

JSI Fellow Project Summary

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I have taken away an immeasurable amount of wonderful information from the 2018 AASCU Japan Studies Institute. As a scholar, a teacher, an artist, and a human being, I truly feel this has been one of the most enriching experiences of my life. As such, I have a multitude of various ways I intend to use what I have learned in order to 1) stimulate interest in Japan among my students and 2) initiate specific plans that I will take back to my JSU classroom.

First, I will be meeting with the Dean of Arts and Humanities as well as the Provost to discuss ways in which to expand Japanese-oriented courses in the overall University curriculum, particularly Japanese language courses. I will also be discussing with them ways in which we can explore many of the various exchange programs with other Japanese institutes and their students.

Second, I will also look at ways in which I can expand interest in Japan within my specific department. The primary way I hope to accomplish this is by proposing a Japanese production of some fashion for our 2019/2020 Mainstage season. Possibilities include a classic Noh or Kyogen or Kabuki or Bunraku play, or perhaps even a more contemporary play from the current Japanese canon of performance. I am also interested in the possibility of creating a hybrid production, for example creating or adapting or devising a variation of a classical Japanese piece. As a potential example, it might be fun to do a wacky melding of Kyogen and Italian Commedia dell'arte, or even American Vaudeville. Another example might be doing a dual-language production combining re-arranged passages from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* with Chikamatsu Monzaemon's *The Love Suicides at Sonezaki* (*Sonezaki Shinjū*). In future years, if my university is able to establish a strong exchange relationship with a Japanese institution, I would love to explore doing such work in collaboration with Japanese Drama faculty and students to create a dual-language production, where the Japanese students come to my school and perform on our stage, and then my students go to Japan and perform at their school.

Third, I also plan on assisting faculty and staff in other departments in exploring the possibility of creating new courses together and possibly team-teaching them across disciplines. For example, I have already initiated talks with David Thornton, Professor of Computer Science, about the prospect of co-teaching a course on the "History of Video Games," in which I would include a massive amount of material on Japanese video games. I have also discussed the possibility of co-teaching a course with new faculty member Helen Kaibara, Professor of History (who just so happens to specialize on Japan) on the "History of Japan through Performance," where we would use theatre and film to study the history of Japan. I have also been in talks with the English Department about teaching a course specifically on anime and manga.

Fourth, I will also be meeting with JSU Librarian Kim Westbrook this summer to personally assist her with expanding the library collection with more materials on Japan, especially on anime, manga, performance, and popular culture.

Finally, I will also be expanding some of my pre-existing courses to include more material on Japan and Japanese culture. As of this moment, I already have specific plans for two of the courses I will be teaching this upcoming year: my "Introduction to the Theatre" course and my "Honors Forum" course.

My "Introduction to the Theatre" course is a university-wide general education requirement that usually enrolls 45 students per section. My general breakdown (which for the

most part follows the agreed upon departmental structure and student learning objectives as well as the textbook *Theatre In Your Life*, third edition) covers basic dramatic theory and the making of theatre in the first half of the semester and historical topics in the second half. Just this past year, instead of trying to cover all of world theatre history or even Western theatre history, I tried a new, participatory tactic of presenting a number of weekly “topics” or “units” and then after the midterm, letting the students vote on which they were most interested. Past topics included, for example, “Greek Theatre,” “Shakespeare,” “African-American Theatre,” and “LGBTQ Theatre.” Now I feel prepared to include a thorough unit on Japanese Theatre as well, expanding the scant amount of information in the textbook into a full week-long unit that would cover No, Kyogen, Kabuki, and Bunraku. Not only would I lecture on these topics, I would also include viewings (primarily on YouTube) of various selections of these Japanese performances. I also might let the class act out certain passages of Japanese plays for extra credit.

My “Honors Forum” course is a special new course I have just designed for the elite Honors students of JSU at the behest of the Dean and the Honors Program Director. The 1-credit course focuses on the core theories of Performance Studies and how they apply to a number of various performance forms and styles. The primary objectives for the course are to increase student-to-student engagement as well as advanced critical thinking and active participation. The general format of the course revolves around short bi-weekly readings and bi-weekly “field trips” to see various performances as a class. Students then discuss their reactions to the performances through the lens of the readings and their own personal reactions both in the classroom as well as through interactive blogs. Past field trips have included national tours of Broadway musicals, movie screenings, professional ballet, college football games, live jury trials at the County Courthouse, and prayer services at a Mosque. These performances are not only fun and great at bringing the students together, but they also encourage the students to raise important questions about identity formation and cultural constructs. As such, during the spring semester of this upcoming academic year, I have already planned a field trip to a local “Asian Cultures Festival” by the name of “Annicon” (the convention takes place in Anniston, Alabama, and is scheduled for March 2nd, 2019). As described on the event’s official website (<http://www.annicon.com/about-annicon.html>), “AnniCon began in March 2012 as a free, one-day mini-convention of Japanese culture including art, music, costuming, manga, anime, food, history, and special guests.” This annual convention in small-town Alabama currently saw an amazing attendance of over 2000 people this past year. For the Honors Forum course, we would attend this performance with a particular eye towards not only ethnographic participation, but also on the formation of the nerd/otaku identity. I will have the students prepare by reading a short article on Japanese otaku, “Nerd Nation: Otaku and Youth Subcultures in Contemporary Japan” by William M. Tsutsui. We will discuss the reading in class and engage in a group discussion about American nerds and Japanese otaku. Then each student will attend Annicon for a minimum of two hours. Then over the following week, each student will write a 500-word blog entry (including two responses to the blogs of their peers as well as time-stamped selfies) on the class website sharing their personal reactions to the performance event as social ritual and a special space for identity performance and performativity.

In these various ways, I am confident that will be able to successfully apply all of the wonderful things I learned at JSI this year and stimulate an interest in Japan in my colleagues, my community, and most importantly, my students, both in and out of the classroom.