

2202 Shoemaker Building
 College Park, MD 20742
 301-314-5919 (ESOL Program)
 301-314-7693 (LAS Main Desk)
 E-mail: umdesol@gmail.com

LAS Director:
 Dr. Marcia Marinelli

Program Coordinator:
 Clare Cheng

Program Intern:
 Xiaolu Li

Special points of interest:

- Pictures from conversation groups for spring 2012!
- Stories from volunteers and students!
- Join our ESOL Facebook Group!

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ESOL Conversation Program Newsletter

Spring 2012

May, 1, 2012

ESOL Program Updates: Spring 2012

As another school year unfolds, many of our volunteers and ESOL participants are leaving the university. Whether they are UMD students who are graduating or visiting scholars returning to their home countries, it is a time for the program members to reflect and share all the good times and memories we have had together.

With the help of volunteers and students spreading their enthusiasm for our program, we had 88 volunteers and 206 ESOL participants in the ESOL Conversation Program this spring semester. These volunteers and students

made up of 36 conversation groups and 56 pairs of conversation partners. Many of our volunteers led more than one session per week in their effort to make a difference on campus. We give our best wishes to those volunteers and

ESOL participants who are graduating, and/or leaving the University of Maryland by the end of the summer. We invite our current volunteers and ESOL participants who are going to be at the University of Maryland in the Fall 2012 Semester to come back and join our program. We will make every effort to improve our program so that it better serves our students. For those early birds, Fall 2012 pre-registration will be on our program website by the middle of August. An e-mail will also be sent to current students and volunteers when registration is up online.



Don Rich's conversation group.
 (left to right): Yoojin, Sangchul, Biwei, Flora, Lingxi, Alan

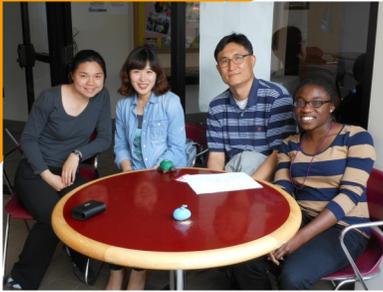
Life as an International Student by Xiaolu Li (Program Intern)

This is my second year in the United States. During these two years, I have experienced a lot as a newcomer. At first, it was all about excitement and discoveries. Everything was new and fascinating. Then gradually, I started to experience a sense of isolation. Anxiety and frustration became overwhelming as the cultural differences and language barriers impeded me from communicating effec-

tively with other people. Even the most basic daily conversations, such as greeting and making telephone call, became really difficult tasks that I tried to avoid. I became really quiet and unconfident when I was around American students, and only regained my confidence and felt comfortable to talk freely when I was with people from my own culture. Luckily, my classmates and professors

have been really supportive and culturally conscious. (Continue on page 4).





A stop at Dorcas' group (left to right): Clare, Sun Wha, Youngjoong, Dorcas

"I ingratiate myself to the local people by learning a bit of the official language to experience the heartbeat of a country."

~Sharon



Our most enthusiastic photographer for the Social ~ Karen, visiting scholar from Taichung, Taiwan.

Reaching Out by Sharon Von Bergener

I am only fluent in English, but when I travel abroad, I ingratiate myself to the local people by learning a bit of the official language to experience the heartbeat of a country. In the same way, in ESOL class, I always encourage my students to get to know American culture through its small talk, idioms and history. At first, I wondered if I could do it—teach American English to a class of international students—but, it soon became clear that it was they who were teaching me!

Over the years, my eyes have been culturally opened through the great opportunity that Maryland's ESOL program has afforded the students and me:

There is no American "Look." Students are often surprised that people approach them on the street for directions, etc., mistaking them for locals. America is, after all, a nation of immigrants.

There is no official American language. Although Americans only speak one language, American does

have an official language. I am always impressed that most of the ESOL students are bilingual, if not trilingual. **American English is a kinetic language.** Over the years, we adopt foreign words to keep the language fresh. For instance, the number 88 is used in texting to sign off because 8 in Chinese is pronounced "bah," so we say, bye-bye in English using 8-8 (bah-bah).

