

1st Column (2018. 10. 15)

Hello! My name is Keely Zabonik and I am from Arizona in the United States. I am the current Coordinator for International Relations (CIR) in Toyohashi and I work in the Multicultural Society and International Affairs Division at city hall.

I usually say I am from Arizona, but I was actually born in Texas. I have lived in three other states, which includes California, Colorado, and Hawaii. However, I had my high school and undergraduate education in Arizona so rather than saying I am from Texas, I feel like Arizona is my home state.

It is funny to think about it now, but the reason I began studying Japanese was because of music and video games. Then my first Japanese teacher ended up being a really great teacher. After taking his classes, I decided to major in Japanese.

At the University of Arizona I double majored in Japanese and Linguistics. After I graduated, I worked in Shimane-ken, Izumo-shi as an Assistant Language Teacher. Shimane is an extremely rural area, but I ended up falling in love with the prefecture because of all of the great people and beautiful nature. After spending three years in Shimane I decided to go to graduate school in Hawaii. My major was the same as in undergrad, and my specialty area was phonetics. In between my first and second year of my master's studies, I came back to Japan to study Japanese for 10 months at the Inter-University Center in Yokohama. Afterwards, I returned to Hawaii to finish my degree. The focus of my master's thesis was second-language learners' pronunciation of Japanese. I ran an experiment that looked specifically at learners' pronunciation of the alveolar tap, or the consonant that appears in 「ra ri ru re ro/らりるれろ」。In my experiment I was able to find some pronunciation trends with these learners by looking at the soundwaves of their speech. I found that I really enjoy carrying out research and am planning to become a university professor in the future. Because of that I intend to return to graduate school to obtain a PhD.

When I was living in Izumo I had many opportunities to volunteer with the local international association. This experience was the main reason I decided to apply to become a CIR. Because organizing cultural exchange events was extremely rewarding, I felt I would be well-suited for this kind of work and I decided to apply for the CIR position.

Outside of work, my main hobby is working out. My favorite exercise to do is weightlifting. Additionally, I started bouldering about a year ago. Both of them require a lot of muscles but the kind of strength is very different. I think it is really interesting to do both. My other hobby besides working out is insect collecting. I became interested in insects when I was in graduate school and worked part-time in an insect museum. I ended up learning a lot about insects because of this job even though it had nothing to do with my own research! My favorite insects are moths and beetles.

I am really looking forward to all the things I can learn from living in Toyohashi!