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ESOL Conversation Program

2013 FALL

12/04/2013

ESOL Coordinator Report

-- Adam Lax

My first semester as the coordinator of the ESOL program has definitely been a learning experience. It was especially difficult in the first month and a half to get the program off the ground. The recruiting of volunteers and participants, registration sessions, matching up people into conversation sessions and dealing with the problems of Tutor Trac all proved quite overwhelming at first. After a while though, the work got less hectic, and I am now better prepared for dealing with them next semester.

Overall it was a pretty successful and eventful semester for the ESOL program. For this semester, we had over 200 people involved in the program. This included 66 volunteers and 186 participants. Moreover, we had a fairly well attended volunteer

training workshop. Also, we hired two great interns, Allison and Aggie, to help improve the ESOL program. With their help, we started the social planning committee and were able to have a great luncheon in the Stamp Student Union as well as an ice skating event. Finally, we initiated a separate Chinese-English language exchange with over 80 participants. This provides a mutually beneficial opportunity for native Chinese international students and faculty to be paired up with individuals studying Chinese. Each session lasts about an hour in which half the time is focused on English and half the time is focused on Chinese. This will be continued in the spring term. For next semester, aside from increasing the number of participants and volunteers in the ESOL program, my major goal is to expand

the social activities and events in the program. We should have some more regular events and activities with



ESOL Luncheon at Stamp

other departments and student organizations to give participants more opportunities to speak English in natural contexts and meet new people. To help accomplish this, I would like more volunteers and participants to get involved in the social planning committee. I am already discussing with staff in the International Students and Scholars Services Department about collaborating to plan more social events and activities next semester.

Why You Should Become A Volunteer



The ESOL program is a wonderful opportunity for volunteers in just ten weeks to receive a much better un-

derstanding of the culture, traditions, education, people, professions, and sports of other countries. ESOL is in a sense a “passport” to volunteers who may never get the opportunity to travel to other countries to do this through their students. Classroom sessions give volunteers and students great

opportunities to learn from expectations for the program. Students should be encouraged to:

Volunteers have opportunities to tailor the sessions to meet the needs of their students. In your first meeting sessions, it is very important for you as a volunteer to ask some important questions, such as:

1. What do you expect to gain in the 10 weeks?
2. What are the areas you need most help with?
3. What topics interest you?
4. What type of discussions do you wish to have?

In the first meeting it is also very important to set your

1. E-mail the volunteer if they are unable to attend a session.

2. E-mail the volunteer if they plan to drop out of the program and also the Learning Assistance Center.

3. If they have any problems they should be encouraged to e-mail the volunteer or the Learning Assistance Center.

Please consider becoming a volunteer for the ESOL program because it will change your life in a very positive way.

—Bernie Gormally (volunteer)

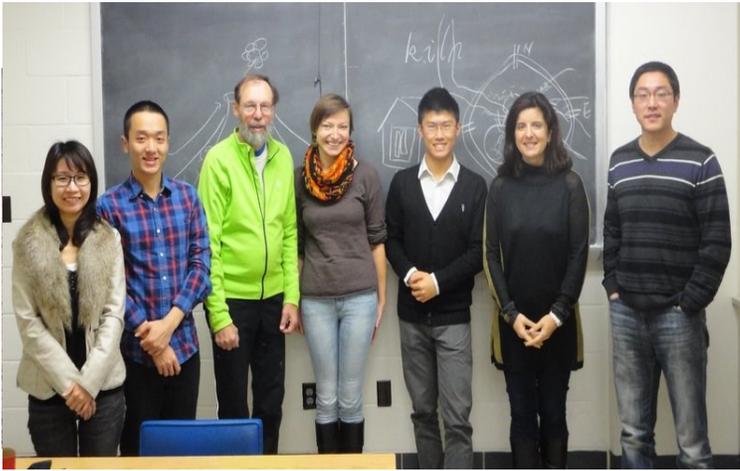
Alisa Bar-katt in her conversation session



