

# JET INFORMATION SESSION

## Teaching English in Japan

October 2016



*Audience in attendance*



*Tobin presenting*

On October 4, 2016, the East Asia Institute hosted a JET Information Session presented by Ms. Alisa Tobin, JET Program Coordinator from the Consulate General of Japan in Houston. More than 30 students were in attendance. JET Program stands for Japan Exchange and Teaching Program. This 30-year-old program gives English native speakers the opportunity to teach the English language, their country's customs and cultures in Japan while learning about Japan and its society. The program's goal is to promote international exchange at a local level. The JET Program offers two types of positions: Assistant Language Teacher (ALT) and Coordinators for International Relations (CIR).

About 90 percent of JET participants work as ALTs. An ALT is usually placed at a specific school or will visit many schools by working under the board of education. The schools JET participants can be placed at range from all levels between elementary to high school. ALTs do not need to be fluent in Japanese since they will be assisting the Japanese teacher of English. Although some proficiency in Japanese would prove beneficial. Participants must design lessons and activities or grade exams. They may also be asked to help with foreign languages clubs, school festivals, speech competitions and/or community English classes. An ALT's mission is to

motivate their students to study English and learn culture of English speaking countries.

"Only about 10% of JETs are CIRs," said Tobin. "CIRs work in prefectural or municipal offices and are required to speak Japanese fluently to do their work." The requirement to become a CIR is to have a Japanese level equivalent to the N2 level of the Japanese Language Proficiency Test. CIRs have many duties including translating documents, interpreting for overseas visitors or local officials, giving presentations, and coordinating sister-city relations. However, similar to ALTs, CIRs still teach. They may teach English in schools or they may provide language instruction for employees and residents.

Candidates interested in applying must be adaptable, have an outgoing personality, a sense of humor, creativity, patience, humility, initiative, and a desire to learn about Japan. An understanding of the Japanese language would be helpful, but is not required unless it is for a CIR position. While in Japan you are not just representing yourself, but you are representing your country. She went on to express the differences between rural and city locations concerning transportation, living arrangements, weather and social

norms. However she stressed that candidates are not guaranteed their desired placement.

"You are signing up for a year long contract, that is the minimum that we ask," said Tobin. "But come late fall or early winter your contracting organization may offer you the opportunity to re-contract for one year, and that can happen up to 4 times which means your stay in Japan can be a total of 5 years." Qualified candidates will be employed by a contracting organization/school - not the JET Program. The program only manages and facilitates in the hiring process. The annual salary of JETs is approximately 3,360,000 yen (about \$28,000 as of September 2015) for the first year. Afterwards, the amount gradually goes up. JETs are covered by health, accident, pension and employment insurance. Their flights

to and from Japan (upon fulfillment of their contracts) are also remunerated for them, and much of the time may also subsidize housing for JETs.

Generally, JETs work 35 hours a week, from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday. Saturday and Sunday are usually days off. Participants get at least 10 days of paid holidays and 15 days of paid national holidays per year. JETs have varying experiences from residence situations to life experiences. It was also posed that people should try to stay at least two years to really merge with the culture, find a place in the society and to learn the language.

After the session the audiences were given a chance to ask some questions of Tobin. They asked questions about the application processes and living in Japan as a foreigner. One audience member

asked "What should a potential applicant have to score a higher chance of being accepted?" Ms. Tobin responded, "We look at the applicant as a whole. Some good things to have are volunteering at cultural events such as festivals. If you study Japanese already that is a good start of knowing the language. Knowing another language or culture is nice because those students are able to adapt easily. And prior coaching, tutoring, or teaching English experiences would make your application stand out." After the event, Ms. Tobin stayed to talk to students who were very interested in the program and to answer the questions that students had.

"The JET program provides great opportunities for UTSA students to learn, not only Japanese language and culture, but to also expand their knowledge of the world," said Erina Romanowich, Japanese Lecture and Program Coordinator of the East Asia Institute.

For more information please see the official JET Program website at <http://jetprogramme.org/> or visit the homepage for the Japanese Embassy to the United States at <http://www.us.emb-japan.go.jp/jet> Applications are due November 18,2016 (postmarked date).



The UTSA East Asia Institute's mission is to promote appreciation and understanding of East Asian societies and cultures both on campus and in the community through research, outreach, networking, education, student/faculty exchange and business development and cooperation.