

UMD ESOL Program Newsletter

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Fall 2012

December

ESOL Program Updates: Fall 2012



A tour of the University House (President's Mansion): Dorcas' group on Nov. 9, 2012.

Fall 2012 Semester went by quickly. This semester our program has 40 Conversation Groups, 56 pairs of Conversation Partners and 6 pairs of Language Exchange Conversation Partners. To put it another way, we have about 105 volunteers with a total of 280 students in our program. This is by far the semester with the most number of students in our program. Therefore, we really appreciate the students and the volunteers for their participation and dedication to the conversation sessions and program-related events. We want to thank the program members for their commitments in supporting each other and the

program coordinator.

There were also several additional changes in our program this semester. In order to meet the demands of students interested in conversation partner sessions, we piloted the Language Exchange Initiative (part of Funds of Knowledge Exchange) where we recruited volunteers interested in learning a target language from an ESOL participant. It is an hour of English practice with an hour of world language practice, which included, but are not limited to, Chinese Mandarin and Spanish.

In response to students' request to provide more social events, we piloted bi-weekly social twice before we had to cancel the later events due to unforeseen circumstances. However, we really enjoyed the discussions and rapport at the social. We watched Freedom Writers with Rachel Alade (Conversation Group Leader) leading the discussions and A Beautiful Mind with Clare Cheng (Program Coordinator) leading the discussions. We would like to encourage more volunteers to help lead discussions and students to participate in the bi-weekly social in the upcoming semester.

~Clare Cheng (Program Coordinator)

One Step towards Changing the World ~ Yuan Xue

Recently, at the weekly gathering of the ESOL program group, the volunteer told us a story: Once upon a time, an old man was walking along the shore after a big storm had passed and found the vast beach littered with many starfishes.

Off in the distance, the old man could see that a young boy was occasionally bending down to pick up an object and throw it into the sea. The old man walked closer to the boy and said, "May I ask what it is that you are doing?" The young

boy paused, looked up, and replied, "Throwing the starfish into the ocean. The tide has washed them up onto the beach, and they can't return to the sea by themselves. When the sun gets high, they will die, unless I

(Continued from pg. 2)

One Step towards Changing the World (Continued from pg. 1) ~ Yuan Xue

throw them back into the water.” The old man replied,” But there must be tens of thousands of starfish on this beach. I am afraid you won’t really be able to make much of a difference.” The boy bent down, picked up another starfish and threw it as far as he could into the ocean. Then he returned, smiled and said, “It made a difference to that one!”

Several months ago, I was doing some shopping with

my mother in a supermarket in China. When I was about to check out after finishing buying all the daily necessities, the cashier asked me,” Do you want any plastic bags?” I gave a quick response to her, “Yes, please.” However, my mother instantly corrected my words and said, “Sorry, we don’t need any plastic bags, thank you.” I was so confused and asked my mother, “Hey, mom, we have a lot of stuff to take,

and definitely, we need at least one plastic bag. It’s not a big deal to buy one bag, which will only cost us ¥0.5 (about 0.08 dollars).” My mother replied to me with a smile, “It has nothing to do with money. If everyone like me stops using disposable bags, our environment will become better and better. You are an expert in the Department of Environment, why don’t you join me in making a contribution to our sur-



*The Starfish Story
Making A Difference*

You might not be able to change the entire world, but at least, you can change a small part of it for someone.

roundings?”

Therefore, we all have the opportunity to help create positive changes. However, in most of the cases, we are thinking, “I am too busy to change the enormous negative effects in our society, so why not do it tomorrow or why are others doing what I wanted to do?” Sometimes we will cast

doubts towards our abilities in changing the world and start to think, “How much of a difference can I really make?” Sometimes the overwhelming challenges ahead will block our steps towards making a change for the entire world; sometimes, other people will deride us as fools because it’s impossible for a single,

ordinary person to make a difference for the whole world.

All of these are especially true when we are talking about addressing massive social problems, like tackling world hunger or finding a cure for cancer, but we should keep in mind: you might not be able to change the entire world,

but at least, you can change a small part of it for someone. Here goes a famous ancient Chinese proverb: The man who removes a mountain begins by carrying away small stones. I remembered once a professional marathon runner said, “It is really difficult to keep working at something for a long time without positive feedback. Try to break down the task into several small goals, which will help you to review what you have achieved so far and to celebrate your progress. Rewarding yourself for achieving smaller intermediary goals gives positive feedback so that you can keep pushing yourself to achieve more in the future.” After that, you will understand why throwing back that one starfish can make “a world of difference.”

