Japan Outreach Initiative
Annual Report

2012-2013

Mai Hoshino, International Studies and Programs, University of Nebraska at Omaha
Japanese Ambience

One of my memorable things to do in Omaha in 2012 is to be a volunteer for Japanese Ambience at Lauritzen Garden in Omaha. This event has held on weekends in October every year. On the day of the event, we have introduced and sold Japanese snacks, green tea, green tea ice cream, Origami, Japanese calligraphy, and chopsticks activity. In addition to these things this year, we performed the Soran bushi dance thanks to the Japanese and American volunteers from UNO Japanese exchange students this year. They practiced for a few weeks to show a wonderful powerful Japanese dance and they succeed it. Most of the visitors enjoyed seeing the performance and surprised how the dance is powerful.

Until the way to success this event, so many people in Omaha got involved with the preparation. Some people practiced Soran bushi dance or learnt how to teach Origami in English, others prepared everything which is important in order to success the event. Everybody from younger generation to older generation cooperated together and tried to success, and enjoyed the event itself. Although the day of the event was so cold and rainy days, people in Omaha were coming to see the performance and enjoyed touching the different culture from Americans. Like this small activity, it was one of the biggest influences to widen the Japanese culture to the Midwest area.
Study Tour to Japan in 2013

Thanks to a travel grant from the Japan Foundation Center for Global Partnership, nine UNO students and one faculty member had the opportunity to visit Japan again. This is our second time challenge to organize the tour so we tried to make a better itinerary compared with last year’s, for students who could have got a chance to join our tour. We focused on where we should visit in Japan. There are so many beautiful places to see for them; however, we must choose appropriate places in which were related to Professor Halla Kim’s class. Through the meeting and conversation with Uno staffs, we finally decided to visit Tokyo, Shizuoka, Kyoto, Nara, and Hiroshima in the end. We included sightseeing places, such as Yasukuni shrines, Asakusa, Ukiyoe museum in Tokyo, Nihon Daira, Miho no Matsubara in Shizuoka, Kiyomizu temple, Tetsugaku no michi in Kyoto, Todaiji temple, Kofukuji temple, Kasuga taisha in Nara, Itsukushima shrines, peace park in Hiroshima. In understanding the Japanese philosophical idea and history, there places were most important to visit, and every student studied these sightseeing places before the departure and gave a small presentation at each site.

In addition to this, we organized taking a lecture at each places, and lectures were given by Prof. Aronson from Waseda University, Prof. Utsunomiya from Shizuoka University, Prof. Nakaoka from Osaka University, and Prof. Unoda from Osaka University. Thanks to these professors, all of us could take lectures which were focused on not only Japanese philosophy but also Japanese history and society. Besides, each university had helped us to make our tour better since we started making itinerary. Thanks to their help, we had a group discussion with Japanese student who are interested in learning English. UNO student enjoyed having communication with Japanese students, and they learned about the difference of school facilities, classes, and student’s life. It could be impossible for students to experience and learn a real point of Japan if they could not join this tour.

Comment from Supervisor

Once again, UNO was awarded a grant from the Japan Foundation to send a group of students who were enrolled in Professor Halla Kim’s Asian Philosophy course to Japan for a study tour.

Mai was the primary organizer of the tour and was instrumental to the success of the trip.
We are so thankful for the experience and support from the Japan Foundation, and the cooperation of the staff from the Office of International Affairs of Shizuoka University, and the cooperation of the staff from Hiroshima College of Foreign Languages. Their support was crucial to the success of our visit.

Visit to retirement house in Omaha

This year, I challenged to visit retirement house to give a presentation, which I could not have done last year. It was hard for me to find a connection for visiting retirement house, but thanks to my supervisor, he introduced me a wonderful retirement house and I got a chance to visit there finally. I did not have enough experience to talk with elderly people so I was a bit nervous to talk and give a presentation at first time. However, people who have lived in the house were so kind and very gentle, and they made me laugh because of their funny American jokes. After the small talks, I started giving a presentation, which was about the difference between Japanese language and American language. It was so glad that they concentrated my presentation and tries to learn useful Japanese, for example how to say hello, good afternoon, and good evening, as well as how to introduce their selves in Japanese.

It was very fun time and the presentation time flies very fast. After the presentation, many people had interested Japanese and they gave me many questions such as my favorite American food, places, and things to do. It seems to me that they enjoyed the atmosphere with learning Japanese language as well as teaching American culture for me.

Mai continued her community outreach throughout this past year. I received a request from a community member to have someone go to a retirement home to share information about Japanese language and culture and Mai was the natural choice. After her visit there, I received a glowing report from the activities coordinator telling me how much the residents enjoyed her visit.

