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My host site is Montana State University Billings (MSUB). Billings is the largest city in the state of Montana. I am in the Office of International Studies, which supports the international community at MSUB with effective and efficient serves. My focus in the first year of JOI coordinator was to know the Billings community and to build a network.

As for on campus activities, I started East Asia Club as the adviser, and managed cultural events for the students. In addition, I have taken charge of tutoring for the students who took the Japanese online class and supported their Japanese language learning. The most challenging thing was to be in charge of short-term ESL (English as a Second Language) program for Prefectural University of Kumamoto (PUK) in Japan. Kumamoto is a sister state of Montana, and MSUB and PUK have been partners for over 30 years. I was very honored to support their precious life in Billings and help them interact with locals. This experience made the opportunity to spread more Japanese culture into the community. In addition, I got collaborated with the public library, art museum, public school and afterschool program for introducing Japanese culture.

In this report, I am highlighting my top three outreach activities from the first year. I appreciate all of the support from MSUB and the Billings community.
I founded the East Asia Club as an advisor alongside the Korean language instructor. We managed monthly East Asian cultural events on campus. All events are free and open to the public. I organized a lot of Japanese cultural events, such as an origami crane workshop, Japanese sweets-tasting event, movie night, calligraphy workshop, tea ceremony and chopstick challenge event.

The biggest successful event was the sushi making workshop. It was held in the university cafeteria during dinner time with the help of the university dining. I prepared the ingredients for sushi in the cafeteria kitchen all day with a Japanese exchange student. That was harder than I expected. Over 70 students joined this event and enjoyed making their own sushi rolls. Some of the students made them for their friends and family. It is always important to organize events that experience different culture with fun.

One of MSUB students told me that he is very interested in Japanese culture, but that there are limited opportunities to experience real Japanese culture in Billings and even Montana. I would like to work on making more chances to experience Japanese culture for the MSUB students in the second year.
I hosted a tea ceremony event at the Yellowstone Art Museum on November 1st and 2nd. The museum hosted an East Asia Exhibition last fall and gave me this great opportunity as a special event of the exhibition. It was first time for me to collaborate with the local organization in Billings. It was a 90-minute event, therefore I managed 2 sections—a presentation part and hands-on part. In the presentation section, I introduced the history, concept and manner of the tea ceremony and also how people drink green tea in Japan.

I performed the tea ceremony with a Japanese exchange student and demonstrated three main parts—consuming sweets, making tea and drinking tea. In the hands-on part, the guests made tea by themselves from matcha powder with tea whisks and tea bowls. Most of the guests liked the pure flavor and aroma of the green tea. The hardest thing was to get good quality and affordable tea ceremony materials. I was not familiar with the tea ceremony, therefore I reached out the tea ceremony organization and an expert about tea ceremonies from another state.

Here are some comments from guests of this events, "Learned a lot from the lecture and enjoyed tea and sweets," "Feeling peaceful in tea ceremony," "Beautiful culture. I want to learn more," and "I will make tea for family." This event allowed the guests to gain knowledge of the tea ceremony and become more interested in Japanese culture. I would like to continue to spread the beauty of traditional Japanese culture to the community.
Throughout the year, I visited local daycares, elementary schools, middle schools, high schools and colleges and joined a total of 24 classes for outreach activities. I always enjoy sharing about Japan with American students because they are full of curiosity and ask me tons of questions all the time. Most elementary students in Billings are not familiar with Japan. Everyone was very surprised to know that Japan is the smaller than the state of Montana, yet Japan has such a larger population. I always talk about how Japan is far away from the U.S. but there are a lot of Japanese culture, technology and food around them. Because I wanted them to feel closer to Japanese culture. I taught origami craft and how to use chopsticks, Japanese calligraphy and read Japanese fairy tales as Japanese outreach. The most interesting thing for them was to know how different Japanese school life is from their own experiences. After my activities, some students came to me to say thank you and gave me big hugs. That was one of the happiest moments from the school visits.

There are very limited chances to be exposed to foreign cultures in Billings. I would like to continue to visit local schools, sharing Japanese culture with more students in my second year. I hope that gives global perspectives and motivation for learning new languages and cultures.
My second year goal is to run a successful Japan Themed Semester next fall. The Office of International Studies at MSUB hosts a Global Studies Seminar: Themed Semester Program in the fall semesters that showcase a region or country of the world through a series of cultural events. Next fall, Japan will be highlighted, and I am taking the lead for this program and organizing a Japan Festival to launch the semester, followed by weekly cultural workshops and a Japanese Film Festival. I hope a lot of community members join each event and experience the attraction of Japanese culture in various aspects. Moreover I would like to expand my outreach network and visit more local schools and organizations.

Kaoru has been a wonderful addition to our office and has brought incredible energy and drive to the JOI program’s initiatives of spreading Japanese culture to our university and local communities. She has been a true asset to our office and to the community organizations and schools in which Kaoru became fully integrated, helping to spread Japanese cultural awareness to young children, piquing their interest at an early age. Kaoru worked closely with our Korean and Japanese instructors to build interest in East Asia and support Japanese language learning. She also seamlessly took the lead on the coordination of a month-long ESL program for Japanese students, working closely with local organizations and host families to run a fantastic intercultural exchange. We are so excited to have her leadership on the upcoming Global Studies Seminar: Japan Themed Semester. She has already exhibited exemplary organizational skills, and we are confident that with her coordination, the semester’s programming will go forward smoothly. We look forward to continue supporting and working alongside Kaoru in the coming year as she promotes both JOI’s and our office’s missions and goals.