Summer 2019 - Summer 2020
Since I was assigned to Asian Studies at Bowling Green State University, I have worked with my supervisor, Akiko Kawano Jones (Teaching Professor; Japanese Undergraduate Advisor), and have sought to find the ways to improve the Japanese program of the university. I also have reached out to the community to promote not only Japanese culture but also the university.
In the first year, the main activities that I have done were on campus, in the local community and at the library.

TOP 3 ACTIVITIES

- CAMPUS
- LOCAL COMMUNITY
- LIBRARY
The main focus of the first year was expanding the Japanese program at Bowling Green State University (BGSU). BGSU has a strong Japanese program. I have worked with my supervisor to improve it and to promote Japanese Studies.

Japanese Club
We have Japanese Club every week. Working with the student officers of the club, I helped to provide the content of weekly meetings, such as doing a calligraphy workshop and providing Origami instructions.

Half-Day Home Stay
Once a semester, there is an event called "Half-Day Home Stay" at my supervisor's house. It's one of the events of Japanese Club and the Japanese program. It is for students and alumni to meet Japanese business people and experience Japanese customs when they visit Japanese home. I cooked Takoyaki and Okonomiyaki for the event. More than 70 people attended the event.
For the community approach, I collaborated with the local coffee shop in Bowling Green. The coffee shop is also a book store and is an important community center for many people. It was a great opportunity not only to share Japanese culture with the community but also to deepen the relationship between the local community and BGSU.

Calligraphy Workshops
I led the calligraphy workshops at the coffee shop in February. It was not a one-time workshop but a series. It was designed for the participants to learn new techniques and to improve their calligraphy skills at each workshop. Unfortunately, the last one was canceled due to COVID-19; however, I could see that the participants improved a lot over the course of the workshops.
One of the important things about JOI is sustainability. The former JOI Coordinator had a connection with Bluffton Public Library, which is 40 minutes away from BGSU. A great part of JOI is that the connection can be sustained even after we leave. Thanks to the library and the former coordinator, I could connect with the library.

**Calligraphy Workshop**
In November, I held a calligraphy workshop at Bluffton Public Library. The event was for both children and adults. We practiced writing lines to get used to the brushes and wrote 「桜」 meaning "cherry blossom." I was amazed by their enthusiastic attitudes.

**Story Time**
I held story time at the library in February. I used Kamishibai and read "Mouse's wedding." We made Origami mice after the story. The children seemed shy at first; but the more we talked, the more I could see they were excited.

For the second year, I'd like to reach out to more institutions and schools while keeping the relationships I have made.
Throughout the whole year I have felt very grateful and fortunate that Ms. Mai Hirashita has been the coordinator of JOI for Bowling Green State University and that I am supervisor for her. Where Mai-san is, there is sunshine. She always welcomes the people with wonderful smiles. She has helped BGSU Japanese Club with the weekly meetings, such as demonstrating shodo, showing the origami instruction, and making online materials to introduce the Japanese yearly events, etc. She was welcomed by the community people when she showed the Japanese culture. I have been amazed with her talent and skills in presenting the materials with her creativity. I believe she has had a big impact to BGSU students and the community, as well as the people in US through online presentations. I have had fun with her throughout the year not only when I am working with her, but also when I just have personal talk with her. It seems as if I have known her for years. I am looking forward to working with her this coming year, too. Thank you very much, Mai-san.

Akiko Kawano Jones
JOI
Annual Report
MAI HIRASHITA
BOWLING GREEN STATE UNIVERSITY
Overview

My Second Year at Bowling Green State University
Summer 2020 - Summer 2021

Due to the pandemic, most of the activities were held online. One of my goals was to keep and deepen the relationships that I have built in the first year, while figuring out a new way of outreach online. My supervisor, Akiko Kawano Jones, and I worked together with the BGSU Japanese Program, the BGSU Japanese Club and the local community to offer interactive programs to keep connected with the students and the community. We could also build new relationships that we couldn’t make during the pandemic after I came back to my host site and held a few in-person events. The top 3 activities of my second year were the seasonal event, the guest lecture, and the serial digital program.

