

The new connecting line makes Kyushu's historic landmarks and nature within an easier reach: Kumamoto Castle, built in the 15th century has very unique ninja-proof walls. Enjoy the 360 degree panorama of Mt. Aso, one of the largest active volcanoes in the world: With 75 miles in diameter, the summit crater is one of the largest in the world as well, and the mountain is as green as the surrounding nature. Kagoshima, at the end of the line, is the gateway to Japan's traditional sand bath in Ibusuki.



Kumamoto Castle

TRAVEL WITH THE RAIL PASS

Operated by the Japan Railway Co., Ltd. (JR), Tohoku Shinkansen is available for travelers with the popular JR Rail Pass. Since JR operates the majority of train systems in Japan, the pass allows you to get around smoother and the more you ride trains, the more you save. Tohoku Shinkansen is part of their system, and Aomori is easy to include in your itinerary. You must purchase the pass within the United States. Go to <http://www.japanrailpass.net/eng/en001.html> to find where to purchase and more.

Shinkansen Video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AcCTDCIFmLo>

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CULTURE Connection

THE JAPANESE PROGRAM AT HUNTER COLLEGE

By Masao Donahue

Japanese Program Assistant



Photo : Jessi James

Hunter College, located on the Upper East Side of New York City, is home to the largest Japanese Division within the CUNY (City University of New York) system. Offering language courses in Japanese since 1986, the college established the Japanese program in 2002 and it has since shown no signs of slowing down. On the 14th floor of the Hunter West building on 68th Street and Lexington Avenue, the Japanese Division – part of the Department of Classical and Oriental Studies – offers eight sections of language courses and one half of a two-part culture course each semester.

The success of the division can be attributed to many factors – the ever-growing popularity of Japanese culture within the United States, the ability of the courses to attract students from any academic discipline, and last but not least, the energy and enthusiasm brought by both the professors and students.

Professor Sue Kawashima, the program head, has taught at Hunter College since 1988 and for much of that time, has guided the Japanese courses. Joined in the past four years by language professors Maayan Barkan and Kazue Kurahara, and most recently this fall by Akiyo Furukawa, they all work together towards presenting fun and engaging ways to tackle the challenges of learning a difficult language.

Throughout the three levels of study – beginners, intermediate, and advanced – special emphasis is placed on ensuring that the complex



and subtle nuances that permeate the Japanese language are understood. From distinguishing between similar sounds, to enunciation, tone, and alterations necessary for specific social situations, the professors explore the ways the language evolves in everyday conversation. As the students become more comfortable with Japanese, they begin working on their own compositions to share with their classmates, uncovering common mistakes and grammar points that would otherwise go unaddressed.



Photo : Jessi James

The highlight of the language courses is unquestionably the midterm presentations that students take part in each semester. Forming small groups, they create, memorize, and perform increasingly complex dialogues using the vocabulary and grammar they have learned. Seizing the opportunity, the results are often spectacular – limited only to the students' imaginations. Costumes, music, props, and anything and everything can play a role in these productions.



Photo : Jessi James

In addition to the language courses, Hunter offers two Japanese culture courses – Japanese Culture Before 1600 and Japanese Culture Since 1600 – which take students on a journey from the time people first migrated to the islands of Japan and follow the emergence and evolution of various customs and beliefs. Covering topics from the arts, the existence of multiple belief systems, literature, mythology, to the interactions with nearby countries that went on to greatly influence Japanese history – these courses go a long way in showcasing what makes Japan unique.

Towards the end of each semester, students are able to pursue their own interests, tying together themes from the course with a specific element of Japanese culture that interests them. This ties in to one of the course's primary goals, to offer students a glimpse of a country whose past and contemporary identity is vastly different from the American society that most of them grew up in – and in doing so, helps to nurture a greater global perspective.

The enthusiasm that students bring is not limited to the classroom – evidenced by the creation of several student clubs and organizations sprouting up at Hunter. One such body, the Japanese Media Club (JMC) – with about 70 members – promotes the exposure of non-mainstream animation, films, and music through weekly Friday meetings and special Japanese-themed events held throughout the year. The club, entering its fifth year, is designed to provide students with similar interests an outlet to discuss and share with one another.

In an effort to broaden the exposure of Japanese culture within the United States – through language and culture studies – the Japanese Division is hopeful that the program can continue its growth and offer a wider array of courses in the near future.



Photo : Jessi James



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For further information:

Hunter College Japanese Division

<http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/classics/japanese/>

(212) 772-5064

Japanese language and culture course listings are located at the end of the Classics section of the Hunter College Undergraduate Catalog.

At this time, Hunter does not offer a specialized minor or major in Japanese studies, but the courses may be used towards the CUNY Baccalaureate for Unique and Interdisciplinary Studies – a program that allows students to design their own course of study.

CUNY Baccalaureate for Unique and Interdisciplinary Studies

<http://cunyba.gc.cuny.edu/>

Japanese Media Club (JMC)

A student organization at Hunter College that promotes the exposure of non-mainstream animation, films, and music.

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From the **Ambassador's Desk**



After Thanksgiving the cold weather is finally here. So before another frigid New York winter arrives, I would like to take a moment to look back on this summer and fall's *Samurai in New York* exhibition at the Museum of the City of New York which closed in early November and was a tremendous popular success, thanks to your generous support. On a completely different note, I would like to sound the alarm concerning recent news of a severe decline in the number of the Japanese students in the US.

Samurai in New York kicked off on June 25th in celebration of the 150th anniversary of the first Japanese diplomatic mission to the US, which was dispatched by Japan's shogunate government in 1860. The exhibition opened in June, the same month as the mission's arrival in