in San Antonio who liked Japan but never had a chance to talk to Japanese people and share their interests and knowledge. I was surprised many times by the cultural knowledge of local San Antonians.

I still remember when a flyer for our Japanese calligraphy contest caught a middle school student’s eye at the Institution of Texan Culture’s annual Asian Festival last February. He told me that he had been learning Japanese calligraphy by himself at home. I was so pleased to see him join the contest the following month; he even won first place in the middle/high school division!

I believe that leaning cultures through someone from the country is very impactful, and forever changes your perspective of the world. I have been blessed and honored to work as a JOI coordinator and promote awareness and understanding of Japan in San Antonio, Texas. I learned and grew as a person, and realized over and over again how beautiful and unique Japan is in the rest of the world’s eyes. I love my country and am now even more proud to be Japanese!

I would like to express my gratitude to The Japan Foundation Center for Global Partnership and Laurasian Institution for their great support. Also, I sincerely thank my amazing supervisors, Erina Romanowich and Mimi Yu. I could not have done anything better without their kind help and support. I will never forget the invaluable memories and experiences in my life. Thank you so much!

Supervisor’s Comment:

I cannot believe that Chinatsu’s 2-year term is coming to end in a few weeks. She has been a great asset for the East Asia Institute, the San Antonio community, and beyond. She will be missed by many, and especially by me! For the 2nd year, Chinatsu increased the number of outreach activities and programs beyond my expectations. I would like to congratulate her for that and I appreciate her dedication and commitment. She has touched numerous people’s lives through these outreach activities. There were many highlights during her 2nd year including, cooking classes, the calligraphy contest, and cultural workshops, just to name a few. However, her most notable achievement during this year was to host a grant-funded event, “Taste of Japan”. Our office hosted a series of events related to Japanese food. With her experience and expertise in cooking, the series was well-received by the attendees. It was another outstanding event that she hosted and coordinated. Thank you so much for all of your work. I truly wish you best of luck with your new adventures in Japan! Erina Romanowich