I took part in the ESOL Conversation Program for the first time in fall of 2013. I was in one English conversation group led by Amber, and a Chinese-English conversation partner with Adam. In the conversation group, we have 8 students, but about 4 or 5 people show up every time. We have spent very joyful time. I appreciate that we have Amber, a very lovely girl, who is younger than all of us, sharing a lot of interesting stories about her family. I also like all the quizzes she gave us. Some questions asked us about American celebrities’ lives before they became famous, and we were very surprised by Obama’s ice cream scooper job! Some questions were about famous American movies and songs, such as how many tickets has Avatar sold. It was just very funny to know something that you didn’t expect. In our every meeting, she prepared very well by bringing pictures and notes to help us better understand. We all get along very well. Everyone likes to share their own stories, which usually make us burst into laughter. 90 minutes pass by so fast just like a blink. With Adam, it was great too! He wants to practice his Chinese and I need to improve my English. What a perfect match! A lot of times he asked me for the differences and uses of several Chinese phrases with very similar meanings, and it was very cool to explain it to him

‘cause I have never thought about it before! (continued on page 3)

Wonderful Days



Tom Simon's Conversation Group

Wonderful Days

much! From the TV show, I have learned a lot of slang. Adam also helped me revise my resume and cover letter, providing a big favor to a graduating student. To help me become familiar with English slang, he even found me a set of slang cards! I really appreciate it! I like the ESOL program very much, which gives international students lots of opportunities to settle down into American culture. This semester will be the last one of my UMD life, and I will miss everyone I have met in ESOL. Best wishes to all of you!

—Xinchen Hu (Participant)

(continued from page 2) But thank God, Adam is very smart and he can always understand it no matter how bad my explanation is! I realize that Chinese might be more difficult for non-native speakers than English for us.

And it's also very encouraging to see that many people are trying their every effort to study Chinese. In English conversation, we talked a lot about the TV show, *Breaking Bad*, which was recommended by Adam and I like it so

Feedback From Participants

I'm really glad that I took the ESOL program and it is indeed a great pleasure to talk with Mr. Boone during the semester. Mr. Boone is an admirable man with an attractive personality and an amazing life experience. From his prospective, he gave me some really useful advice on life and helpful knowledge about the U.S. culture. We usually do not prepare the topic and the topic will come as our chats go deeper. We chat about topics from food to politics, and from daily routine to religions. Since I have always been into religions and philosophy, his unique life story and background gave me a really good opportunity to learn more about what interests me.

From my part, I shared about my opinions on Chinese culture and what I think about being Chinese. In one specific talk, without going into any details, I shared my knowledge about a brief history of China. As we have discussed in the talks, it is optimal for two great nations, U.S. and China, to know each other better, and only through more communication can we truly understand each other. That's why I'm not treating this program as only a chance to perfect my English, but also a cherished opportunity to share my culture and belief, and to learn from the U.S. culture. In conclusion, the program is over what I expected and I am grateful for Mr. Boone's time and effort that he volunteered for us.



Xinyuan Shao in the conversation group with Roberts Boone

—Xinyuan Shao (Participant)

NEW ESOL Social Planning Committee

“Put the tiny stone in the middle of the labyrinth, then all the problems you have in your mind will leave at that place. Write up what you want to say in this notebook under the chair. I left my mood, both in Chinese and English, in that notebook.”

—Tiffany Pao

Allison Lee

ESOL has started a new special committee, devoted to planning and coordinating social events for its program.

It has already hosted its first-ever social bash of the season: a cozy luncheon with 40 of its volunteers and participants.

This event, hosted on Friday, Nov. 22, attracted a full house of people to the room they reserved inside Stamp Student Union. The event began at around 12:45 p.m. and lasted straight until 2 p.m., when the luncheon was supposed to end. But even after the scheduled end-time, many people lingered around to continue the conversations they were having and to eat up all the leftover snacks.

Although the event was loosely structured (purposefully, I might add), attendees never experienced a dull moment: the luncheon began with a fun ice breaker—2 truths and a

lie—in order to get conversations rolling and people more comfortable with each other. This exercise squelched any awkwardness that might have existed beforehand, and allowed free time to be full of lively and endless chatter.

The Social Planning Committee plans to coordinate more events like this one in order to inspire new relationships amongst its volunteers and participants, and even between participants and their peers outside of the program. On top of planning group activities to have during the school week and/or weekends, the committee hopes to arrange activities with those not particularly affiliated with ESOL. This would help many of our participants fortify the relationships they desire, or sometimes need, with other students and residents around College Park.