(continued on page 4)

Amanda teaches her students idioms with colors words.



Remarks from a Senior ~Amanda Pleasant

This has been my second semester as a volunteer with the ESOL program. I do not think I could have asked for a better experience my senior year of college than joining the ESOL Conversation Program. I have had wonderful conversation groups and a great conversation partner. It is always so fun to learn from one another, and there's never a shortage of laughter! As we talk about a variety of topics, we also learn about one another: our

likes and dislikes, what we like to do in our spare time, where we go to travel, and what our families are like. Having studied abroad in another country where English was not the first language, I understand how people may be shy when speaking in front of others and how difficult it can be to transition to life in another country. I hope that I have been a great resource to all my students. I hope that they have learned more English

and feel more comfortable speaking to Americans, and that they feel free to keep in touch even though the semester is coming to a close. I'm so glad I volunteered with the ESOL Conversation Program!



Pablo, Giesele, Songhee and Sharon (from left to right).



Audrey's group: Juan, Momo, Inah, Jounghoon, Audrey, Hanwei, Odin, Amanda (left to right)

A Memorable Experience by Xianwen Hu

It has been a memorable time for me to participate in the ESOL program at UMD. As a visiting scholar, I was interested in the cultural differences between the eastern and the western cultures. But I had trouble communicating with others in English. The ESOL program helped me to improve my oral English, which was in need of practice. I could practice talking with others in the conversation partner sessions and the conversation group sessions. I have learned how to communicate

by taking in and producing ideas in English, which is a foreign language to me. It is very exciting. I have come to keep up with what I hear and can express myself smoothly with the help of the volunteers and other students. At the same time, I have received much knowledge about society and culture all over the world during the ESOL study. I am so lucky to meet so many kind people, who showed the differences and the similarities across cultures. We enjoy a variety of stories

around the world from listening to each other. This is a significant period in my life for the international friendships and the internal progress that I have made.



Xianwen (middle), his wife, and his daughter (Xianyan).
Xianwen, also known as Professor Hu, is a chemistry professor from Wuhan, China.

Beyond Expectations by Alan Zhu

When I first signed up for the ESOL programs, I expected a lot. I wished to learn more about the American culture, to “examine” Americans outside the classroom and of course to practice the language itself. One thing I did not expect was to have fun. I thought

the ESOL program would be like medicine, something good for me but hard to enjoy. However, the past 10 weeks have proved me wrong. My Volunteers, Don and Ashley, put a lot of effort to make sure that we not only learn something each week, but also have fun during the

process. I cannot thank them enough for their hard work and I wish more people would get involved in the ESOL program to enjoy themselves the way I did.



Students and friends from Richard Bourne's group.

A Part of Campus Life by Zhiwei Zheng

Time flies. This is the feeling that comes to my mind when I recall my ESOL experience. I might be seen as an “old man” in the ESOL Program because I've been at UMD for two years and I've participated every semester. In a way, ESOL has become a part of my campus life. I would say besides shaping my English speaking skills, I got to know the American society, and made several best friends in the program. I still remember that Hallow-

een week when I was new in the States. My group volunteer brought pumpkins and carving knives to campus. At the end of that session, we each designed and completed Jack-o'-lanterns by ourselves. I felt very proud of myself, and that memory is still fresh. Before that experience, Halloween for me was only an vague concept. However, after getting involved that time, I began to visualize a dynamic American culture. ESOL provided me with a

great opportunity to deeply know and discuss some social and cultural issues with people from different countries. Even though I have several classes everyday, the actual speaking opportunity still has been limited. It is hard to make friends in such a short time during class. In ESOL, I've had a regular timeline to meet a fixed group of people, and this makes forming a concrete friendship easier.
(continued on page 5).

“One thing I did not expect was to have fun. I thought the ESOL program would be like medicine, something good for me but hard to enjoy.

However, the past 10 weeks have proved me wrong.”
~Alan



Vera and her student, Sharon.



