Japan Outreach Initiative
Annual Report
(2019-2020)

Yoko Minami
The University of West Alabama
My biggest goal at the University of West Alabama (UWA) in the first year was to teach both Japanese language and culture as much as I can because there were a lot of people who didn’t know a lot about Japan.

For instance, I regularly organized Japanese conversation hours for not only UWA students but also people in Livingston. At first it was hard for them to pronounce Hiragana accurately, but the more they joined in the conversation hour, the more they were able to have fun learning Japanese greeting phrases and counting numbers.

Also, I held some Japanese culture workshops at UWA such as Origami, Japanese Calligraphy and folding Kabuto using newspapers. Every time I held the workshops, I always had presentations about the topic in order to make the UWA students understand better. Almost all of the students had never experienced Japanese culture before so these workshops must be unforgettable memories for them.

Moreover, I assisted a professor to pronounce Japanese in a history class on campus and helped office administration work in the International Program where I work!
Doing outreach at charter school is what my supervisor wanted me to do in the first year. I mainly taught origami, a few Japanese songs, one Japanese game and easy Japanese language from Kindergarten to 6th Grade on Fridays. Since Japanese culture is not common in Livingston where I live, I had no idea how to spread it there and how the students would react. However they seemed to enjoy outreach because one day after I was finished, some students asked me "When will you come next time?" and "I want to do origami again!". Also, when I was walking in front of the charter school, a lot of students called my name and sang the Japanese song I taught in front of me.

I would like to challenge a lot of new outreach activities for them in the second year too!
3. Activities off campus

I visited 5 cities for outreach in Alabama!!

Huntsville

Tuscaloosa

Birmingham

Mobile

Montgomery
Soran-bushi in Huntsville and Mobile

I participated in some festivals in order to dance soran-bushi with Airi who is a 17th coordinator living in Troy, Alabama. At first I had no idea how much people in Alabama knew about soran-bushi and Japan, but there were tons of people who took part in the festivals and watched our performance.

Airi and I were able to have such an outstanding performance by collaborating with other college students in Alabama. We also volunteered at Japanese booths and did origami, writing Japanese bookmarks and selling some goods.

Activities in Tuscaloosa

I organized some outreach activities in Tuscaloosa. For example, I visited girl scouts and an elementary school and then taught Japanese games and language to children.

Also, I did a presentation on demonstrating how to give a business card in Japanese style, which was a memorable outreach activity. This is because there were not only students but also people from SASAKAWA USA and USJETAA that I wanted to work with and I have never done that before so I was quite nervous.

Nevertheless, I was able to learn how important new challenges are. I hope I can do more of it for next year.
Activities in Montgomery and Birmingham

I took part in a Japanese festival called sono-con with Airi and we served curry rice there. It was the first time I tried to serve food in an activity. After that, we held some workshops such as Japanese game, Kabuto (folding newspaper) and Japanese calligraphy!

Since Airi is already connected with the University of Alabama in Birmingham, we visited there and taught soran-bushi dance for the students. Furthermore, I got an opportunity to do outreach for Japanese children who moved to the States from Japan in a church in Birmingham.

For next year, networking of outreach in the entire Alabama state is one of my biggest objectives.

Comment from supervisor

Yoko Minami, JOI Coordinator, has made a major impact on our university and in our area. We couldn't be happier. Building upon her programs of language and cultural outreach from the fall term both on UWA's campus and at local area schools, Yoko managed to create a small following of students we hope will begin a Japanese Club on campus. Yoko also managed several regional activities through the Japan American Society of Alabama and through the Girl Scouts of Tuscaloosa, in conjunction with the Honorary Consul General to Alabama and with Ingrid Galinat. The situation surrounding the current pandemic derailed many of the programs she planned. She has been resourceful and creative and continues to provided cultural outreach through virtual means. I am excited for year 2 and I hope we can work on several small new local/regional programs and one big program at UWA that will sustain her Japanese culture and language work for many years to come.

Mark D. Davis, Ph.D.
The University of West Alabama
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I had a lot of presentations on zoom for The university of West Alabama and the university of Alabama in Birmingham about Japanese food, school life, seasonal events and more. At first it was difficult for me to manage eye contact and time management remotely but I was able to get used to do those things. Every time I did the presentations, I also organized craft activities at once so that audience would not get bored. Online activities were not easy for me compared to in person activities; however, I hope they were worth for people in Alabama as much as face to face activities.
Doing online activities at kodomokai (kids group) in Birmingham was also important objective of second year. There were different age children from kindergarten to 6th grade in the kodomokai. I mainly taught origami paper craft to them, but then it was hard for me to explain well how to fold paper remotely so I tried to analyze the explanation over and over again in order to let the students understand easily. I also tried to interact with them during the activities. For instance, I asked them more often "How was it?" "Are you with me?" "Do you have any questions?" and so on. I had lots of fun to talk to them even on zoom!
3. Japanese garden

My supervisor and I decided to create Japanese garden on the campus of the University of West Alabama so that the students can feel Japanese culture. We planned to plant male Japanese Ginkgo, emperor Japanese, maple, Korean Maple, hinoki cypress, sakura cherry, dawn Redwood and dove-tree. Moreover, we created QR cords so that people can look up the details of the trees. Since there was no Japanese trees and garden at UWA before, I hope it would be a good sustainability and opportunity to get to know about Japan for not only the students but also local people in Alabama.

Comment from supervisor

Yoko Minami, JOI Coordinator, made a lasting impact on the campus of UWA. We built language and cultural outreach on UWA's campus, at local area schools, other universities in the region, and other civic organizations. Yoko developed relationships with the Japan American Society of Alabama, the Girl Scouts of Tuscaloosa, the Honorary Consul General to Alabama, and Ingrid Galinat, the current President at the Japanese Exchange and Teaching Program Alumni Association. Pandemic slowed some of the activities and derailed many of the programs she planned. Her creativity allowed her to provide outreach through virtual means. We will miss Yoko at UWA, but hopefully, the Unity garden will be a lasting reminder of her influence at UWA.

Mark D. Davis, Ph.D.
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