

Teens Log on to Learn about U.S.-Japan Relations



REISCHAUER SCHOLARS — Allison Fink (L) and Alex Warofka.

By HEATHER HORIUCHI
Nichi Bei Times

PALO ALTO — Imagine: being a 17-year-old high school student with Stanford University on your transcript.

Thirty students — incoming high school seniors and college freshmen nationwide — recently completed an annual course which covered Japanese history, politics, economics, literature, pop culture, as well as the U.S.-Japan relationship through Stanford's Reischauer Scholars Program (RSP). The online course's top students were recently honored at an Aug. 22 luncheon hosted by the RSP.

The program is sponsored by the United States-Japan Foundation and the Stanford Program on International and Cross-Cultural Education (SPICE). The program was named in honor of former U.S. Ambassador to Japan Edwin O. Reischauer, a scholar of Japanese history and culture.

Last week's event included remarks from: Consul General of Japan in San Francisco Yasumasa Nagamine, Japan Foundation New York Director General Isao Tsujimoto, SPICE Director Gary Mukai, Stanford Professor Emeritus Daniel Okimoto, and RSP coordinator and instructor, Naomi Funahashi.

"I want you to come away with a deep vision of the world we live in today," Nagamine said. "Being able to reach across cultural differences is essential today. Isolation is not an option."

The students, who came from public, private and home school educations from places as far away as Hawai'i, Ohio and New Hampshire, thrived on their exchange of knowledge and experiences. Some students entered the program with only the most basic exposure to the Japanese culture, while others had been studying the language for years.

The students spent an average of two to six hours a week on the course, watching video-taped lectures, participating in online discussions, as well as completing weekly readings and homework, and a final research paper. Throughout the course, the students watched lectures from many scholars, diplomats and leading experts on topics such as feudal Japan, Japanese perspectives on Pearl Harbor, Shinto and Buddhism, as well as *anime* and *manga*.

The program's top scholars, Alex Warofka and Allison Fink, presented their research papers, entitled "The Rise of Japan's Middle Class as Seen through *Ukiyo-e*" and "*Juku*: Problematic or Necessary?" respectively.

During a brief lecture at the luncheon, entitled "A Symbiotic Alliance: America's Dependence on Japanese Capital," Okimoto called the U.S.-Japan relationship the "single most important relationship in the world." Discussion is underway to someday create a similar program in Japan, to teach Japan-U.S. relations, and create further opportunities for the students. The students are clearly benefiting from the course's current design.

Fink, 18, from Bedford, N.H., will enter Stanford this fall as a freshman. Warofka, also 18, will attend Case Western Reserve University, in Cleveland, Ohio, and double major in Japanese studies and business management.

The program was "eye opening, it provided a great opportunity I wouldn't have had in my local school to learn about Japanese history and politics," Warofka said.

Tsujimoto, who is also the acting director of the Center for Global Partnership New York, encouraged the program's two top students to "evolve your interests and opportunities," and added, "Life is a series of discoveries."

Whereas most of the students have only met virtually, the RSP network remains strong. As the students go off to college, many have met face-to-face, and alumni have provided younger students with tips and guidance.

"Every year the students impress me. This year's selection process was particularly hard," Funahashi said of the applicants, which neared 100.

Funahashi described the course as a "time-consuming endeavor," and encouraged potential applicants "to have that paramount self-motivation and a genuine interest in the subject matter and interacting with their peers."

While the course runs from February through June, for Funahashi, coordinating the program is a year-round job. Funahashi will begin recruiting applicants for the 2009 year later this month.

For more information about the Reischauer Scholars Program, or to download an application, visit www.reischauerscholars.org.