Jihye, the singer, and Jiwon, the pianist at the Social performing *Somewhere Over the Rainbow*...

"With their help, I was able to realize that the fear of making mistakes is imprisoning. It kept me trapped in the very narrow comfort zone of the known. If I continue to let the fear paralyze me, I would never be able to make any progress."



Visiting scholars from Pudong, Shanghai (China): left to right Sharon, Vivian, Jacqueline

Reaching Out by Sharon Von Bergener

(Continued from page 2).

Proper pronunciation in English is very important.

It must be emphasized that Marylanders eat *crab* meat not "crap meat." Stress the wrong syllable in "unique" and it becomes eunuch.

Americans love to try international foods and adapt them to our palate.

Chop suey and hamburgers are foods created by immigrants. Many international students have not tried my favorite American food—peanut butter.

American English is a conglomeration.

English appropriates a multitude of words

from other languages; this becomes apparent when I try to define certain commonly used words in class and it turns into both a linguistic and a history lesson.

Most of all, I know conversation is the key. However, we all must continue to ask questions to define and explain what makes us who we are. It is clear that our cultures share similar celebrations, customs and superstitions, proving that we are not that different after all.

Life as an International Student by Xiaolu Li (continued from page 1)

They have created a relaxed and comfortable environment that I can say whatever I want without being judged. With their help, I have been able to realize that the fear of making mistakes is imprisoning. It kept me trapped in the very narrow comfort zone of the known. If I continue to let the fear paralyze me, I would never be able to make any progress. That's when I finally began to acclimate to the new environment with a positive attitude. That is also the time when I decided to participate in the

ESOL conversation program, so that I can share my experiences with more people in order to help them overcome the cultural and language barrier.

My experience in the ESOL conversation program is really rewarding. As a volunteer, I had a diverse group consisting of visiting scholars from Mainland China and Taiwan, PHD student from Taiwan and UMD staff members from El Salvador. In our group, we have built a strong sense of community

that everyone is comfortable speaking with each other and everyone is actively engaged in the discussions. We share our experiences of living in a foreign country, exchange our ideas, and appreciate different cultural customs and values. Moreover, genuine friendship has been developed through 10 weeks' gathering.

I hope more people will participate in our program, as volunteers or ESOL students, to enjoy this cross-cultural, mind-opening experience!

Coordinator's Response to Spring 2012 Mid-Semester Survey

"Continue with the community building events and activities!"

~Anonymous Volunteer

"You can organize some parties in UMD to encourage us to practice language."

~Anonymous Student

We have also tried to implement more social events for our program over the semester. However, due to concern for safety, we find that it is better to have grassroots events that are not affiliated with our program yet constitute our program members. In the future, perhaps with

the permission and collaboration of several volunteers, we could potentially have indoor social events such as playing board games related to language skills and watching movies that relate to important social issues with a follow-up discussion.

A Glimpse of Our Session...
by Vera (Zenan) Song

There are five members in my conversation group, including three beautiful and elegant ladies who are visiting scholars from China, a handsome German visiting intern, and a friendly and knowledgeable UMD student's spouse from Taiwan. We've had a great time through the semester, talking about the diverse cultures, sharing unique cooking recipes, and even learning different languages, like Chinese and German. We see each other as friends and our group as a family.

A Part of Campus Life (continued from page 3) by Zhiwei Zheng

Now, I still hang out with my volunteers and other group members from several semesters ago. I highly cherish these friendships.

I've been living and studying in Maryland for two years. As an international student, life is not that easy. On one hand, we are curious and enjoy this adventure of studying abroad. On the other hand, we need to overcome language barriers and cultural challenges, nostalgia, or even some-

times the lonely feeling. I have lots of happy memories here, and I have scary memories as well. This is how life goes on. I believe we will have more fun and become more humble and open-minded to difference as long as we keep exploring the world. ESOL provides us with this precious chance! Overall, ESOL is a part of my campus life. I recommend it!