Some ideas to make this happen include having teatime or “coffee corner” with anyone who desires to come. Or, we might sign up to do volunteer work around the city and help out other organizations. Whatever the event, the Social Planning Committee hopes to satisfy the needs and aspirations of the participants and volunteers it wholeheartedly works for.

If you would like to join the committee, whether you are a volunteer or participant, please contact ESOL

interns Allison Lee (alee1217@terpmail.umd.edu) or Aggie Hu, (aggiehu@umd.edu). The committee accepts new members year-round and welcomes anyone who wishes to join!

About the Author:

Allison Lee is one of the new interns for the ESOL Conversation Program. She is from Howard County, MD, and is in her third year of studying undergraduate broadcast journalism here at the University of Maryland. She is very happy to be serving the ESOL program this year, especially after having served as a volunteer during her freshman year of college. She is now able to attest to ESOL’s wonderful impact because she was able to gain many fond memories and friendships with her conversation partners through the program—just last winter, she met up with an old ESOL partner in NYC, where she was then living! Because of her own memorable experience and genuine enthusiasm for the program, Allison is now excited to be interning for a program that gave her a lot to be grateful for. She hopes to receive a warm welcome by those already involved with the program and wishes to serve ESOL to the best of her abilities.



Words From Volunteers



**ESOL
Luncheon
at Stamp**

On a sunny day, I met my language partner for the first time next to Tes-tudo near McKeldin Library. We instantly connected since we were both first-year master students

who had just moved to the area. During our first meeting my partner expressed relief as she had worried about who would be her partner and what they would discuss. Our subsequent meetings were filled with laughter, and for the both of us, it was an escape from our hectic study schedules to enjoy friendship and to learn for the sake of learning. Over the weeks, we shared stories and learned about each other and each other's culture. I also hope that I was able to aid her language learning. We discussed a diverse array of topics during our meetings, such as family, friends, movies, cooking, and holidays. My time spent as a conversation partner was rewarding and I know that my partner and I will continue to meet in the future.

—Erin Carlini (Volunteer)

Doing A Field Trip

Well, I met my conversation partner on a field trip during the first week of the Fall 2013 ESOL Program term. She and her University of Maryland roommate joined me and my long time female partner to go to the Renaissance Festival. The Renaissance Festival takes place every year in Crownsville, Maryland. It is a recreation of the time when British kings really had a lot of power and their knights actually had major jousts with lances and swords. Many people dress for the occasion in medieval outfits or rent one at the Festival. The Festival has a

number of shows, including jousts, which hark back to the medieval times such as British maids singing. They even have a display of fake British royal crowns and scepters. For lunch, you get to indulge like a true medieval Brit by digging into a turkey leg. If you get tired of going to the shows there are also a number of shops with various medieval items, such as blown glass, figurines, musical instruments, masks, and hats. The Festival is an all day event on the weekends during September and October. Meeting for the first time with my Fall 2013 ESOL conversation partner to go to the Festival enhanced our ESOL conversations and



Bruce's Conversation Group on Field Trip

gave us a good start to the whole Fall term. I only suggest three basic rules: stay together at the event, speak English all the time, and have everyone pay for their own fees and purchases.

—Bruce Kuhl (Volunteer)

A Bite is Worth a Thousand Words

Experiencing the local food is part of any cultural immersion. Having that sensory experience is part of the “show and tell” for and by the students in my sessions. Talking about food in the abstract does not compare to tasting, smelling and seeing samples of bites. The variety of American “food” reflects the diversity in America, with “fusion” of cultures in one bite.

This experience becomes fodder for conversation during the semester as the students converse about characteristics of the samples, offer comparisons, explain the reasons for their “like,” “dislike,” etc. The students broaden the conversation to include culinary history that covers geography, botany, commerce, religion, and tradition (I learned that the Portuguese introduced tempura to Japan!).

At our last session, my students surprised me by bringing homemade bites! Each student introduced his dish, explained how he prepared it and gave a bit of culinary history, answering questions from the others.

Rocks cooked up tomato and eggs, a dish I enjoyed while attending Beijing Culture and Language University. Yuan, the only gal in the group, made seasoned garlic potatoes. I didn’t know that potatoes were common in China. Zhiqi prepared congee, also known as porridge and gruel in other cultures. His version was “sweet” with pumpkin and dates, rather than the “savory” flavor that I know. Daisuke was able to draft his wife to bake “Mama’s chocolate chip cookies” with less sugar than the American version. Yoichiro, who loves introducing his classmates to Japanese cooking, made a red bean roll filled with sticky

rice, a dish similar to Chinese cuisine.