“IT MADE A DIFFERENCE TO THAT ONE ...”



James Spatz's Conversation Group

Enriching My Journey ~Audrey Hong

Learning is a continuous journey. It's no secret that I learn from my students. In fact, when we first meet, I tell them that I learn from them!

Yes, yes, as a volunteer I help the students with English, find answers to their questions, share homemade edibles and even explain the rules of football.

In my advance conversation group, the students are asked to complete one assignment for the semester: to prepare a "show and tell" on any topic to share with the class. The only guideline given is to choose a topic for which they have a passion or interest for a five to ten minutes talk. It's easier to talk about something we enjoy, something that is a part of us such as a hobby, a trip, our family, or a special event.

The students organize the "show" with photos for viewing on their personal electronic devices. There is no deadline. Whenever they are ready, they "tell" us about their passion.

My students have introduced me to a variety of topics. A visiting scholar in Chinese art talked about Don McLean's "Vincent (Starry Starry Night)" being inspired by Van Gogh and his series of Starry Night **(Continued on pg. 7)**

Role Playing ~James Spatz

Participating in UMD's ESOL program was a new and positive experience for me. I really enjoyed the back-and-forth nature of the conversation group with lessons designed to encourage the sharing of each other's ideas, cultures and backgrounds. In speaking

for myself, I know I am coming away from this semester having learned much more about China (my students were from there) and the culture of the people there. It was evident that the students were also really interested in improving their English, and they

came with a great attitude for whatever activity we did. Whether it was pretending to order meals and eat at "Olive Garden" in the classroom, prepping for the corporate interview or playing memory with our language's many idioms, they always made it fun.



Audrey Hong's Group:
Momo, Xin, Audrey and Allan (from left to right).

"As a transfer student, it was great to have the chance to assist other students in getting acclimated to life at UMD, and to American culture in general while I was experiencing many of the same difficulties."
~ Thomas Burke



Thomas Burke and his group members in the middle of a discussion.

Adjusting to the New Environment ~Thomas Burke

As a first semester student at College Park, I really enjoyed having the opportunity to volunteer with the ESOL conversation program. As a transfer student, it was great to have the chance to assist other students in getting acclimated to life at UMD, and to American culture in general while I was experiencing many of the same difficulties. ESOL has been such a fun and unique way to learn about other cultures, and I often came out of group talks with a new outlook on my own culture. During my trips out of the U.S. I've seen the difficulty that comes from not being able to adequately express yourself in the local language, so it was great to help new students improve their English. As the students adjusted to American culture, and I adjusted to my role as conversation leader, I felt that our conversations improved in depth and purpose, and I'm already looking forward to volunteering next semester.

What the ESOL Program Meant for Me ~ John Holland

I took part in the ESOL Conversation Program for the first time in fall of 2012. I wanted to practice Chinese, and, in turn, help someone else with English. Since I study U.S.-China relations, this was an invaluable opportunity for me to learn more, not only about Chinese language, but also Chinese people and culture.

I started studying Chinese when I first came to Maryland in fall of 2011. As a full-time graduate student in political science, I could not take Chinese language courses, but I was able to study a little bit on my own. However, I had little opportunity to apply and practice what I was learning. Then, during my second semester, in spring of 2012, I came across an advertisement for the ESOL Conversation Program. It invited students of Chinese to practice their language skills with a native speaker while, simultaneously, teach English to the person. Since I had been looking for a conversation partner, I decided to participate.

The program began in fall of 2012. I was assigned to a very fun and enthusiastic graduate student from Chongqing, China. She had just come to the U.S. to pursue her master's degree; she had heard about the ESOL program and signed up, hoping to polish her English skills. Though I thought she already spoke English quite well, I tried to think of ways to help her improve. We talked about her classes, hobbies, and upbringing in China. I also brought in newspaper articles and scripture passages for her to read. There was always the occasional word that was new to her. Finally, I lent her movies, with the great challenge to not use subtitles! In terms of my studying Chinese, she was exceedingly helpful. Besides aiding me with vocabulary and grammar, she was willing to discuss political and social matters as well. One practice I found especially fascinating was study hall (自習): many Chinese middle schools require students, during the school day, to simply sit down, for an

extended period, and do homework. When I went to middle school in Virginia, we, on the contrary, were always expected to do homework at home. My conversation partner and I learned a lot from each other, and what we learned gave us a truly unique perspective on cross-cultural exchange.

