

Japanese: A Hidden Language at USU

When one thinks of languages taught here at Utah State University, you probably think of the normal, well known spectrum of languages: Spanish, German, French. You might have friends who have taken a Russian, Chinese, or Portuguese class, or have tested out of other, more obscure languages like Tagalog. What you may not realize is that USU also boasts an immersive Japanese program.

Japanese is one of the hardest languages to learn if you're a native English speaker according to the Foreign Service Institute. There aren't that many people who know how to speak that language and so chances to practice what you're learning are incredibly difficult to come by. There are no traditional restaurants or events here in Logan unless the Japan club is hosting them according to Professor Yurika Izumi. The lack of opportunity coupled with the relatively low number of students taking Japanese, around 85 students this semester, meant that creative ways to use the language was developed - culture days, their own tutoring lab, aid from community members.

Tucked away on the fourth floor of the geology building is a little known corner where Japanese learners go every week. This is the Japanese learning community room. The room is set up like it might be in Japan, with low tables and no shoes allowed. The walls are lined with Japanese books. They have a computer devoted to just Japanese. Use is limited to students learning Japanese and Japanese tutors. No one else would really be able to use it as it's all in Japanese too. Lower division students are required to come here every week to be able to have time to practice using what they are learning in class. They are tutored by a select few upper division students, the 5-7 Japanese foreign exchange students, and non-student Japanese community members who come up every week. When asked if having this weekly visit as part of the curriculum was helpful, Professor Atsuko Neely said, "It is a necessity.. You don't get to

use... outside of the classroom”. The need to practice Japanese was the driving factor in getting a Japanese learning community room established.

Students sign up and have scheduled appointments to meet with these tutors every week. It's nice to have that time though because it provides an opportunity for them to develop friendships with others within the language - to develop a sense of camaraderie - and it helps to know who you can turn to for help with homework. By knowing these upper division students through the lab it's also not as weird when a food day rolls around.

Food days are a few times every semester and Japanese students gather together throughout the day in the Family Life building and prepare traditional Japanese cuisine. This last semester they were able to gather and all enjoyed making this delicious food! When asked about attending a food day, KJ Adachi said that “food day is fun but doesn't really change the learning



that much. It's just a fun day!" The point is to expose students to a different kind of education to what they might get in a normal classroom. It's a great way to let loose and see more of what it's like to be Japanese - to read Japanese recipes, which isn't the easiest, to get involved in a different way of cooking, and to eat Japanese food! Having the opportunity to go into a

kitchen and make Japanese food is a great experience for the students and something they all seem to enjoy!

Japan's culture is unique to the world. It's special and something that's hard to replicate. There are certain aspects of Japanese life and culture that are easier to experience here in Logan more than others. Food is part of that experience but only a small fraction of that culture as a whole. Culture is who we are as a people and "we need to nurture that [culture]. It's really difficult in Cache Valley" said Professor Neely. That's what is so special about these language classes. They are a way of transporting that culture from across the globe to own little town in Utah. This culture is the lifeblood of who people are and where they come from. Professors Izumi and Neely do their absolute best to make sure that that culture is preserved and passed



on to those students who desire to have it - in more than just language. It involves countless hours of grading, of extra work to help train tutors, of preparing for food day. And do students love them for it? Of course!

The Japanese program here at Utah State is amazing and so inviting to those

who want to learn. They offer interesting additions that most programs don't have such as private tutoring, food culture days, community member help, and what college student can resist making and eating authentic Japanese food every semester?