

# **Interview with Dr. Yumi Takamiya from the University of Alabama at Birmingham**

## **Could you give a brief introduction of yourself and your connection to Japan?**

I grew up in Japan. Ever since I was little, I wanted to be a teacher. When I was in high school, I was able to go to San Diego, California for a month for a homestay. After college (in Japan) I earned my certificates to teach Japanese as a first language to Japanese students, and Japanese as a foreign language to foreign students. As a student, I taught Japanese in New Zealand and at a local high school in Japan. I enjoyed both experiences, but I more interested in teaching to foreigners as they come from many different backgrounds and I get more feedback; I learn a lot from them. I taught at several universities in Japan after I graduated and then decided to get my master's degree and PhD here in the U.S.

## **Could you talk about any resources/activities that are offered at the university?**

At UAB, we have the Japanese Culture Club (JCC) and regular Japanese conversation tables. I also share various websites and resources. Especially since classes are mostly virtual right now, I inform students of many virtual Japanese events. There are many Japanese culture ambassadors like professional Japanese tea teachers, professional chefs, Kendo fencing teachers, calligraphy teachers, etc. There are many people who are trained to teach Japanese culture. When things get back to normal, I would like to invite them to give a hand with teaching students about Japanese culture. We are about to establish a Japanese major program starting this Fall 2021 at UAB. This new Japanese concentration will be the first and only undergraduate Japanese major in the state of Alabama. I hope our new major program will offer students opportunities to learn deeper about Japanese language and culture.

## **Have you noticed any trends/patterns as to why your students are interested in the Japanese language and culture?**

Many students have been introduced to Japanese anime, games, and JPOP since they were kids. Mainly, students grow interested through pop culture. However, Japanese culture is more than just anime and games; so, as a teacher, I need to teach both language and culture at the same time. I want to give more opportunity for students to broaden their views.

## **Could you talk briefly about your plans for the faculty led program?**

Due to current travel restrictions, the faculty led program for this upcoming Summer has been cancelled. Next Summer, hopefully travel will be allowed. I plan to take students on a trip to Kyushu, Tohoku and Hokkaido area in the future.

**How do you stay engaged with Japanese culture outside of the university?**

We have many Japanese families as there are many Japanese companies here. On Saturdays, I teach Japanese students at a Birmingham supplementary school. I'm also a teacher with the Japanese Children's Club meeting at a local church. Although, we're meeting virtually right now.