The ESOL Conversation Program was undoubtedly a most rewarding experience. It was an opportunity for my partner and me not only to practice language skills, but also to learn about other cultures and make new friends. Though one may have no interest in studying a foreign language whatsoever, the ESOL Program exposes one to a curious mind that seeks to understand this great land of ours. There are hundreds of foreign students every semester who participate, and this program gives one the opportunity to be a voice for our country, representing it with both a tone of instruction and a hand of welcome.

*"...this program gives one the opportunity to be a voice for our country, representing it with both a tone of instruction and a hand of welcome."
~John Holland*

John Holland engages in Language Exchange Initiative (part of Funds of Knowledge Exchange Initiative)



Rachel Schonfield's Conversation Group: Fall 2012

Volunteer's Comments for End-of-Semester Evaluations: Successes of the Program

- Bi-Weekly Socials that allow us to see other volunteers and see the larger program.
- I like the bi weekly sessions. Keep those. But I'd vary the time of week they were.
- Keep up the regular email notices and information for volunteers and students throughout the semester. Good to keep in touch. Also keep providing as much guidance and support as possible for sessions online. Quite useful for volunteers preparing for their sessions.
- Language Exchange
- The coordinator treats both volunteer and students with respect and passion. I benefit from cross-cultural understanding.
- The gathering at the end of the semester is a good experience to meet people and learn more about others. More information about events that occur with the ESOL Conversation Program and the ESOL students during the semester that helps the students and volunteers to make more connections with others in the program.

A Note of Thanks: An E-mail from a Student ~Chen Qian



*Don's Conversation Group:
Fall 2012*

I'm writing to thank you again for the efforts you put into the ESOL program. It really helped me a lot. I met Jessica, Don and Carol. They're very kind and warm-hearted, and they've given me great advices about English study and American culture. Just like you, they are not only my teachers, but also my friends.

Although Jessica was so busy working on her academic work upon her transferring, she devoted lots of efforts to our conversation group. We talked various kinds of topics, such as traditional American culture, mistakes, Muppet and so on.

Carol is an interesting and friendly person. She kept encouraging me when I had trouble with adapting to new life and new culture. She showed me around the campus, and told me a lot of funny stories. I truly enjoy our conversations.

In my conversation group with Don, we have 9 people, which is kind of crowded at first. But we get along well with each other and we went to the Air and Space Museum in DC once. Don is kind of shy, but he always wears a smile, and he always offers us generous help. Don likes poetry and he sincerely enjoys reading them with rich feeling. You should definitely listen to his recitation if you have a chance.

ESOL has been a wonderful place where I meet with new friends, while I can improve my English. I appreciate your work so much that I will absolutely come back next semester (even though somebody had stolen my conversation partner ticket [from the unfair game]...T^T).



*Mohan Sun, Alisa Barkatt and
Menglin: Conversation Partners*

Thank You ~Mohan Sun

I have really learnt a lot and met many interesting people at ESOL this year. Thanks to the great experience, I'm able to communicate and talk with native speakers more comfortably, which helps to boost my confidence. It

must be tons of time, energy and responsibilities for you [and the volunteers] to build and maintain the program, not to mention it's such a successful one! And I know you've been gone through some tough time but you still make it. I

appreciate all of your effort involving the program and I sincerely hope ESOL will be better and better.

"THEY'RE VERY KIND AND WARM-HEARTED, AND THEY'VE GIVEN ME GREAT ADVICES ABOUT ENGLISH STUDY AND AMERICAN CULTURE. JUST LIKE YOU, THEY ARE NOT ONLY MY TEACHERS, BUT ALSO MY FRIENDS." ~CHEN QIAN



*Emily Rueger's Conversation
Group: Fall 2012*

A Privilege ~Emily Rueger

Being an ESOL Conversation Group leader was fun and interesting. Every week I had the privilege of having a conversation with some students from China. And it was quite a privilege! Not only did I get to have weekly discussions, but sometimes we were also able to do some pretty fun things just as a group. One time I went bowling with some of them after our group time, and another time I invited them to a party organized by the Gathering (a student group I am involved in), which helped me to get to know them a little better. The experience of being an ESOL volunteer has been a true blessing to me. In our group meetings my students allowed me to share the things that matter most to me and in return I got to hear about what they valued. The friendships forged in this past semester will not be forgotten and everything I have learned from my students will continue to fascinate me.