Top 3 Activities

Seasonal Event  Guest Lecture  Serial Digital Program
Cherry Blossom Festival -Ohanami-

The BGSU Japanese Club, the Japanese Program and the Asian Studies Program host ”Cherry Blossom Festival” every year on campus. Due to the pandemic, the festival was canceled in 2020; however, we managed to hold the 20th Cherry Blossom Festival online for the first time in April 2021 and could welcome about 450 people in total. It was 2-day event with 9 programs such as music performance and hands-on activities. We invited performers and speakers not only from the local community but also from Japan.

Seasonal Event

Star Festival -Tanabata-

Thanks to the support from the community, we could hold the Star Festival in person at Arlyn’s Good Beer, a family-friendly place in Bowling Green, on July 7th, 2021. More than 80 people joined us to celebrate the festival by writing wishes and hanging them on the bamboo tree, playing Japanese traditional games, and having some sushi. The bamboo tree was displayed for a week previously for those who came before the event and could hang their wishes. It was beautifully decorated with 121 wishes.
Guest Lecture

"Yōkai and Other Mysterious Creatures of Japanese Folklore"

We invited a guest speaker, Michael Dylan Foster, who is a professor of Japanese and Department Chair of East Asian Languages and Cultures at the University of California, Davis, to talk about yōkai and other mysterious creatures of Japanese folklore on Zoom. Professor Foster teaches classes on Japanese folklore, heritage, tourism, and popular culture and is the author of "The Book of Yōkai: Mysterious Creatures of Japanese Folklore" (2015), "Pandemonium and Parade: Japanese Monsters and the Culture of Yōkai" (2009), and numerous articles on Japanese folklore, literature, and media. He also co-edited "The Folkloresque: Reframing Folklore in a Popular Culture World" (2016) and "UNESCO on the Ground: Local Perspectives on Intangible Cultural Heritage" (2015).

About 90 students and professors not only from BGSU but also from other schools enjoyed his lecture, and we had an interactive Q&A time after his presentation.

We made it come true not only thanks to the guest speaker but also because we had a chance to hear the interest on yōkai from one of the students who joined my previous event. It made me realize how important to hear about participants’ interests and feedback.
Serial Digital Program

”Origami Live”

Since July 2020, Bluffton Public Library and I have held a monthly digital program "Origami Live" via Zoom. Each month had a different topic based on the seasonal events of Japan.

The origami instruction was followed either by a presentation or Japanese folklore. We got regulars, and the group became full of familiar faces at the end. Everyone improved their origami skills over the year.

Brush Pen Workshops

I held a series of brush pen workshops for the BGSU students in February 2021. It was designed that the students could learn more skills than they could at one workshop and could keep doing calligraphy at home by themselves without many materials. We provided brush pens for free and they could pick them up on campus.

Because face-to-face interaction was limited for everyone, I valued not only the contents of the programs but also something physical that the participants could keep as a memory.
Comments from my Supervisor

Akiko Kawano Jones
Teaching Professor; Japanese Undergraduate Advisor

“Thank you very much – 謝謝(gratitude)” is the first word that comes to me when I think of talking about Ms. Mai Hirashita. With her dedication, diligence, pleasant personality, artistic talent and creativity, we could get over this unique Corona pandemic time and we could conclude the successful two-year JOI program at BGSU. I cannot find the appropriate words to express how pleasant and enjoyable it was to be working with her. I would like to thank her and JOI program for the impact they have given to the communities of OH and the students of Bowling Green State University. I don’t believe that this is the end of the project we work together. I hope the goals of JOI will be continuing with us to promote the Japanese culture together, working for two countries, US and Japan.

Akiko Kawano Jones
Bowling Green State University

Message

Summer 2020 - summer 2021 was a different year for all of us; however, I felt close to my host site and the community thanks to all of their support. BGSU has a strong Japanese Program, and I am glad to have been able to help it expand and develop in a new way as a JOI coordinator. My term as a JOI coordinator has come to an end, but the relationships I have made here will continue, and what I have done as a coordinator will be passed down. I would like to thank everyone who has supported me and JOI.

- Mai Hirashita, JOI Coordinator for Bowling Green State University