

Don't Stop Intercultural Exchange!
-A Year of ICC in the COVID-19 disaster-

Although there's still no sign of the end of the pandemic of COVID-19, face-to-face classes have finally started and Waseda campus is filled with students. However, there are still students who are unable to come to campus. They are international students who are overseas. They are unable to come to Japan due to the Japanese government's entry restrictions, so they continue to take online classes from overseas.

ICC (Intercultural Communication Center) provides such students with opportunities to connect with other students in Japan. Furthermore, ICC provides opportunities for all Waseda students, including international students abroad, to interact with various Japanese communities through online events. This news article focuses on the activities of the ICC and covers the behind-the-scenes challenges of ICC.

Mr. Nambu, an ICC staff member, and Ms. Kobayashi, a student staff leader, agreed to be interviewed by us.





Nishiyama

In the first stage of the COVID-19 pandemic, how did ICC deal with it?

When the state of emergency was declared, the first thing I thought about was how to switch to telecommuting. As ICC gradually established a telecommuting system, we began to think about what kind of service we could provide, and the idea of holding online events came up. However, although we actually held online events in the spring semester, there were many issues such as how to use Zoom effectively and how to interact with other participants online. As a result, there were about 20 online events in the spring semester...



Nambu



Nishiyama

So it was. When did ICC's online events start to work well?

We have put to good use our lessons from the spring semester and have been able to hold about 80 online events in the fall semester!



Nambu



Nishiyama

Only 20 events in the spring semester but 80 events in the fall semester.... That's great progress! What kind of things did you pay attention to or devise?

We tried to run the events in which participants could communicate with each other actively through Zoom. We prepared "Topic Sheets" to trigger conversations and took into consideration their language skills, hobbies, and departments when dividing the participants into groups for making it easier for them to talk to each other through Zoom.



Nambu



Nishiyama

Kobayashi-san, what did you do as a student staff?

The student staff were required to be facilitators in each group on Zoom, so I was conscious of how to get the participants to talk, rather than just myself. For example, I tried to find similarities between the participants and myself, or between the participants and each other, so that we could have a point of contact in the conversation.



Kobayashi

When it came to communication, reactions were very important to me. I paid attention to my reactions in Zoom and tried not to just talk too much. I also learned the importance of listening attitude.



Nambu



Nishiyama

I can imagine it is difficult to keep up with the pace of the conversation with the other person when you are communicating online... You may find yourself talking too much, or conversely, you may not be able to say what you want to say... By the way, I heard that the ICC student staff is involved in the planning of the event from the very beginning. What kind of difficulties and innovations did you encounter in the process of creating the online event, Kobayashi-san?

I especially made a lot of effort to let students know ICC and our events. Every year ICC used to make a presentation to promote ICC activities at the guidance for new students, but the guidance was cancelled due to the pandemic of COVID-19 last year. Therefore, we were unable to promote the ICC, and the PR team created a new video and focused on social networking for popularizing our events. Speaking of which, Nambu-san reached out to various departments of the university and worked with them to publicize the events!



Kobayashi



Nishiyama

ICC collaborated with other departments! Have you been doing a lot of collaboration with other departments before?

Actually, there's not a lot of coordination with other departments before. Especially we didn't have a type of event which other departments join during the event. There aren't definite reason, but eventually we didn't come up with those idea. But for instance, we challenged this year to collaborate with Kouhai Navi. It is no exaggeration to say that cooperation with other departments would not have been possible without the COVID-19 disaster.



Nambu



Nishiyama

Now that we have heard about ICC's efforts in the COVID-19 disaster, what do you appreciate about the activities of ICC?

I think it was the fact that we were able to keep some face-to-face events. They were great opportunities for international students who didn't have the chance to meet face to face. We had a lot of trouble coordinating with various people to find a way to do face-to-face events, but I'm glad we were able to do it. The other good point was that we were able to arrange a manual. We have a debriefing session after the event, and I think it was good that we were able to make a manual out of the know-how we gathered through our discussions, so that we could apply the accumulated know-how to other events.



Nambu





Nishiyama

You were trying to keep the traditional face-to-face events while implementing the online events. Kobayashi-san, How about you?

