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Press Release



Nick Hefty with two of the students he worked with.



Laurissa Lueck as she helped students with their lessons.



The Japanese ESL group

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At UW-Richland:

Wisconsin teens provide a crash course in high school life-American style

With Wisconsin teens as their guides, 41 students from Japan recently completed a crash course in high school life-American style. The Youth for Understanding Japanese Program held July 27 – August 5 on the University of Wisconsin-Richland campus included intensive English as a Second language classes led by certified instructors. To practice their English lessons and to prepare for a year as exchange students in schools across the USA, the Japanese teens worked closely with those who know American high school life best—American high school students.

Laurissa Lueck returned for her second year with the program because, she said, “I just love every time I come here. I love getting to meet new people. I like the opportunity to help my students speak better English. It’s eye-opening to realize how much we take for granted about learning.” A senior at **Viroqua** High School, Lueck plans to take the fourth and final year of Spanish language offered there. And now, inspired by her experiences with the Japanese program, she said, “I want to learn Japanese. That will be a goal in college.”

One of Lueck's students, Hiromi Yamano from Osaka, said, "Working with Laurissa has improved my confidence. She speaks slowly, so I can understand."

Nick Hefty, a first-timer with the program who comes from **Platteville**, found his experience to be inspirational, as well. "I'm planning to come back next year. This is so different for me—sharing cultural learning and examining values, looking at things that are the same and things that are different (between Japan and the USA). You lead by example. The Japanese students are watching you to see how to be American."

One of Hefty's students, Ryota Kojima from Kyoto, found particularly entertaining several aspects of American culture he first encountered in this program, including the game of Rock-Paper-Scissors, and the whoopee cushion.

Amanda Brunner, **Elroy**, who's returning for a second year as a mentor to the Japanese students, said, "It's a life-changing experience. I'm usually shy. But I found out I can be a leader."

The Wisconsin teens prepare in advance for the arrival of the students from Japan, planning activities that support language and cultural learning. While the program is underway, the Wisconsin mentors live and attend classes with their Japanese students so that they can provide support around the clock.

In addition to intensive language classes, board games, a deejay dance, typical American meals, a shopping trip, movies, presentations about individual subjects of interest, and lots of conversation are part of the curriculum. Richland Center High School served as the model American high school when the group visited there for a tour and a sample of a typical high school class session.

In addition to Lueck and Brunner, other Wisconsin students returning as mentors are, from **Mauston**, Cassandra Bauer, Jordan Lancaster, and Tiffany Schumer; Amanda Larson, **New Lisbon**; and Clara McGlynn, **Reedsburg**.

In addition to Hefty, Wisconsin students new to the program this year are Marcus Boothe, **Montfort**; Stacy Dullum, **Arena**; Allie Husain, **Brodhead**; Angelica Medina, **Fitchburg**; Kate Mulvaney-Kemp and Julie Mulvaney-Kemp, **Viroqua**.

UW-Richland staff member Kathy Neckar, **Blue River**, who is a certified ESL teacher, was an instructor for the program, and was joined by two other ESL teachers, Dream Gunther and Lizz Hall. Other program staff were Jessica Laeseke, **Muscoda**; Henry Olsen, **Black Earth**; Pat Meuer, **Cobb**; Samantha Miller, **Wilton**; and from **Richland Center**, Andy Peckham, David Kopitzke, and Cheryl Crook. David Kaukl, formerly of Richland Center and now living in Matsusaka, Japan, also worked with the program.

“We appreciate the warm welcome the community gave to our guests from Japan,” said Diane Treis Rusk, program director. “The combination of classroom lessons and interaction with mentors makes possible a concentrated language and cultural learning experience.”

For more information about the program, visit richland.uwc.edu online, and click on “Continuing Education,” then “Summer Youth Programs.” Or contact Treis Rusk by calling (608) 647-6186, Extension 227 or by e-mail at diane.treirusk@uwc.edu .

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