University Activities

There were many events/activities at the university during my first year. I organized/attended Conversation Café, Japan-America Cultural Exchange Club (JACEC), Aki Matsuri (Fall Festival), Sakura Matsuri (Cherry Blossom Festival), and Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT) Study Class.

Conversation Café was held once a week for the students who are studying Japanese. With the Japanese students’ help, participants were divided among their level; they reviewed the class and practiced conversation about the topic they were interested in. At the last 20 minutes, Japanese students and I did a short presentation related to Japanese culture. This café was also a good chance for Japanese and non-Japanese students to get to know each other as well.

Aki Matsuri and Sakura Matsuri were big events opened to the public. At Aki Matsuri, I had a booth for “Kirigami (Cutting papers in patterns)” and also performed Yosakoi (Japanese traditional dance) with the JACEC members. Approximately more than 200 people attended. Sakura Matsuri was held at the mall and it was the 28th year this year. I was in charge of the “Kimono booth” where people tried wearing Kimono/Yukata and take pictures. Also, with the corroboration of JACEC and JVC, we performed “Radio Taisoo(Radio Exercise)” and sang “Sakura (Japanese Song)” on the stage. We also introduced school life and school uniforms to the audience by having some of the Japanese students wear the actual uniforms. When we performed Radio Taisoo, we had the audience participate as well!

Comment by Supervisor, Dr. Koji Arizumi
There is no better time in history that we all need to exchange our ideas and cultures with each other. I believe a grass-root movement is the strongest tool to do this. Yumi is surely contributing her skills and ideas to provide Japanese culture to the people of Alabama. She works every day.
I did presentations to pre-school children to university students and adults in my first year. The topic varied from origami, calligraphy to business and education matters. Smaller children seemed to enjoy origami and learning about holidays and its related art activities, while high school students and university students were more interested in daily life in Japan and pop culture. For the elementary school children, “Kamishibai” (Japanese story telling) was the best activity. Children were very interested in the special wooden stage I used and the Japanese traditional stories. I heard many of them saying “I liked everything!!” and trying to figure out how I was reading the story while they were looking at the pictures.

As part of the activity, 4th graders and high school students wrote letters to pen pals living in Hokkaido, Japan. They wrote letters in English and in Japanese. It became a grass root opportunity for both American and Japanese students to make friends who are in the same age range.

When I do presentations, I try to introduce Japanese language including greetings, numbers, and colors as well. At the end of each presentation/activity, students say to me, “Yumi-san, arigatoo gozaimasu!(Thank you, Ms. Yumi!)” or “Sayonara! (Good bye!)” with a big smile. That always makes me very happy.

Comment by Supervisor, Dr. Koji Arizumi

Many of the students of Japanese at UA who took Japanese class told me their motivation originated from the experience of Japanese culture during childhood. I’m sure these kids Yumi taught will keep their interest and learn Japanese in the future. This surely contributes to a good future relationship between the US and Japan. Good job, Yumi!

Comment by Elementary School Teacher

I was extremely satisfied with the activities and the level of student engagement. It was amazing to me how little they knew about Japan so this was a wonderful learning opportunity.
Narashino City in Chiba prefecture has been the sister city of Tuscaloosa since 1986, soon after JVC established its plant in Tuscaloosa. Every other year, 12-17 students from three different high schools in Tuscaloosa go to Narashino during summer. Also, students from Narashino come to Tuscaloosa in the same years. Students visit schools and stay with their host family. They also go to side trip to Tokyo, Nara, and Kyoto.

Since I wanted the exchange student delegates to have some knowledge about Japan and its language and culture before their actual visit, I started a Japanese language class every Saturday. This class focused on “Survival Japanese” by having a different topic every week and learned the phrases related to it. They learned general information about Japan, school life, housing, family, food, introducing themselves, phrases to ask questions to their host family and more.

During the class, every student also did a presentation about the topic they were interested in. They learned about etiquette, music, anime, food, sight seeing spots etc. from each other’s presentation.

One day, we did cooking and made onigiri (rice ball) and tamagoyaki (rolled egg). Students enjoyed cooking and tasting Japanese traditional food.

**Comment by Students**

- Thank you sooooooo much! I was so nervous about meeting my host family and not being able to speak with them, but now I am very excited to meet them and to try a bunch of new things in Japan. I owe this will to you and this class. Arigatoo gozaimasu!

- I really enjoyed learning how high school students lived compared to us. It was also really cool to get a first-hand experience with cooking and conversation.

**Comment by Lisa Keyes , Sister Cities Executive Director**

Yumi Miyatake has been an extraordinary asset to the Tuscaloosa Sister Cities International organization, as well as the entire community this past year. She has shared her knowledge and love of Japan with so many individuals and groups in Tuscaloosa and West Alabama, creating a special bond between our nations and cultures. We feel truly fortunate to have Yumi-san here, and look forward to the next year with her, as she continues to showcase fascinating Japan in Tuscaloosa (including preparing the 100+ member Alabama Choir School performers and families for their May/June visit to Tokyo, Kyoto, Nara, and Tuscaloosa’s Japanese Sister City, Narashino)!