Unforgettable Halloween Night ~“Cynthia” Jingyue Wang

As an international student, the first month of getting exposed to an exotic culture and having a brand new life seemed to be refreshing, but the exciting feeling didn't last long. When everything came back to normal, I found myself stuck in overwhelming challenges, both from busy schedule of study and from language barrier. I even had difficulty in some basic conversation like ordering meal or making a call. For example, I was flustered because I didn't remember a word in punchline when I tried to tell a joke to my American friends. Everybody was staring at me and waited for the joke to end! You can imagine how embarrassing it was!

I told myself I had to do something! At this time, the announcement of ESOL Conversation Program

caught my attention. I was happy to find out the advanced group conversation was what I was desperately in need of! After I attended, it truly was! Our conversation volunteer, Adrian Francisco, was a great teacher. He would make sure everybody in the group have a chance to speak up. I also enjoyed the easy and happy learning atmosphere he created with his funny blackboard drawings and vivid body language. You can always find the whole group bursting into laughter.

The ESOL program gives me the opportunity to practice with some topics, which I can apply to daily conversation. It also gives me the confidence to share my ideas with the native English speakers. I realized that it's not the cultural shock or my poor English speaking ability that makes

chatting with Americans a daunting task. It is whether I dare to approach them and speak out that makes a difference. Here's my personal experience that can illustrate this point. When I was alone on the shuttle bus on the Halloween at night, some party girls dressed in Halloween costumes got on the bus. I really wanted to talk to them because I liked their costumes but I thought it's awkward for people to chat with strangers. After hesitating for seconds, I summoned my courage to praise the costume of one of these girls. What surprised me is that everybody started greeting me, asking my major and my name and introducing me to the cartoon characters they were modeled after. Guess what? They even invited me to attend their costume party! Later on, I was surprised to find that

the simple greeting, which I hesitated to make at the beginning, turned out to be an unforgettable Halloween night! Once I have this mindset for the rest of the semester, I actively participated in class case discussions and spoke as much as I could in English to the people around me, even with shuttle bus drivers!



Program Members from different groups got together for a fieldtrip to Butler's Orchard.



Adrian Francisco leader a small group discussion at bi-weekly social #2: *Watching A Beautiful Mind*

Laughter from Explaining Idioms

~Adrian Francisco

I've really had a great time as a conversation group leader this semester! I enjoyed talking to all of my group members and learning about their cultures. Explaining new idioms to them every week was my favorite thing to do. I hope everyone felt that their conversation groups improved their English!

Nathan Lim's Conversation Group (top right)
Dorcas Olawuni's Conversation Group: At the President's House (lower right)





Students from Don't Group at Air and Space Museum.



Sara Schulski's Group: Fall 2012

Enriching My Journey ~Audrey Hong (Continued from pg. 3)

paintings. Another scholar shared why an American professional basketball player, whom he followed in Taiwan, was a favorite. A former student in Japan showed us the art of Japanese cuisine. A former student in the United Arab Emirates brought us up-to-date on the country laws governing a husband's conduct towards his wife.

The feedback has been positive. Students say that they are initially nervous but then begin to enjoy talking, just like a conversation! They handle the Q&As with ease. Most are surprised that they spoke so long. Some said that they could have said more. More critical was that the students felt more confident in speaking.

Learning about anything comes to us in many surprising ways. Each semester I learn something new, something different, from my students. The students have enriched my journey. It's been an enjoyable trip.



Yin Yuan's Group (top)

Brittney Nathaniel's Group (bottom)



Home Cooked Feast with Family ~Raishay Lin

I had a fantastic time leading an ESOL group throughout the fall semester of 2012! We had a large group of seven people, but we all bonded well. I really enjoyed listening to my students talk about their home countries of Nigeria, Japan, China, and Hong Kong. When several students expressed curiosity about traditional

American holidays, I invited them to my home on Thanksgiving night to enjoy a home-cooked feast with my family. Most of my students brought friends and dates, and we had a wonderful party. My parents, who were immigrants themselves back in the 1980's, were so excited to share their stories with my students. Over the semester,

the conversation group became close as they talked about increasingly personal topics such as politics and marriage traditions in their home cultures. We have already made plans to spend time together next semester. I am so thankful to the UMD ESOL conversation program for bringing us together!