I have two major points. The first was that we were able to hold an event that we would not have been able to do in the past. Although we would not normally be able to hold events with students from universities in Ireland and Brunei, we were able to do so because we were online. It was my great pleasure to see the students who participated in the event enjoy it. The second point is the cooperation with other departments, as Nambu-san mentioned earlier. We were able to collaborate with Kouhai Navi and hold the event for freshmen.



Kobayashi



Nishiyama

So, the ICC offered an opportunity to interact with students from Ireland and Brunei...That's impressive! As you held various events through trial and error, I'm sure you received words of appreciation from students and other participants. Is there anything that left a lasting impression on you?

I heard many students say, "I can finally talk to people!" At that moment, I felt our efforts to organize the events have rewarded!



Nambu

I also heard that many students said that they were able to communicate with other students owing to the ICC's planning!



Kobayashi



Nishiyama

It's nice to see such a response from the participants! Could you let us know the ICC's future plan considering the persistent COVID-19 disaster?

We would like to hold more than 100 events a year as much as possible, including face-to-face events. We think "We want to help as many students as possible who are suffering from the COVID-19 disaster" as President Tanaka has said. I would like to work hard for it with everyone, including the student staff.



Nambu



Nishiyama

Lastly, please give us a message from ICC for all students!

Some students have mental barriers to participating in ICC events, such as "I don't speak English" or "I might not be able to speak well with people from overseas because I don't have any overseas experience." I would like to eliminate those barriers and provide more students with the opportunities of cross-cultural exchange experiences.



Kobayashi

Maybe it sounds cheesy but I would like to say to students, "You are not alone." I want students to know our events and opportunities for intercultural communication and would like to tell them, "Hey, why don't you give it a shot?" "You are not alone. Join us and you'll see a different world. If you don't like it, you can leave. If you like it, you can stay as long as you want. Just give it a try!" This is my message. And if I can take a further step, I hope that I can introduce the wonderfulness of cross-cultural exchange and understanding. We are waiting for you at the ICC events!



Nambu



Nishiyama

Nambu-san and Kobayashi-san, thank you very much for your valuable talk today!

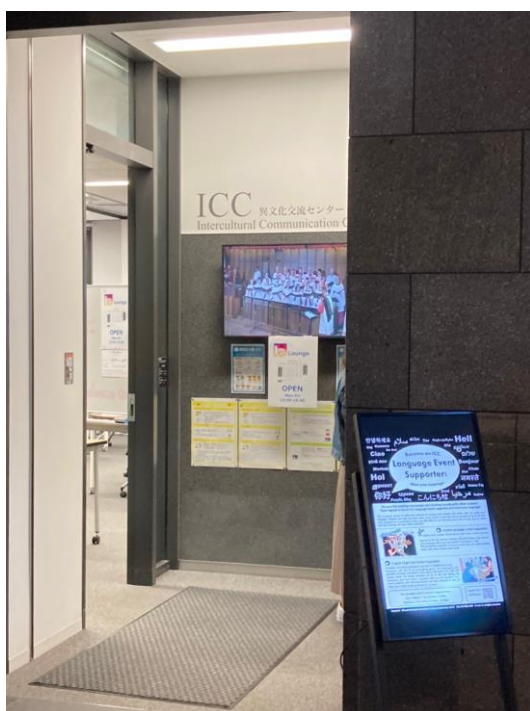
The editor's notes

Through the interview with Mr. Nambu and Ms. Kobayashi, we were able to learn about ICC's struggles in the COVID-19 disaster. We often heard the phrase "how to keep students interacting with each other" in their talks and it made a deep impression on us. We felt that the staff's passion made it possible to realize the unprecedented implementation of various online events. ICC is organizing various events right now and is looking forward to the

participation of many Waseda University students! You can find your favorite events on ICC's website. Please come and join!!

Links

- [ICC Website](#)
- [ICC Promotion Video](#)
- [ICC official Instagram](#)
- [ICC List of events](#)
- [ICC feedbacks from participants](#)



Entrance of ICC @ 1st floor of Bldg. 3



Bulletin board in ICC



By preventing the spread of infection, students can interact in ICC lounge.