



Consulate-General of Japan in New York 在ニューヨーク日本国総領事館

November 2011

CULTURE Connection

Japanese Language and Literature Courses at LaGuardia Community College

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Prof. Tomonori Nagano and his student in Intermediate Japanese 1

The Japanese program at LaGuardia Community College offers five Japanese-language courses, including elementary and intermediate language courses, two courses on Japanese literature (one in English and one in Japanese), and two culture and civilization courses. More than one hundred LaGuardia students take advantage of this opportunity each semester, making the Japanese language program the second-most popular in the college after Spanish. LaGuardia is the only community college in New York City that offers four full semesters (two years) of Japanese language classes, as well as one of the few college in the area to offer a Japanese literature course targeted at native and near-native speakers of Japanese. But perhaps the true uniqueness of the Japanese program at LaGuardia Community College springs from what is perhaps the greatest asset of the school itself: the diversity of its student body.

At LaGuardia, students from a variety of national and ethnic backgrounds come together in the Japanese-language classroom to share their excitement for a new language and culture. Over 60% of students at LaGuardia are foreign-born, an asset that plays a particularly beneficial role for foreign language students, including those studying Japanese. There are about one hundred students at LaGuardia who hail from Japan, several of whom work with their fellow students as Japanese-language tutors. Students learning Japanese have the opportunity to drop by the Language Lab to practice Japanese or to chat about their interest in Japanese culture with Japanese native speakers.

The Japan Club is another cornerstone of the Japanese community at LaGuardia. In the club, Japanese-language students have the chance to interact with students from Japan outside of an official academic setting. The Japan Club also serves as a local community for international students from Japan. After the

March 11 earthquake and tsunami in Japan this year, a group of Japanese students and members of the Japan Club collaborated in various charity campaigns, raising \$6,666.46 in a three-day donation event.



Prof. Hana Masters and her students in Elementary Japanese 1

Of course, the core Japanese language program itself has been carefully designed to meet students' academic needs in their pursuit of Japanese-language mastery. The elementary-level (first-year) Japanese courses focus on oral communication and pronunciation skills; therefore, a significant portion of the class is conducted in Japanese. In both the fourth week and the last week of their first semester of Japanese, students present a video-taped self-introduction, in which they talk about their ethnic background, school work, hometown, hobbies, and daily life.

The intermediate-level (second-year) Japanese courses put more emphasis on grammar, with a focus on expanding students' communication skills from speaking to writing. Students are expected to master the core aspects of Japanese grammar and write several compositions throughout the year. At the end of their second year, students revisit the video-taped self-introduction that they made in the fourth week of their Japanese study and expand it into a 2000-character essay. In the essay, students not only demonstrate their mastery of complex grammatical structures and Japanese rhetorical skills, but also display their newfound awareness of the cultural contrasts between Japan and the U.S.

In order to ensure their students' continued study of Japanese, faculty at LaGuardia have been working tirelessly with colleagues at several CUNY senior colleges to ensure an easy transition into upper-level Japanese language courses at a 4-year institution. Additionally, a discussion with Queens College is currently in progress in hopes of making LaGuardia the first CUNY community college that will offer a special Liberal Arts curriculum tailored for students who are seeking a career in the field of Japanese or/and Asian Studies.

The Japanese program at LaGuardia Community College strives to create a solid academic experience with the Japanese language for its students, a goal that is readily supplemented by the cultural diversity of the school at large. Not only do Japanese-language students have the opportunity to work directly with their peers from Japan, but they also bring their own unique cultural perspectives to the classroom, where they gradually learn how to express themselves to the world in a brand-new language.



Prof. Mai Kumagami and her students in Elementary Japanese 2



Japanese faculty and tutors at LaGuardia