

International students give back to the Davis community

Course allows students to practice English outside the classroom

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International students at UC Davis are volunteering in schools, retirement centers and other locations around the city — not just for good karma, but to improve language skills.

UC Davis Extension is integrating community service with academic study by providing international students a volunteer experience course, with the goal to develop student involvement in the community as well as to teach civic responsibility.

“Launching this service learning program is a way to help support the Davis community and give our students a chance to develop leadership skills and utilize their English,” said Peter Hendricks, academic director for pre-professional programs and service learning at UC Davis Extension.

Hendricks said he developed this project in order to give international students a chance to practice and experiment with articulating themselves. He hoped that it would provide them with exposure to a broader range of spoken English.

One of the international students, Kaori Miyazawa, a junior English major from Japan, volunteered at the Yolo County Arts Council, mainly doing office work such as answering phones. She has also been involved with two concerts and an auction based on the council’s artists during her time volunteering.

“I think I’ve learned some words I didn’t know and wasn’t familiar with,” she said. “I also have learned how things work in the working place.”

Miyazawa hopes her experience will help her find a job after returning to Japan. She said the hardest thing was answering

phones because it was difficult for her to understand people at first.

“I think it helps me to listen to English,” she said. “[There are] many different accents here and I think I’m getting used to them.”

Sakiko Tanaka, also a junior English major from Japan, chose to volunteer at the University Retirement Community with the Health Care Center. She helps move members of the community who are in wheelchairs and does activities with retirees, such as origami.

Tanaka’s experience working with the elderly was very emotional, as she learned more about dementia.

“I’ve never talked to people who have dementia before, so it was very shocking,” she said. “Some of them don’t remember me. Every time I go over there I introduce myself. At first it was very sad for me.”

However Tanaka said it also proved to be a positive experience since she was able to learn from them.

“We help each other,” she said. “I help them physically but they help me with English.”

Tanaka was also taking classes at UC Davis, which she found to be more difficult than those at the extension center.

“It’s very encouraging when I can understand what the teacher is saying,” she said.

Masa Shibamoto, another junior English major from Japan, chose to work with students at North Davis Elementary School.

“The students are really nice and friendly,” he said. “I talked with them as if they were my peers. They helped me learn English and I helped them to read.”