The 70th Japan-America Student Conference Report
第70回日米学生会議の報告

By Jacques Chaumont ‘18
This past August, the 70th Japan America Student Conference (JASC) took place in four sites across America. The sites for this year’s conference were Madison (Wisconsin), Lexington (Virginia), Washington D.C., and Portland (Oregon). There were nearly 70 participants total, and me and the rest of the Executive Committee (16 members total) spent the 11 months prior planning the entirety of the conference. This was a substantial undertaking, and with multiple weekly meetings, constant research, emailing, and logistical planning, it was often difficult to balance with my studies and extracurriculars. However, to understand why I decided to volunteer for this position in the first place requires an explanation of my experience as a delegate of the 69th JASC.

In August of 2017, I participated in the delegation that traveled throughout Japan to Kyoto, Ehime, Mie, and Tokyo. Each day of the 3-week long conference was packed with programming from morning to night, and I was surrounded by people with common interests and passions to my own. This overload of intellectual stimulus fostered my interest in international relations and allowed me to draw upon my own experiences and knowledge as a half-Japanese American. The other participants came from schools across Japan and all over the U.S., and each brought their unique perspectives to the table. And beyond just the academic- and professional-oriented aspects of the conference, there were also ample opportunities to bond
with other participants and form friendships. In fact, this would keep most of us staying up until the late hours of the night, talking about any number of things. As a student studying Japanese in Williamstown, there are very few opportunities to speak with Japanese students. So, being surrounded by 36 Japanese students my age, all of whom also had excellent English ability, was a really rare chance. Even during my times studying abroad in Japan, this wasn’t something I ever experienced.

So as the 69th JASC was winding down in Tokyo, I was feeling incredibly inspired by this once in a lifetime program that had been designed by that year’s Executive Committee. Knowing that the continuation of the conference was dependent upon participants like myself, I decided to carry on the legacy of JASC and try to create a whole new program for the next year, taking place in the United States. I was confident that this job could be done with the right group of people as an Executive Committee, so following the elections at the end of the 69th JASC the 16 of us embarked on our own journey of planning and executing the 70th JASC.
I’ll spare the details of all the planning that went into organizing a conference of this scale but suffice it to say that every minute detail and micro-logistic from the start to end had to be considered. Designing programs, brainstorming themes and discussion topics, inviting speakers, finding venues, food, accommodation, and transportation. When spread over an 11-month planning period, it seems manageable, but it was certainly a daunting realization when we had our own student lives to lead and were volunteering our time to do this. Meeting deadlines, working together with a team of very different personalities, reviewing and interviewing each and every applicant, and finally, coming together in August to make sure the whole thing went smoothly, dealing with situations as they arose. This was both a challenging and fulfilling experience, and I’m incredibly grateful to all of my wonderful teammates and proud to have been a part of this year’s Executive Committee.

So, what did we actually do this past August? The 70th JASC began with American Orientation in Madison, Wisconsin.

American Orientation is the first time that the American side of the JASC delegation meets in person, and is a time of icebreakers, preliminary discussions, and basically getting to know each other. The pre-conference activities in Japan are different, so the Japanese delegates actually had multiple programs together before the main conference in August. Such trips are much harder to coordinate given the size of the U.S., so the American delegates only have weekly video call meetings with their roundtables (topic-centered small groups) in the months leading up to August. American Orientation also gives the American delegates a chance to experience the intense scheduling and pace of the conference, which was certainly something I had to get used to when I first participated.
After those three days, it was time to greet the Japanese delegation as they arrived into Madison, and after a big welcoming dinner, we had plenty of opportunities to get to know each other and plant the seeds of friendship. We tried to make the icebreaker activities as accessible and entertaining as possible, and it turned out to be a perfect way to get to know the other students from across the globe.

The following day, we got into our business formal suits and launched into our programming. After our opening ceremony, we attended a local community event called *Lanterns for Peace*, centered around the anniversary of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Japanese delegates presented on the effects of the bombings, and their own hopes for a world without another nuclear attack. This event eased our transition into a presentation the following day given by Caren Stelson, author of *Sachiko: A Nagasaki Bomb’s Survival Story*, and a panel discussion on the themes of War and Peace.
We spent several more days in Madison, exploring the importance of the dairy industry, touring the largest Kikkoman factory in North America, experiencing the Wisconsin State Fair, and finding various ties between Japan and Wisconsin. On the 11th of August, we held our Madison Site Forum in the State Capitol Building. Delegates moderated a panel on agricultural development, as well as participated in a panel on peacemaking moderated by a local Zen practitioner.

From Madison, we flew out to Lexington, Virginia, where we were graciously hosted by Washington & Lee University. Here, we would explore multiple themes including the interactions of nature and humanity, the challenging racial history of America, as well as mass violence in recent history.
We were able to visit the Natural Bridge State Park and caverns and learn about the Monacan Native American tribe that once inhabited the valley. We also visited Charlottesville on the anniversary of the 2017 riots and spoke to the deputy mayor on the lessons to be learned from such an event and its aftermath. In Lexington, we had a panel of many local small business owners and talked about community engagement, particularly in more rural areas. We also participated in a short Japanese tea ceremony with the University’s tea ceremony club and were showed many materials from the amazing Special Collections and Archives of Washington & Lee. On our last full day of programming, we had our Lexington Site Forum, and I moderated a panel of delegates and three faculty members on the topics of mass violence and conflict resolution, as well as the roles of local communities with regard to such issues.

