

Students Participate in Service-Learning Program in Japan

By Tabitha Mueller
Contributing Writer

Four students from Middlebury College participated in an intensive, four-week service-learning program in Japan over the summer that took them from the busy city streets of Tokyo to the quiet, rural community of Tenryumura. Two students from International Christian University and four students from The Chinese University of Hong Kong joined them.

The group of ten students came from different countries, academic disciplines and varying levels of Japanese proficiency. Despite their differences, they all engaged in service activities such as planting soybeans, clearing blueberry patches, teaching in elementary classrooms and interacting with elderly Japanese citizens.

Sanae Eda, director of the Middlebury C.V. Starr School in Japan, and Kristin Mullins, coordinator for the College's Language in Motion program created and piloted the program. They realized that the service learning center at ICU in Japan allowed students to participate in service learning projects in countries throughout Asia and Southeast Asia, but not in Japan.

"[We] really wanted to have a program where students [came] to Japan from other countries, colleges and universities. The program is not just different institutions collaborating but also students from different institutions collaborating," Mullins said.

Mullins and Eda wanted an intercultural program that encouraged students to explore the meaning of service within an international context.

"The question we kept looking at was, 'What is service?' Do we have a shared understanding of service within this group? And then when we are working with communities and community members it's not

as if you have one community, one personality and one perspective," Mullins said.

Michiko Yoshino '17, a Japanese Studies and Sociology double major and a member of the service-learning project, said that during orientation the students discussed the idea of service, but did not leave with one concrete definition.

Imagine Yoshino's surprise, then, when the vice mayor of Tenryumura, instead of asking the students to perform labor-intensive tasks, requested that they share a meal and converse with older members of the community. The vice mayor emphasized the value of young people spending time interacting with Japan's aging population.

Reflecting upon the program Yoshino recalled, "At that point I questioned everything. It was a pilot program, so I didn't

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SERVICE PROGRAM PARTICIPANT

know what to expect. Making connections and hanging out with residents in Tenryumura didn't feel like 'work' and I kept wondering when we would actually start helping people." It was not until Yoshino let go of her preconceived ideas of service that she began to understand. "Service isn't about 'fixing what is broken,'" Yoshino said. "It's [about] strengthening a community in whatever way that we can. And if people were happier because we played in the water and helped pick blueberries, then that is serving a community. I didn't realize how much of an impact I would have on the community – I still get updates via Facebook about the soybeans we planted."

Mullins explained that spending time in Tenryumura was important because the town is struggling with an aging population. 58 percent of the population is 65 years or older, which means that older residents do not spend a lot of time around younger people. While Yoshino questioned whether



SERVICE LEARNING PROGRAM FACEBOOK PAGE

Student participants pose with Language in Motion Coordinator Kristen Mullins, right, for a photo during the Japan service-learning program during summer 2016.

or not spending time with host families benefited the community, she later realized that the elderly residents loved talking with the *gaikokujin*, or "foreigners", and hearing about their lives outside of Japan.

Both Mullins and Yoshino enjoyed playing 'gate ball' – a game similar to croquet – with residents. After the game, those residents laughed along with service learning students at how games and sports can unite people regardless of their culture or language.

Students also participated in service projects in Tokyo where they facilitated classroom activities and helped out with after school programs. In one school, the Japanese children taught the *daigakusei san* (or college students) how to play with traditional Japanese toys.

"It was a wonderful mutual learning opportunity," Mullins said. She described how the Japanese elementary school students loved sharing their culture's customs and

traditions with their "teachers," who then reciprocated with games from their home countries.

When asked about the activity, Yoshino laughed and said, "I thought it was cute. None of us, the college kids, knew how to play with the toys and the kids really enjoyed interacting with us."

The four Middlebury students who participated in the program were selected out of about eighteen other applicants. Mullins said she hopes to continue the program but is unsure of its future.

