Japanese Beyond the Classroom

This Fall Saint Joseph’s students in second and third year Japanese were given the opportunity to experience Japanese culture outside the formal classroom setting. In November Ms. Nanako Hoch, who teaches the second year class, and Ms. Yuka Usami Casey, who teaches the third year, invited their students to enjoy traditional Japanese cuisine at a local Japanese restaurant. Then in December they arranged another cultural activity, this time on campus. They held an “open class” to which anyone with an interest in Japanese culture was invited. About 20 students participated along with a number of faculty, and learned about Japanese culture, experienced a tea ceremony, practiced calligraphy and enjoyed a variety of Japanese foods.

Casey and Hoch began by explaining the cultural backgrounds of the tea ceremony and calligraphy in Japan. Then half of the classroom was converted into a small Japanese tea room and everyone sat on Tatami flowers (reed mats) and enjoyed the beauty of the tea ceremony. They sampled some Japanese macha (green tea) and daifuku (sweet rice cake with red bean paste). The other half of the room was taken up with a long table for practicing calligraphy. Students from the third year class helped other students write kanji (Chinese characters) so that everyone could try their hand and take their art work home. There was also a short fashion show, with several of the students learning how to wear a kimono. At the end, everyone enjoyed Japanese foods such as sushi and snacks.

Dr. Kazuya Fukuoka, of the Department of Politics, who was present and who helped with the event, commented on the importance of these events: “Our hope is to expose SJU students to authentic Japanese cultural experiences. We try to have cultural events like this every semester!”

These two events were particularly timely for three of the students, John Contosta, ’15, Pasquale Cipollone, ’15, and Brenna Ritzert ’17, who will all be spending Spring semester at Sophia University in Tokyo, Japan. Cipollone, noting the better than expected turnout for the open class, expressed his appreciation for the work that Ms. Hoch and Ms. Casey have put into the program, and expressed the wish that he might find some way to continue to make a contribution to it while in Japan.