I was “wowed” by my students’ thoughtfulness to share their bites. “Breaking bread” keeps conversation rolling and our spirits high. I learn from my students in so many ways. Thank you to my wonderful students for giving me their culinary culture!

—Audrey Hong
(Volunteer)



Audrey
Hong’s Con-
versation
Group

2013 FALL

ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages)

Where to begin? My English teaching and learning back in China—which partially led to my college admission, and later, an interview opportunity with Clare Cheng, the previous coordinator? The ESOL program at UMD is the first place where I was introduced to before I even came to the States. One thing led to another. After going through a zigzagging route, finally life brought me here. As an international Chinese student and an intern for the program, this is where I am supposed to be: UMD and the ESOL program.

How do I see the ESOL program? It is a free service offered by the UMD counseling center. Some people might think that anything offered for free is substandard in quality. I cannot understand why people think this way because for me, anything free is something to be grateful for.

How I see it? Well to start, the acronym ESOL means English for Speakers of Other Languages. Among the speakers of other languages who want to learn English well, students from China constitute a significant portion. Surely, with a growing economy and increasing demand for high-

er education, China has become a leading exporter of students to universities in the U.S now. In order to better survive and thrive in these English-speaking countries, students like me must learn this international language well. Though the motivations for learning the language may vary from person to person, they are super real and solid. Back in China, I saw



ESOL Luncheon at Stamp

that many of my students spared no efforts grasping every opportunity to practice more English and to speak better. Speaking fluent English to them become a cool and desirable goal worth striving for.

Second, let me go beyond language. What does foreign language skill offer us? Language is

definitely a facilitator for intercultural communication if one is good at it. I guess that's also part of the reason why the ESOL Conversation Program attracts so many volunteers and participants. People with different language skill gather and merge together to have conversations, to engage with each other, by sharing, listening, and responding. ESOL therefore serves as a destination for participants to not only

improve English conversation skills, but to also better familiarize oneself with the world culture. I even heard that in one conversation group, people actually prepared slides about their respective cultures and gave presentations. It is no longer about language itself. It goes beyond that.

Third, ESOL is a place where we can meet people and make genuine friends. It is a place where sincere conversations are carried out and mutual understandings are being achieved. Being in a different country and confronting oneself with a diversified back-

ground can be a challenging and sometimes depressing experience for newcomers. Many volunteers in the ESOL program, from my observation, are very understanding and helpful in assisting the new students adapt to new life here.

Sometimes I babble a lot. But basically, I like the program and the people here. It is GREAT!

—Luanjiao (Aggie) Hu (Intern)

Feedback From Participants

I am so happy to participate in the ESOL Program this semester. It is not easy for a Chinese student or scholar to speak English fluently if they had no any experience abroad. The obstacle from language is big challenge for us, which can influence our study and daily life. ESOL program provides us very nice opportunity to practice our oral English. I attend two English groups now, Yvette Yu is one volunteer who guides us practice English every week for 1.5 hour. Every time she prepared carefully for every conversation and organized very well. As a Chinese girl, she would like to help Chinese students or scholars to improve our oral English. Another volunteer is Daniel Goodley who is a warm-hearted American guy. Every time he encouraged every one to speak freely and let us know much more information and customs about United States. Anyway, we appreciate what

they did for us.

During the conversation, every one will be benefited from others, because everybody has the different thinking style and different attitude. we can share the different experiences and different approaches from different fields. In addition, we not only practice our language, but also build up the friendship with each other by this platform that ESOL Program provided. Every week each of us look forward to the chance to meet together. By the end of this semester, we can feel our improvement to some different extents. So next semester I would continue to participant in ESOL program.

— Xu Hong (Participant)

Feedback From Participants

I'm really glad to share this amazing experience I had in the ESOL program. In this semester, I attended the advanced group discussion with Robert and Daniel. We met every Monday to talk about a wide range of topics including philosophy, religion, environment protection, history and etc. I benefit a lot from this group discussion because the topics are chosen as we wish and definitely opened my eyes. We found the difference between eastern and western culture but we also found the similarity in all the mankind. It's a bowl of chicken soup to my heart. I refreshed from this conversation after a whole week's heavy load of studying. Robert taught us much wisdom in life. He is more like a friend to us other than a volunteer. We really had a great time and recommend you all to take part into this fantastic program.

