On September 17, 2018, the East Asia Institute hosted a JET Information Session presented by Ms. Alisa Tobin, JET Program Coordinator and Mr. Mark Schneider, Information and Cultural Affairs Specialist from the Consulate General of Japan in Houston, the delegation was led by Vice-Consul Ai Kawase. Also present was Mr. Ian Cruz, from the City of San Antonio International Relations office. Tobin, Schneider and Cruz, all former JETs themselves, motivated over 50 students in attendance to apply.

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 in Japan as well as their country's customs and cultures, 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). Tobin emphasized that the JET Program is a full-time job that comes with a life changing experience.

“About 90 percent of JET participants work as ALTs.” said Schneider. An ALT is usually placed at a specific school or will visit many schools by working under the board of education. ALTs do not need to be fluent in Japanese since they will be assisting the Japanese teacher with English. Although some proficiency in Japanese would prove beneficial. Participants must design lessons and activities or grade exams. Schneider stated that “ALT’s 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." According to Tobin, “The requirement to become a CIR is to have Japanese fluency equivalent to N1 or 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, like ALTs, CIRs still teach. They may teach English in schools or they may provide language instruction for employees and residents. Tobin shared that being a CIR allowed her to organize a field-trip for 13 students to her home state.
“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, said Cruz. An understanding of the Japanese language would be helpful but is not required unless it is for a CIR position.” While in Japan JETS are not just representing oneself, but are representing their country. Cruz went on to express the differences between rural and city locations concerning transportation, living arrangements, weather and social norms. Not every situation is the same.

Cruz also highlighted the importance of the Association of JET (AJET). Cruz indicated that “AJET helps by providing support networks, organizing events and activities, and offering resources such as counseling services.” He continued, “There are also a variety of special interest groups such as Stonewall Japan, an LGBT group, JETs of African Descent, Veg JET and many more.”

"You are signing up for a yearlong contract, that is the minimum that we ask," Tobin added. “The contract can be renewed up to four times, so you can live in Japan for up to five 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 a JET participant is approximately 3,360,000 yen (about $30,048 as of September 2018) 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.

After the event the three presenters talked to students who were very interested in the program to answer any questions the students had. Applications are due online in November of 2018.

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