

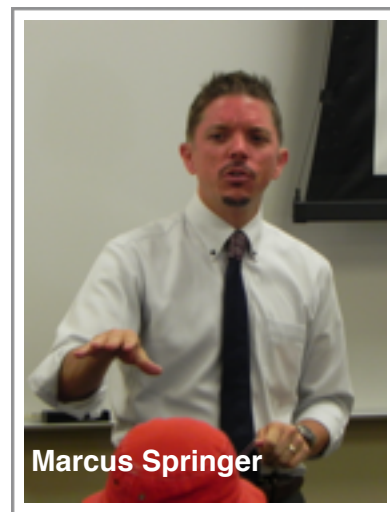
# 2020 VISION: ENGLISH EDUCATION IN JAPAN

On Wednesday, September 14, the East Asia Institute invited Marcus Springer, Designated Associate Professor and Coordinator for the English-Chinese Language Education Center at Shizuoka University of Art and Culture, to present a lecture entitled, "2020 Vision: English Education in Japan". With over 50 people in attendance, many students and several members of the public were excited to learn about how English education in Japan and the upcoming 2020 Tokyo Olympics are linked together.

Springer began the lecture by explaining his background and experiences concerning teaching English in Japan. The speaker had his start by obtaining a position at the AEON Language School. After realizing that he did not know much about teaching, he came

back to UTSA to earn his Master's degree in Teaching English as a Second Language. Returning to Japan, Springer participated in the JET program. He was assigned to a small high school named Futamata in Shizuoka where he received his first culture shock concerning Japan's education system. The school he taught was populated with students who had low test scores. Springer was surprised to find out that the grading system was far different from that of the United States' and that the students had low expectations for themselves. From that point, he began to consider the purpose of learning English for Japanese students.

Springer discussed the difference between Japan's and the United States' education philosophies. "While the United States is more focused on



developing skills and workplace training, Japan focuses more on cultivating minds, becoming productive members of society and promoting a strong *kokoro*, which means heart. Despite this philosophy, Japan has been falling behind on their English skills," said Springer.

According to Springer, a lot of Japanese people are stuck with a "Galapagos" mentality, meaning that they only want to do things the Japanese way and are not as welcome to change.

# 2020 VISION

Traditionally, English proficiency is not required for the Japanese society, in turn it tends to fall to the wayside. "Certain parts of Japan are also much farther behind technologically than other regions," said Springer. "While big cities have the most updated computers and technology, other areas may have a few outdated computers to share with the entire school."

However, Springer believes that there is hope on the horizon due to the upcoming 2020 Olympics. With the international attention that the Olympics will bring to Japan, there is a greater need for English proficiency within the Japanese society. Currently, the Japanese and British council are working together to develop a new curriculum for Japan to implement in order to strive for this goal. Despite positive changes being made, the change is still slow.

"A challenge Japan faces when fostering change is the country's Junior/Senior hierarchy culture," according to Springer. Younger teachers have new, fresh ideas and a better appreciation for English after growing up with ALTs, Assistant Language Teachers, who are usually native English speakers. With eager minds ready to administer change, Junior teachers are often stifled by their



*Audience listening to Springer's lecture*



Seniors who advocate for more traditional methods. Due to this system, younger teachers have a hard time speaking up or applying any real change. Tensions aside, the 2020 Olympics have still been a motivating factor for both teachers and students to put forth more effort into English learning.

After the lecture, Springer was able to take a few questions from the audience. One attendee asked if Springer thought that once the Olympics had ended, change would stop. "The exact opposite will happen, and instead the teachers and students should be able to gain confidence from the Olympics," replied Springer. "This new confidence combined with the new generation of teachers, having more positive English education experiences, will only continue to encourage change." Following the conclusion of the lecture, members of the audience were welcome and eager to ask Springer for more information.

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.

