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CIR's Corner

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Hello everyone! "CIR's Corner" is my monthly article about international exchange and cultures around the world. I will introduce a variety of interesting international topics.

This Month's Topic: Students from Gresham – Part 1

From late June to early July, we had many students visiting from our sister city, Gresham, Oregon. This month, I'm going to tell you about the students from Mount Hood Community College.



Mount Hood Community College (MHCC) is a two-year college in Gresham. Community colleges are similar to junior colleges in Japan. Community college students learn the specialized skills that are necessary for their profession. In addition, students who plan to transfer to a four-year college can take courses to satisfy general education requirements. What makes a community college different from a four-year college? First, community college students tend to be a little older, and many work for a few years before enrolling. Also, community colleges have cheaper tuition. Going to community college for the first two years and then transferring to a four-year college is more economical than entering a four-year college straight out of high school.

By the way, my home state of Washington offers a

free program at community colleges called "Running Start." If they pass a placement test, high school students aged 16 and older can attend classes at their local community college while they are still attending high school. I participated in this program and attended Seattle Central Community College for two years. My classmates' ages ranged from 16 to around 40, so I had a unique high school experience. I graduated from high school and community college at the same time. When I started at the University of Washington, I already had two years' worth of credits, so I was able to graduate early. However, this is a story for another issue.

To get back to the topic, eleven students studying Japanese and their Japanese instructor came from MHCC, and they stayed in Ebetsu from June 24 to July 7. They stayed with host families and attended classes at Sapporo Gakuin University (SGU).

I attended their welcome party at SGU on June 24. Even though the students were jet lagged, they seemed to have a lot of energy. At first, they were nervous about introducing themselves in Japanese in front of the group, but they actively conversed with SGU students and the host families.

On June 27, I spent the whole day with the MHCC students. First, we visited a class taught by an Assistant Language Teacher (ALT) at Higashi Nopporo Elementary School. Kirby, the ALT, had a great idea for an interview game. The children told the MHCC students about their favorite places in Ebetsu, and then asked them about

their favorite places in Gresham. The MHCC students told the children their favorite places in Gresham, and the children had to write the information down. Finally, we all played BINGO together and had Q&A time. After class, a few MHCC students said they would be interested in becoming an ALT someday!



Next, we went to the Ebetsu City Local History Museum. The students marveled at the historical items, such as the clay pots that were excavated in Ebetsu and the various tools from the pioneer days. Some students got excited when they saw the katana of the *Tondenhei* on display. The curator explained that the *Tondenhei*, or “farmer-soldiers,” were former samurai, which really impressed the students. Many people from outside of Japan think that samurai and katana are so cool!

After the museum, it was lunchtime. The MHCC students had free time to eat anywhere they liked. I made a list of restaurants near the City Hall for them. A few students chose ramen. A few chose *yakiniku*. There was even one who chose McDonald’s! “I wanted to compare,” he explained. I went with two of the students to eat soba. All three of us chose the cold soba with tempura. They had never eaten soba before, so I taught them how to eat it. They said it was really good!

Next, we took the students to visit the mayor of Ebetsu. Each one of them introduced themselves in Japanese, and they talked about the foods they want to try and the things they want to do in Ebetsu. They also talked about how they plan to use Japanese in their futures. The mayor talked about his experience in Gresham, and offered the students words of encouragement. The students told me after the meeting that they were nervous about meeting the mayor, but he was very kind. They all had a very pleasant conversation.



Finally, we went shopping at EBRI. The students enjoyed the trendy atmosphere. Snacks and sweets were popular with the students, and some bought cute T-shirts and wrapping cloths. I saw a few students enjoying coffee and even eating Japanese-style fried chicken. “I wanted something to snack on,” he said. After shopping, some students went back to their host family’s house, and some went back to SGU. It was a very fun day!

I also went to the farewell party held at SGU on July 5. There were a lot more people there than at the welcome party, so it was a very lively party. The students were relaxed and seemed to have gotten used to life here in Ebetsu. A teacher at SGU prepared a slideshow, and looking at the pictures from the past two weeks, I could see that it was a meaningful exchange for everyone involved. Spending time with the MHCC students also brought back memories of my own days as a student in Japan. The MHCC students will surely treasure these memories forever!



Next month I’m going to write about the students from Gresham High School, so stay tuned! ★

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