"My parents, who were immigrants themselves back in the 1980's, were so excited to share their stories with my students."
~Raishay

Approaching my Conversation Group Sessions ~Sockfoen MacDougall

This is my third semester facilitating an intermediate conversation group. I always begin by asking members of the group to list some of their interests and to state the reason/s for their enrollment. This allows me to gear conversations/discussions around their interests, and to address their language needs/concerns (as best as I can).

Each semester, I invite members of my group to make short presentations on topics of interest. Each presentation is followed by a question-and-answer session. I have a two-fold purpose in doing this. The first is to acclimatize members to making presentations and taking questions in English. The second is to accustom members to asking questions in English.

My groups included students from different countries, although a majority is from China. I take advantage of this diversity by making some our discussions comparative, to the extent appropriate. Thus, for example, I had facilitated a discussion on education in China, Brazil, and the US.



Don Rich's Conversation Group

End-of-Semester Feedback from Volunteers and Students

Volunteer: Improvement Suggestions for the Program

- Maybe groups or partners can join together and form a greater group, once in a while, not during every session. I like the ESOL Conversation Program, but I just feel that I am not helping the students to improve their English that much.
- More interaction between volunteer set up annual events for both student and volunteer, better in middle of the semester (e.g. after mid-term)
- Better communication between group leaders
- The fluctuating conversation group roster was a little disorienting, and much time was spent on participants and myself reintroducing ourselves whenever a new person joined (which happened frequently). I think a more final and consistent roster would make it easier for participants and volunteers to build a strong rapport throughout the course of the semester.
- [Some of] the students sometimes lack the commitment in this program and did not take this seriously.

For the complete listing of the mid-semester and end-of-semester evaluation by volunteers and students for Fall 2012, please go to the program blog and go under <http://umdesol.weebly.com/mid-semester-and-end-of-semester-evaluations.html>



Carving pumpkins in Clare's Conversation Group: Fall 2012



Bernie Gormally's Group



Nima Fazeli's Group

We made it to the Diamondback! Jeremy Snow, Diamondback Staff Writer, interviewed Program Coordinator, and observed Rachel Alade's conversation group and interviewed several group members.

Diamondback



[International students break language barrier through ESOL group](#)

By Jeremy Snow
Diamondback Staff Writer

Students' Comments: Successes

- [Volunteer] is responsible, interesting and humorous.
- He respects my culture and show strong interest in understanding it.
- She is very friendly. Good to teach us some useful slang.
- She showed genuine interest in members of the group and ensured that everyone participated in group discussions. She's also a kind person.
- [The volunteer] is very thoughtful. She always teaches me a lot besides English.

Students' Comments: Improvement

- Could be good at the end of each session to make a vocabulary review
- Further strengthen the practice time
- It would be better to let students prepare a 5 minutes talk relating to some interesting topics- such as cooking tutorial, trip preparation, car maintenance, sports game etc.
- More active
- Session could set some daily life topic such as ordering food in restaurant, or get to know Maryland sports culture.

Coordinator's Corner ~Clare Cheng

Fall 2012 has been another eventful semester in the ESOL Conversation Program! I am really thankful for the support from the volunteers and friends throughout the semester as I faced many difficulties along the way. I truly appreciate the warm wishes, the encouragements and the prayers from volunteers, students and friends in the program as well as the staff members at Learning Assistance Services.

I also want to thank Yin Yuan, the program intern, especially for her help in the beginning of the semester with the registration sessions and for stopping by to visit several conversation groups

throughout the semester.

As my third semester as a program coordinator wraps up at the University of Maryland, I realize that I have one more semester to serve both the students and the volunteers in our program. Thus, I look forward to the spring semester with much excitement and aspirations, hoping that the experiences that I have garnered thus far will help me become a better coordinator in this upcoming semester. With the last semester in view, I hope that this upcoming semester will be one of the best and most memorable semesters for both the students, volunteers and myself.

To view the complete URL of the Diamondback article on ESOL Program, please go to: http://www.diamondbackonline.com/news/article_0e63831e-29e4-11e2-9c49-001a4bcf6878.html