FGL Community Newsletter

Club Spotlight: Tohoku University Aikido Club

A look into the art of harmony and self-discipline.



THE ART OF HOSHIGAKI ASK SENPAI: JESUS URBANEJA

FALL 2024

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As the air turns cooler and the leaves transform into a tapestry of gold and crimson, fall has arrived in Sendai, bringing with it a unique charm. Whether it's exploring the vibrant autumn foliage, indulging in seasonal treats like roasted sweet potatoes, or enjoying cultural festivals this season offers something special for everyone. So grab your coziest scarf and a cup of hot tea, and let's discover all the joys that autumn in Sendai has to offer!

- The FGL Community Committee

Club Spotlight: Aikido Club

Koharu Miyoshi

What is Aikido?

Aikido is a relatively modern martial art developed during the Taisho and Showa eras by Ueshiba Morihei. It blends traditional techniques from jujutsu and kenjutsu and focuses on using an opponent's own attacking force to throw or restrain them. As a non-combative martial art, aikido emphasizes personal growth, enhancing the practitioner's mental and physical attributes such as confidence, balance, and selfdefense skills.

History of Tohoku University's Aikido Club

Tohoku University's Aikido Club was founded in 1961 by Morikawa Zenzō, a highly respected practitioner who received mentorship directly from aikido's founder. The club quickly became a success, attracting over 100 members early on and hosting an *enbukai* (demonstrative performance) featuring Ueshiba Morihei himself. Today, the club is in its 66th generation, with around 30 active members. The club also organizes regular *gasshuku* (intensive practice camps) with its official instructor, Ueshiba Mitsuteru, who is a great-grandson of Ueshiba Morihei.

Why join Aikido Club?

Personally, I joined the Aikido Club because I had experienced Aikido at a summer camp in California during elementary school. When I saw the club's booth at the Spring Festival, I thought, "Why not?"

At first, the practices seemed intimidatingly formal, but now I would describe the club as disciplined rather than intimidating. The practice schedule is very flexible, and the club doesn't have the strict hierarchy that is often associated with martial arts organizations. Most members join as beginners, and the senpai (senior members) are very approachable and helpful instructors.

One challenge is that the primary language used in the club is Japanese, so socializing might be difficult unless you're confident in your language skills. That said, I would recommend the Aikido Club to anyone interested in Japanese martial arts, especially those who prefer a non-combative style. (Plus, everyone looks great in a hakama!). If you're interested, the Aikido Club has a booth and demonstrative performances at the Spring Festival. Feel free to stop by!

Website: <u>https://tohokuaiki.jp/</u>. X (formerly Twitter): @tohokuaikidou Instagram: @tohoku_uni_aiki

The Art of Hoshigaki: A Tradition of Drying Persimmons

Avin Sharma

When autumn arrives in Japan, the countryside dons a magical hue with rows of persimmons, or *kaki*, hanging like radiant orange lanterns. These fruits are not only a hallmark of the season but also central to the age-old tradition of *hoshigaki*, the art of drying persimmons. This meticulous process goes beyond preserving the fruit; it is a cultural ritual steeped in history, passed lovingly through generations.

Production of *hoshigaki* starts with the selection of raw *hachiya* persimmons, whose shape is of a teardrop and astringency very strong when raw. To prepare them, the fruits are immersed for a short period in boiling water to sterilize them and then peeled with precision so that the stem is left intact for easy stringing. Tied in pairs, the persimmons are hung in a warm but well-vented space where air passage inhibits mold and creates an ideal drying environment.

One of the most typical and time-consuming procedures in the preparation of *hoshigaki* is the daily hand-kneading of the fruits. After their outer skins have dried, they are lightly massaged to disrupt internal fibers. This process, besides encouraging even drying, also develops the natural sweetness of the persimmons. Over weeks, the fruits darken and develop a delicate white sugar bloom on their surface, meaning they are ready to be savored. The result is a chewy, moist delicacy packed with flavor, floral aroma, and musky sweetness, cherished as one of the best autumn delicacies.

But *hoshigaki* are more than a delicious treat. They hold deep cultural significance, too. Long ago, they were part of the ritual ornamentation of traditional New Year's decorations for good luck and longevity. Ultimately, they are a part of Japan's rich cultural heritage and the harmony between nature and tradition. So let's enjoy *hoshigaki* this season!





Ask Senpai: Jesus Urbaneja

Alicia Adrian, Jesus Urbaneja



• Can you give us an introduction of yourself?

Hello, my name is Jesus Urbaneja. I am currently a fourth-year student in Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering at Tohoku University. Originally from Venezuela, I am proud to be the first student from South America in the IMAC-U program, and I'm excited to share a bit about my journey and interests.

• Could you give an overview of the Research Topics and Lab Work you do? I am part of the Kobayashi-Sato Lab, which primarily focuses on computer architecture while exploring other intriguing areas such as High-Performance Computing, Quantum Annealing, and Al/Machine Learning. This semester, I took on the role of Administrative Assistant as part of my training for a future graduation project. My lab work involves molecular classification using Quantum Annealing techniques, applying Quantum Annealing-based clustering algorithms to identify molecules in soft materials. This experience has given me numerous opportunities to deepen my knowledge of quantum technologies through conferences and research.

Additionally, I work as a Junior Researcher at the Frontier Research Institute of Tohoku University under Professor Le Binho. My research here focuses on Quantum Computing Algorithms, where I am developing a Genetic Algorithm to optimize quantum circuits. This algorithm uses natural evolution principles, such as crossover and mutation, to improve circuits based on their ability to represent quantum states accurately. For more details, our research article, "Multi-target Variational Quantum Algorithm," will soon be published in the Machine Learning Science and Technology journal.

• What are your future plans after completing your undergraduate studies? Looking ahead, I plan to pursue a Master degree at Kobayashi-Sato Lab. I believe further specialization is necessary before entering the workforce, and Tohoku University's information science program aligns well with my goals. After completing my Master's, I hope to gain industry experience and potentially pursue a PhD, though my plans are still evolving. How has being a member of the Tohoku University swimming team enriched your experience as an international student, and what have you learned from participating in national competitions?

I am also a member of Tohoku University's swimming team, where I am currently the only foreigner. Being part of the team has helped me better understand Japanese culture and improve my Japanese language skills, especially regional slang. The team members have been incredibly supportive, offering translations and swimming advice.

I've had incredible experiences with the club, including representing the university at national competitions. The team's unwavering support and camaraderie have kept my spirit high and motivated me to keep pushing forward.

• What final message or advice would you like to share with fellow and future students who are navigating their academic and cultural journeys at Tohoku University?

Being the only student from South America has broadened my perspective on cultural interactions. While Venezuelans are known for their warmth, my experience at Tohoku University has helped me appreciate and adapt to Asian cultural norms. Despite the challenges of being far from home during a time of unrest in Venezuela, I am deeply grateful for the opportunities I've received.

I want to thank the FGL program for making this journey possible. Leaving a Computer Engineering program in Venezuela to study at Tohoku University was a significant decision, but I have no regrets. Coming from a developing country, I am especially appreciative of the opportunities I've been given to grow academically and personally.

Thank you for reading the Fall 2024 issue of the FGL Community Newsletter! See you next season!