The One Middlebury Fund, a one-time grant administered by the Office of the Provost dedicated to strengthening interactions between various Middlebury programs, the College's Japanese Studies department and the Center for Community Engagement's cross cultural fund originally covered all the expenses. The one-time nature of the funding, however, means that the program may not continue.

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KRISTEN MULLINS
COORDINATOR, LANGUAGE IN MOTION

Observatory Opens for Public Glimpse of Planets

By Sarah Asch
Senior Writer

The Observatory, located on the roof of Bicentennial Hall, held the first open house of the season on Friday, Sept. 16 to welcome students back to school. The event was open to students, faculty, staff and the general public and showcased several smaller telescopes where viewers could see features of the night sky including the full moon. The larger, 24-inch telescope on top of the Observatory was also open and viewers were able to glimpse both Mars and Saturn. The Observatory, which is the best-equipped observation facility in the state of Vermont, has another open house scheduled for Sept. 30 where visitors will also be able to view both planets.

Jonathan Kemp, Telescope Specialist and acting Observatory manager, collabo-

rated with students to plan the event.

"We often get up to a few hundred people attending our Observatory public open house events," Kemp said. "These usually involve a healthy mix of students, faculty, and staff, and members of the public from surrounding communities—both adults and children."

At the event, students from the College were stationed at the smaller observation stations to assist and educate viewers while Kemp operated the 24-inch telescope. Toby Aicher '16.5, who has worked as a telescope assistant for the past three years, helped attendees to view the full moon. Aicher said stargazing can be a humbling experience.

"I think astronomy gives an important perspective on our place in the universe," he said. "We're floating on a speck of dust revolving around a vanishingly small point

of light in a vast cosmos, and it makes you appreciate the preciousness of the earth and human life."

For students interested in exploring astronomy on campus, Aicher recommended checking out astronomy classes in the physics department as well as taking advantage of the extracurricular space-related activities.

"There are a few great opportunities for students who want to get more involved with the observatory," he said. "The Space Club, run by Ben Belinski '18.5 and Roo Weed '18.5, brings together students who want to talk about astronomy and be notified about astronomy events on campus."

Sam Cartwright '18, one of Aicher's fellow telescope assistants, also said that students of all interest levels are welcome to explore astronomy by attending Observatory events.

"Whether someone is a die-hard space junkie or is just curious about what constellations they can see, the open house events are great opportunities to feed their curiosity," Cartwright said.

No matter interest level or prior knowledge, Cartwright said he hopes that the people who attend the Observatory open houses walk away with a new enthusiasm for space.

"I hope that people learn something interesting or even inspiring about space that will change the way that they look at the night sky," he said. "In a place where our focus is often locked onto the happenings of our small campus, I hope people walk away

from the events having gained at least a small sense of the vast beauty of the universe."

Kemp echoed Cartwright's sentiment. "I hope that people who attend our events gain an appreciation for our place in the Universe and the wonders of the night sky," he said. "Many people who view an object through a telescope have an emotional or visceral reaction to what they see, and I hope to help inspire both a curiosity about and an understanding of the cosmos."

According to Kemp, the Observatory does not host open houses regularly later in the semester because the department needs to use the facility for academic purposes.

"After our fall outreach programming ends, we will again start scheduling public Observatory events in the spring, and generally offer approximately weekly opportunities in the summer when Language Schools are in session," Kemp said. "However, I also try to keep students apprised of potential visitor scholars who may be available to talk to and meet with students."

Kemp also emphasized that one doesn't need fancy equipment to deepen their appreciation for the stars.

"Any reasonably dark location with a largely unobstructed view of the night sky can allow you to observe constellations, planets, artificial satellites, and the moon," he said. "We have a variety of resources on our Observatory web site to help people enjoy the night sky from wherever they might be."

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SAM CARTWRIGHT '18



JONATHAN KEMP

The Observatory had its first public opening on Friday, letting people glimpse of Mars and Saturn. There will be two more observation events on Sept. 30 and Oct. 7.