
JOI ANNUAL REPORT

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NEBRASKA

JOI PROGRAM
JAPAN OUTREACH INITIATIVE
About my host site:
University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) is located in Lincoln, Nebraska. It is the flagship public research university in Nebraska, and is a member of the Big Ten Conference. I am based in the office of Global Partnerships & Initiatives (GPI), which is the central hub for all university global activities at UNL. My main focus in the first year was to introduce myself and get to know the community. I reached out to over 2,000 people in the first year, from August 2021 to July 2022. The followings are the activities I did on campus and off campus for my first year.

**On Campus**
- Guest teaching
- Japanese cultural events
- Assisting GPI to build Japan Internship program
- Supporting Study Abroad Fairs/International campus events
- Community liaison for Japan and Japanese visitors

**Off Campus**
- Guest teaching at local Schools
- Collaborating with Asian Cultural Community Center
- Community liaison for Japan and Japanese visitor
- Supporting community cultural events
- Assisting local business with Japanese related projects
- Helping Japanese expats in Lincoln
Campus Activities

Fan Painting and Tea Tasting Event

As a part of Archie the Wolly Mammoth’s birthday party at the University of Nebraska State Museum at Morrill Hall, I collaborated with the Kawasaki Reading Room to hold a fan painting and tea tasting event. I prepared Japanese snacks and 150 sensu (folded Japanese fans) for the event. A lot of local people, children and adults, visited and enjoyed three different flavor of tea (genmaicha, hojicha, apricot) and fan painting.

It was pride month, so some guest painted with rainbow colors and other drew summer like designs. It was great to see everyone’s creative and artistic talents!

HUGE THANKS to the staff at State Museum, KRR, and all the students who helped us!

Challenges

Apart from Cultural outreach, one of my goals as a coordinator is to build a Japan Internship program at UNL. This is one of the most challenging tasks and a long-term goal for me. At first, I was nervous and was not sure where to start and needed to start from zero with my supervisor. We have been reaching out to faculty and staff in each departments to figure out current programs involving Japan and understand potential department needs and student demand while focus on networking. It is an on-going process, but we have narrowed down the areas to focus. My goal is to build a sustainable program for the UNL students by the end of my JOI term.
Community Engagement

During my time at Lincoln, I have reached out to a host of community organizations, including the Asian Community & Cultural Center (ACCC), Girl Scout, libraries, and numerous local schools.

One of the memorable events was ACCC’s 30th Anniversary and Asian American & Pacific Islander Heritage Month Celebration, which was attended by over 2,000 people in person and virtually. For the event, I collaborated with students at the Friends of Japan at the University of Nebraska, Omaha and Kwansei Gakuin University to dance "Soranbushi". At the Japanese booth, I had a paper Sakura tree project. I asked guests to help grow Sakura tree on the board. Thanks to all the people who visited our table, our Sakura tree was in full bloom by the end of the day!

It was wonderful that I could connect Vickie Schaepler, the Japanese Hall Project Coordinator, with ACCC. She preserves Japanese-American history in western Nebraska, sharing the importance of Japanese-American history in the local community. I try to help in this by improving the awareness of Japanese Cultures. I also visited Origami artist, Illustrator, and author Linda Stephen’s workshops at libraries and Lincoln Arts Festival. I assisted her workshops and got chances to meet local children and their parents.

A huge thanks to Rebecca, the Cultural Program Coordinator at ACCC, and Reiko Loukota, the advisor of FOJ. I really enjoy meeting and engaging with people in Nebraska. I look forward to connecting more people in Nebraska for my second year.
Guest Teaching

Over the course of the past year, I have visited three high schools and four colleges to guest teach or hold outreach activities in Japanese classes or Japanese Clubs.

I visited several schools to introduce and teach about Japanese culture, and in the process, I learned about the curiosities and the perspective of students about Japan. It encouraged and inspired me to be a better coordinator. I sincerely appreciate all the teachers and students who invited me to their schools! I tried to find and share similarities, and not just differences between Japan and Nebraska to appeal to more student’s interest.

I look forward to visiting more schools in Nebraska in my second year.

**Comments from the students:**

- "I loved the activities we did for club today. They were so much fun."
- "It was a dive into a new viewpoint of life."
- "Learned Japan was more "western" than I expected."
- "Thank you for spending your time coming here. It really helped motivate me to learn more about Japan and Japanese."
Comments from Supervisor

It has been a pleasure and a privilege to work alongside Mariko. She is precisely the social butterfly we needed fluttering about Nebraska to spark curiosity and interest about the wider world. Mariko has a tenaciously positive and fearless attitude, as well as an independently motivated will that has driven her far in her work. She is always the first to volunteer to help others and is glad to collaborate with anyone. This has all made her a regular member in the hearts of the Global Nebraska team at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln.

From the moment of her arrival, she has taken the lead to reach out and get to know the community and Nebraska as a whole. Her engagement with the community has been so thorough, that she is now my reference point for community contacts and events as she has a greater knowledge of the community than I do at this point. As she has gotten to know the community, she has led her own community events independently and in collaboration with other organization, schools, and businesses. These connections are vital in building the kind of community connections between UNL, Japan, and the broader Nebraskan community. Moving forward, we hope to establish at UNL a lasting Japan internship or exchange program that meets the needs of departments and students.

We are confident about Mariko’s lasting positive impact on UNL and the community in building bridges between Japan and Nebraska. More importantly, we treasure the lasting friendship that Mariko has imbued in our community and in our office.

– Christopher C. Heselton, PhD.