Next, we traveled to the nation’s capital, Washington, D.C. I was one of the two American site coordinators for D.C., so I played a large part in the brainstorming, planning, and organizing of our time in D.C. After getting off the bus from Lexington, we quickly changed into our business formal and went straight to the International Monetary Fund (IMF). There, we spoke to several officials from IMF and the World Bank about the roles of such international organizations in the global economy and international affairs. That evening, we went to a reception hosted by Toyota for the winners of the American Bowl (English essay contest for Japanese high schoolers).
The next day we held a panel on Women Empowerment, moderated by a delegate and featuring the director of the Better Life Lab and NY Times bestselling author Brigid Schulte. In the following days we visited the National Japanese American Memorial, explored the Capitol and National Mall, and explored places in D.C. relating to our individual roundtable topics. I coordinated the Technology & Innovation Roundtable, so I brought my roundtable to the Smithsonian Air & Space Museum and the National Building Museum.

The morning of the last full day of programming in D.C., delegates participated in a Six Party Talks Simulation at the Korean Economic Institute. Later that afternoon, we held our forum at the Old Ambassador’s Residence of the Embassy of Japan. I MC’ed the event and our keynote address was given by Bob Takai, SVP General Manager at Sumitomo Corporation of America and former JASC alumnus. We then had a panel on Soft Power with Bob Takai, Department of State diplomat Julie Chung, and two student delegates. Our program was recorded by NHK Broadcasting, and video segments from the program and interviews with JASC participants appeared on national TV in Japan.
For the remainder of the conference, our delegation moved to Portland, Oregon, where we were hosted by Portland State University. There, we focused first on the U.S.-Japan relationship through the lens of the history of the Japanese-American community in Oregon. From there, we touched on other important topics including mental health and LGBTQ issues and experiences in the U.S. and Japan. These discussions took place in panels of delegates moderated by Executive Committee members, as well as in small group discussions.

The following day, we were hosted by Wacom and had a presentation on their cutting-edge technologies, given by one of the digital artists from the stop-motion animation studio Laika. The same day, we had a panel on innovation and entrepreneurship featuring local Portland entrepreneurs and the creator of a Portland startup incubator. As the conference neared its end, we had an alumni reception hosted by the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, held at the Portland Japanese Garden, attended by many notable JASC alumni and local officials.
To cap off our main conference, we held our Final Forum, where each round table gave a short concluding presentation on their topic and their findings from the three weeks of extended discussion. We also had a panel on the future of JASC and concluding remarks by the American and Japanese Executive Committee Chairs.

With Final Forum over, the only remaining item on the agenda was the election of the next year’s Executive Committee, those who would carry on the torch and craft the 71st JASC taking place in Japan next year. With elections taken care of, we had our Final Reflection and got ready to bid farewell in the morning. The goodbyes are always the hardest part, speaking from my experience on two JASCs, but it is amazing to see how close people can become in a few short weeks.

So that was the 70th Japan America Student Conference in a nutshell. Putting the experience into words is nearly an impossible task, so hopefully you also get a sense of the atmosphere through the photos scattered throughout this report. One of my responsibilities throughout the duration of the conference was being the primary photographer, so I always had my camera ready and eye trained on capturing special moments.
Though I covered most of the main programming that occurred as part of the conference, some of the most memorable and enlightening moments took place outside of programming. Long bus rides and plane rides, late nights following busy days, walking through sweltering D.C. in business formal attire. These were all opportunities to get to know each other, have conversations with someone new, and learn about each other’s backgrounds. Ask any JASCer and they will tell you that you won’t really sleep much throughout the conference, since you’ll want to spend as much time together as possible. The camaraderie and friendships shared by the participants stretch far beyond the three weeks spent together, and by the end you’ll truly feel like you have a network of friends throughout both America and Japan. I still regularly talk to many of my JASC friends, both in the U.S. and Japan, and my fellow Executive Committee members are some of my closest friends. I feel very lucky and grateful to have been able to participate in JASC, and although organizing the conference was one of the toughest things I’ve ever done, I never regretted taking on the task and it was an incredible opportunity for growth.

The next JASC will be taking place in Japan, with Tokyo and Kyoto as sites (as well as possibly one or two other cities). Having spent a considerable time with next year’s Executive Committee, I am confident that they will do a great job putting together a worthwhile conference. JASC’s reputation is quite prestigious in Japan, so there are many opportunities for networking, professional development, and personal growth. Also, as a student of Japanese, being able to speak with so many Japanese students with shared interests is an invaluable opportunity. If you are on the fence about applying, I can’t recommend it enough. If you have any questions, feel free to send them to me at jack.chaumont@gmail.com, and check out the JASC website at http://iscdc.org/jasc/2019. There, you can find information about the sites, executive committee members, and round table topics of next year. If you want to see more JASC photos, I have uploaded close 2000 of them in full quality to the JASC Flickr page at http://flickr.com/jasc1934/albums. Thank you for reading through my report, and a special thank you to the Japanese and Asian Studies Departments at Williams for making my own participation in JASC a possibility.