Coordinator's Corner ~Clare Cheng

There have been many changes this semester to our ESOL Conversation Program based on the students and volunteers' feedback from last semester. One of the most exciting changes is that we have an intern, Xiaolu, for our program this semester!

With Xiaolu's help, we were able to drop by every group (with the exception of two that cancelled their sessions during the weeks we stopped by).

Having had the opportunity to drop by every group to not only say hi but also listen in on some of the conversations, I have realized how powerful the presence of our program is

and could be on our campus. Xiaolu and I were intrigued by some of the thought-provoking discussions as well as the laughter we heard and the lasting smiles we saw on our students and their volunteers' faces.

I want to take this opportunity to thank all the volunteers who have dedicated the time, effort and heart to help the ESOL participants in our program. I have also had the opportunity to participate in gatherings initiated by volunteers who reach out to their students to make their stay in the United States just that much more heart-warming and memorable. Even though



From left to right: Feng, Alex, Zhiwei, Carrie and Juan



Students and friends from Rachel Alade's group.

our pro-

gram does not have the financial ability to provide tangible incentives for our volunteers, we would like to extend our gratitude and appreciation to the volunteers by listening to your comments and feedback on how we can better help them to serve our students. And of course, we will try our best to throw in a raffle or two occasionally for everyone at the end-of-semester social.



Picture from the end-of-semester social.

"I believe we will have more fun and become more humble and open-minded to difference as long as we keep exploring the world." ~Zhiwei

Friendships by Franklyn Abedi

Being an ESOL conversation partner has given me the confidence to communicate and connect with the UMD international students. It has shown me that we are more connected as people than we think. My conversation partner, Wenqi, has become one of my closest friends. It's amazing how our first awkward meeting has bloomed into conversations between two friends catching up on one another's lives. I love learning about the traditions and culture of China as well as teaching Wenqi about the American ways. My favorite moments as an ESOL conversation partner are the times when we come back to school from breaks and exchange stories about how we spent our time away from school. I know that Wenqi and I will continue to be friends after our time in this program. I will always be grateful to this program for allowing me to have this experience.



Volunteers and staff members at the End-of-Semester Social from Spring 2012

From left to right:

Back row: Clare, Franklyn, Dr. Marcia Marinelli, Loretta, Don, Richard, Carol, Peter, Jim, LaRae, Lauren, Elizabeth

Front row: Xiaolu, Dorcas, Audrey, Alisa, SockFoon,



Picture of program members enjoying our time together. For more photos from the social, please join our Facebook group. More photos will be added after the finals.

Comments from Volunteers, Answers from Coordinator (Continued)

It would help if you could provide some suggestions for possible lessons or conversational topics for the Conversation Partner sessions. My conversation partner and I have been doing lessons centered around my student's needs (such as idiomatic expressions, phonetics, intonation) but any suggestions from you and a list of language learning resources would be very useful.

-Anonymous Volunteer

While we already have some online resources on our website for volunteers, it's a great suggestion to have a separate session guidelines for our conversation partner sessions. We will make sure that volunteers who work with students one-on-one have separate guidelines and topics of discussion for next semester.

Improved guidelines on taking attendance. I think it should be written out instead of only having a YouTube video. Also all important information such as taking attendance and training sessions should be at the top of the website. There is so much information on the website that it is difficult to find the most important things.

-Anonymous Volunteer

While we do have a YouTube video, we also have a handout on taking attendance distributed to the volunteers during the registration sessions. They are also on our website. However, I do agree that we should and we will reorganize our website over the summer so that it is more user-friendly in the future. Thank you for the great suggestion!

"I honestly love my experience with ESOL. It has honestly been one (if not the) most rewarding thing I have done in my time at Maryland. I like feeling that I am helping the students and doing something of significance. I hope that when I am abroad in a country where I don't speak the language that someone will take the time, consideration, and patience to do the same with me. When I travel or am in other groups, non-native English speakers often apologize for their poor English-I always have to remind them that their English is much better than my Polish, Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Spanish..."

~Anonymous Volunteer

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