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National Japan was one of those events where a week felt like a month. I got to experience so many things, so first and foremost I want to say my thanks to everyone at JASO for funding the trip. It was a really eye opening experience, seeing a different part of the country, and meeting people with a high motivation for Japanese, gathered in one spot. I got to hear about the tales of study abroad students who were recently in Japan, to the people of the highest position in the Japanese American Society of Washington D.C. that were in Japan 40 years ago. If I learned anything from those stories it's that Japanese paperwork is no joke, but another more important thing I learned was that their language skills were able to connect bridges and pass barriers. I for the most part of my short life have never really thought of "using" my language skills in that sense. I'm pretty hesitant when it comes to talking in Japanese. I never really dreamed of living in Japan and talking with native Japanese speakers. Japanese for me was a fun side project where I stare at a few flashcards and books in mind numbing confusion. So for me, to see people who are truly passionate about wanting to connect with people of different backgrounds, "enlightened" me into why other people would learn a language to such a high degree. Changing my mindset towards Japanese a bit. Of course it is still a fun "hobby," but this event proved to me that Japanese can be so much more.

Of course though, if we're talking about the practical side of things, I learned a lot of cultural and linguistic skills through Japan Bowl. Like having to use the opposite of your chopsticks to give food to someone when eating nabemono or that お茶でいいです is consider impolite compared to お茶がいいです. I know now what an アンケート is and that アプリ means application (app) not applicant. Before If you told me to describe Oshogatsu, the only thing I would have said was

“Oh that’s Japanese New Year’s,” but now I know of osechi, toshikoshisoba, and all the fun games like daruma otoshi that are played during Oshogatsu.

This deepening understanding of Japanese culture has overall increased my language skills as well, as now I’m not trying to pronounce セタ as しちゆう. All of this to say, I’m extremely grateful for being able to participate in this event, and for the people who have supported this program.

Even if next year I’m not able to participate for some reason or another, I am wholeheartedly satisfied with how things went. Thank you for this opportunity.