

Interview with Dr. Koji Arizumi from the University of Alabama

Read our interview with Dr. Koji Arizumi. Dr. Arizumi teaches Japanese and Japanese literature at the University of Alabama. He is also the head of the Critical Languages Center at UA.

We discuss different topics such as different resources available within and outside of UA, ways to engage in Japanese culture, and more.

What are your personal connections to Japan?

I grew up in Japan, and my brother, sister, and relatives are still living in Japan. I have many friends including university professors, who work with the UA Japanese Program for collaborative learning. I conducted summer Study Abroad programs at Chiba and Kansai Gaidai in Japan many times and stay in close contact with professors there. Also, I'm in contact with many UA graduates who studied Japanese and are now living in Japan. So, I have many very strong connections to Japan.

Could you discuss any activities and resources (related to Japanese culture/language) that are available through the university?

UA offers a Japanese minor (the highest level is 4th year Japanese), and we have four semesters (2 academic years) of online Japanese courses, of which our online tutors give one-to-one (or group) interactive sessions via Zoom. There are many students learning Japanese including high school students, to post-graduate adults not only in the USA, but in foreign countries.

Are there any outside resources or activities that you would recommend to those interested in learning more about the Japanese language and culture?

There are Japanese botanical gardens in Birmingham Alabama that often hold Japanese culture events, and some local museums have special events but not permanent exhibitions

Have you noticed a pattern/trend as to why your students are interested in Japan or the Japanese language?

Until 20 years ago, many students who were interested in Japanese were business related people, but nowadays, the majority are motivated through Japanese anime, or Pokemon with which they played in childhood.

Do many of your students express the intent to incorporate their love for Japan into their future careers or daily life?

Yes, many students of mine go to Japan, and either study or work there after graduation.

If so, are there any common/similar goals that you've noticed regarding your students' plans?

Even though the majority of my students teach English there first, after that, it varies a lot as they gain career work in business, enter graduate school, or other different disciplines.

How do you stay engaged in Japanese culture from home?

I watch Japanese news and dramas every day through YouTube and other Internet resources, and read Japanese novels and non-fiction books, and research in Japanese for my classes.

How do you keep the students in the program interested and engaged in Japan/Japanese culture?

We introduce our students to a wide variety of Japanese history, visual and performing arts, traditional arts like tea ceremony, shodou and ikebana. We have a "culture center" that has all the tools (even actual tatami mats) for hands-on experience with Japanese culture. The center has a large library of books in English and Japanese. We try to teach our students to think deeply about Japan and its people and find what is special about Japan that they may have never thought about, as a way of engaging them in more creative reflection about Japanese society and arts.

Do you have any final thoughts or words of encouragement for those interested in the language and the culture?

Considering the cultural diversity and global trends of the 21st century, everyone should try and understand different cultures in the world, and Japanese culture/language is one of the most interesting.