I think it turned out to be a great learning experience for Mai as well!
School Visits

A major part of JOI’s mission is to visit schools. This past year has presented many wonderful opportunities to promote Japanese culture in Omaha. Visiting schools to make presentations and participate in activities about culture (such as geography, language, history, calligraphy and origami) has served to deepen the connection to Japanese culture for many of the citizens of Omaha, which is not such a big city. Most of the students I visited had not had any prior experience with Japanese activities, and many of them seemed happy to learn something new about a different culture.

Even though America is considered one of the great melting pots of races, in the Midwest it is a bit difficult to learn about and experience a variety of cultural activities. Promoting Japanese culture in the schools will definitely help strengthen the relationship between Japan and America. I am aware that some high school students hope to study Japanese as exchange students after they become university students; others enjoyed learning different cultural aspects through the school visit. These visits were such great opportunities to learn - not only for the kids but also myself.

Supervisor Comment

We have enjoyed having Mai serve as the JOI Coordinator at the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO). She has shared Japanese culture with students at a variety of learning levels, including our university-level students who are studying Japanese language. Her enthusiasm and creativity have been great assets to her as she reaches out to diverse groups on campus and in the community at large.
Comments from students

- Amazing country and I’ll be going there someday.
- Thank you so much!
- They are very different from USA.
- I learned how to greet in Japanese.
- Today, I learned about the variety in Japanese schedules. I think it’s cool that there is lots of variety.

Study Tour to Japan

Thanks to a travel grant from the Japan Foundation Center for Global Partnership, nine UNO students and one faculty member had the opportunity to visit Japan over Spring break. The primary focus of the Global Partnership program is to facilitate exchange and understanding between Japan and the US. Professor Halla Kim, UNO Department of Philosophy, and I organized the tour. The main goal of the study tour was to provide students with firsthand experience that would allow them to gain a more nuanced and balanced understanding of Japan. The tour also focused on understanding the unique character of Japan’s intellectual heritage.

 Stops were made in Tokyo, Kanagawa, Shizuoka, and Hiroshima. We had an especially exceptional stay in Shizuoka City, where we made memories to last for the rest of our lives. We visited Shizuoka University, which is one of UNO’s longest-lasting sister university relationships. Students were able to sit in on lectures from Japanese professors and acquire additional knowledge on a variety of Japanese-related subjects. We had a chance to meet with groups of Shizuoka students and fostered the relationship between Japanese and American students. This experience was a true international cultural exchange between Japan and America.

Our study tour provided wonderful memories, and we are so thankful for the experience and support from the Japan Foundation and the cooperation of the staff from the Office of International Affairs of Shizuoka University. Their support was crucial to the success of our visit.

Comment from Student Participant

“I had the pleasure of going on the study tour to Japan. Mai Hoshino was an integral part in making this trip possible. She assisted with almost every aspect of the Study Tour and guided the Tour with relative ease despite the large cities and varying schedules. She showed excellent leadership skills and knowledge of Japanese culture during visits to shrines and various historic sites as well as the visits to the Universities. She was a great guide and everyone on the tour appreciated her assistance with all of the reservations and translations. She really made the trip fantastic.”

-- Elizabeth Hendrix
Fund-Raising Event for East Japan Earthquake

Coordinating the Fund-Raising event was a challenge. Thanks to a lot of volunteers who supported this event, it was very successful. One of the things this event included was the sale of Curry Rice. UNO and Japanese students started to make the rice early in the morning. Some of the Japanese had made the curry at home, so that the curry rice would be ready for sale to those who attended the event. I heard many positive comments from people who bought the curry rice; many of them said they enjoyed eating the Japanese-style curry. Another part of this event was a Bake Sale and Silent Auction. Lots of people made cookies, Japanese snacks, and cakes for the bake sale, and some Japanese contributed traditional crafts and other items for the auction. In addition, we had an Earthquake Information Board, some pictures drawn by children in Tohoku, the music and singing of “Be not Defeated”, and a presentation about earthquake relief in Japan.

We were sincerely appreciative of the people who came to this event to show their support for the victims of the earthquake.

Supervisor Comment

The Tohoku Earthquake Fundraiser was a tremendous success, bringing the campus and the community together to try to make the world a better place. A total of $4201.78 was raised and distributed to two organizations. We are very proud of Mai’s continued efforts at raising awareness about the many aspects of Japanese culture.
* Donations were sent to the following 2 organizations:

1) Education Fund for the Tohoku Earthquake Orphans in Soma-city, Fukushima

2) Iwate Project NEXT. “NEXT” helps people who are unable to receive assistance to keep them from having to live in the public shelters.