Japan Outreach Initiative
Annual Report

Summer 2018 - Summer 2019

Minae Uehara / University of Mary Washington
Since we do not have official Japanese language classes at the University of Mary Washington, students did not have many opportunities to experience Japanese culture in school. I worked with other language coordinators in the language department a lot for the last four semesters. I organized four cooking sessions last year. Students made curry rice, takoyaki, sushi, and mochi. Holding the cooking session was one of the great and simple ways to approach and inform them that there are Japan culture-related classes.

Conversation hours was the first outreach I started throughout the campus. It was difficult to proceed at the beginning because each student had a different level of Japanese. However, I tried various kind of topics and activities (learning sentences from movies and TV shows and card games, etc), it was kept a year. Around 10-15 students joined each session and some of them decided to go on a study abroad to Akita International University in Japan which is the sister university of UMW.
Team teaching & Visiting Libraries

My supervisor Dr. Steve Rabson and I did team-teaching in the Fall semester. It was a class about Japanese movie and literature. I had a presentation about Okinawan history because students also learn about the minority in Japan. I answered their questions based on my experiences in Okinawa. They were glad to learn about modern culture from me as well.

Central Rappahannock Regional Library is where I have visited and brought activities many times. Libraries offer programs for a wide range of people from children to adults. Programs I have involved in were 'origami presentation, Japanese pop culture discussion, baking and conversation, and sanshin concert.' It was my first time performing by myself and I was really nervous but, I am glad I did. I was able to reach out to older generation and guests were not even in the program because they could hear the sound.

Student’s voice

This course was very intriguing and insightful on Japanese culture. There was great diversity in the readings and the films shown that covered every topic discussed in class. On top of that, Japanese conversation hours were amazing and I loved the opportunity to learn outside the class as well as within.
After arrival, at the University of Mary Washington, I started contacting public schools in the Fredericksburg area where the university is located. I visited several K-12 schools to give them a presentation about school life in Japan, Japanese food, seasonal events, and Japanese traditional dance. For 5th grade students, they have studied world geography and how it affects food people in different regions eat. I talked about school lunch and food in Japan. As an activity, we did a chopsticks challenge. Thus it was efficient to present Japanese culture related to the subject they have currently studied. Because I visited the same school several times, students recognized me on the corridor and bowed to me when they said hi. It was a really fun experience to visit schools and I received a lot of energy from them.
For the second year

I would like to focus on three things for the second year. First, I am going to reach out to schools, libraries and community centers in the farther area and visit them regularly. Second, we will organize new kind of events at the university in order to raise more interests to study abroad and learn Japanese language. Third, it is our goal to work toward sustainability. I will find out the way to keep holding Japan-related events and maintain the connection with communities.

Comment from supervisor

Since Ms. Uehara's arrival at UMW last August, she has team-taught with me in the course "Anime, Film and Literature of Japan," led two weekly Japanese conversation hours in the Department of Modern Languages, and given public demonstrations at the university of calligraphy and origami. She also gave a calligraphy demonstration for a class in the Art Department and a performance and explanation of sanshin for a class in the Music Department. Her work at the university has inspired students to take additional courses about Japan, study the language, and register for study abroad there. In the community she has visited several local schools for introductions of Japanese culture including food, calligraphy and origami. She teaches the students to use chopsticks. She has also given several such introductions at local public libraries, including sanshin performances. All in all, she has been extremely successful reaching out to the community for informing residents about Japan. We are only sorry that this will be her last year here, and wish she could stay longer.

Steve Rabson