—Kangjian Wang (Participant)



Tiffany and Sydney in Memorial Chapel Garden of Reflection and Remembrance

Comments From Participants and Coordinator Response

“Please correct my pronunciation” – If you want your volunteer to help you with pronunciation you should tell him/her directly. Often, we don’t want to correct non-native English speakers’ because it can intimidate them and make them more hesitant to speak freely. We encourage speaking for communication rather than speaking with perfect pronunciation.

“Maybe volunteers can take turns so we will meet more people.” – This would be very difficult to accomplish in our program because we have a lot of volunteers who have very different schedules. Next semester, however, we hope to have more social events in the ESOL program that can allow you to meet more volunteers in the program.

“I think the location should not be limited in the classroom” – For group conversation sessions, we usually have them in a classroom because it can be difficult for a volunteer to find a place each week that’s big enough for all his/her students. If you would like to change the location of your group conversation sessions, please talk directly to your volunteer about this. If many people in your conversation group and your volunteer support this and an adequate alternative space can be found, you can change your group conversation session location.

“6/7 people in a group may be a little bit more talkative so some people, especially those who do not like to talk in front of people, may have little chance to speak.” – In the spring term, we will be adding an additional type of conversation session for the ESOL program. In addition to regular groups and partners, we will also have a small group. The small group will only be three people (two participants and a volunteer). This will give participants more chances for closer communication with volunteers.

“The lessons/meetings should more often or longer.” – Many of the volunteers have busy schedules and can only meet with participants at certain times. They may not be able to do longer conversation sessions or more conversation sessions each week. I would suggest inviting your volunteer to do an activity outside of conversation sessions if you would like to spend more time with her/him.

Comments From Volunteers and Coordinator Response

“Create a more user-friendly attendance system—something where all participants are entered once, and one only needs to report absences. Or just stick with paper, also just recording absences, to turn in at end of semester.” – Because the ESOL program is run through the Learning Assistance Services Office in the Counseling Center, we are required to enter attendance on the Tutor Trac website. This allows us to keep track of the program and prove its merit within our department. As such, we need to regularly enter in attendance online.

Comments From Volunteers and Coordinator Response

2013 FALL

(continued from page 9) Thus, it is not feasible to rely on paper attendance logs to be entered at the end of the semester. It is a very minimal requirement for the volunteer to be able to enter in attendance online on a weekly basis. To help all volunteers get comfortable using the website and entering in attendance, I will require volunteers to meet with me once in my office in the first few weeks of the spring term. I will go over with you how to use Tutor Trac and enter in attendance.

“The students in my sessions say that they continue to receive ‘missed appointment’ e-mails even after I submit their names as having attended.” – This problem is an issue with the Tutor Trac website that we use for keeping attendance. It sends out an e-mail automatically if attendance is not entered in a certain way the same day of the appointment. I have figured it out and I will address this matter during the Spring 2014 registration session.

“Some students do not e-mail when they are not coming to class so maybe sending an e-mail reminding students if they have conflicts to let their volunteers know so they are not worried. Also, students dropping out should have the courtesy to let their volunteers know why. It is very rude just to drop out and not say anything to the volunteer.” – I agree with this 100%. I emphasized this during the registration session for participants but I believe that the volunteers need to remind them about this in their conversation sessions. I would suggest getting the phone numbers of student(s) at the beginning of the semester and calling them directly if they don’t show up without letting you know. If students drop out without letting you know, please inform me and I will contact them as well. In future semesters, they may be not allowed to participate in the ESOL program.

“Students asking for more social interactions with student body at large.” - We want to change this through our social planning committee. We want to do more activities and events with other organizations on campus next semester. I encourage volunteers and participants, if they have time, to get involved in the committee to bring your ideas and to help plan and run events.

**VOLUNTEERS
WANTED
!!!!!!!!!!!!!!**



**Please feel free to e-mail
umdesol@gmail.com
your comments or
provide ongoing
anonymous feedback on
our program website.**