Reawakening Japanese Culture at UNH: The Revitalized Japanese Student Association

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After remaining dormant for several years, the Japanese Student Association (JSA) has returned in full swing over the fall semester. The club, headed by third-year President Kyle Melville, has been on a path to spread the word about Japanese culture and heritage.

The previous owners had disbanded upon graduation, leaving an enriching touchstone for the University of New Hampshire (UNH). However, at the beginning of the year, Melville and the JSA’s new electoral board got to work, bringing their own experiences to the table.

The last two semesters have seen a myriad of meetings allowing students to explore the technique and style of calligraphy, learn folklore-based horror stories for Halloween and enjoy some hearty curry udon in collaboration with United Asian Coalition’s (UAC) global food event, Night Market.

Growing up spending summers in Japan, President Melville developed an appreciation for Japanese customs and wanted to share it with those around him.

“Being half Japanese, I spent a majority of my summers in Japan absorbing the culture for what it was... I liked going out and seeing a whole new world, because it really is so different,” said Melville.

The idea of bringing back JSA had not come to Melville until he began attending similar clubs on campus that celebrate different Asian cultures.

“Going to UAC and seeing some Japanese topics being covered, I wished there was a way to spread that more because it was such a big part of my life,” said Melville. “After I heard it was a thing before and actually had stopped a couple years prior... I thought it would be a great addition to UNH.”

Students also seem to agree, with turnout for meetings continuing to grow as the club enters its third semester running. After filling room 113 in Conant Hall with over 50 people during spring 2023 for the Hanami Festival, a Japanese seasonal celebration, positive reception has stayed strong.

The club’s recent Calligraphy and Origami Night had students leveling up their brush strokes and folding skills. Students got to practice writing out different Japanese Kanji and attempted to craft the perfect paper crane.
Third-year student Genesis Soebagyo had a lot of fun working with his friends, figuring out how to craft a flawless crane despite having no idea where to begin.

“I had trouble making the crane, but I had my friends help me out... I had a great time!” Soebagyo explained.

On a predominantly white campus, Melville hopes to teach fellow students what it means to come from different ethnic backgrounds.

“We really want to push diversity and have a little more Japanese presence on campus,” Melville said. “The not so profound goal is to just have fun,” he added.

For students looking for more information on upcoming events check out JSA’s Instagram @UNHJSA.