

2202 Shoemaker Building
 College Park, MD 20742
 301-314-5919 (ESOL Program)
 301-314-7693 (Main Desk)
 Coordinator: Clare Cheng

- Program Updates
- Refer-A-Friend Initiative Announcement
- Voices of Volunteers
- Voices of Students
- Program Initiatives
- Coordinator's response to volunteers and students' comments

ESOL Conversation Program Fall Semester Newsletter

Program Updates

Time flies and before you know it, the end of the semester is just around the corner! Whether this is your first semester studying

Assistance Service for making this semester possible for everyone. Even though we were experiencing a low number of volunteers in the beginning of the registration process, we were able to have approximately 72 pairs of Conversation Partners and 33 Conversation Groups for the Fall 2011 Semester. To put it another way, we have about 100 volunteers and approximately 160 students (more than 200 students pre-registered) for this semester. We hope everyone has had an enjoyable experience in the program and will come back for the Spring Semester. Spring pre-registration will be on our program website in January. An e-mail will be sent to current students and volunteers when registration is up.

Refer-A-Friend Initiative

This semester we have had many new and creative ideas from the LAS staff, volunteers and the students. One of the ideas was the Refer-A-Friend Initiative. When a student or a volunteer refers another friend or someone they know into our program as a volunteer, both of their names will be entered into a raffle for small prizes. This semester, our Refer-A-Friend Initiative Winners are **Leilani Padua, Mary Rose Rivera and Rachel Alade**. The volunteers who came to the training session helped the ESOL Conversation Program Coordinator draw the volunteers' names. These students will receive a UMD T-shirt for their participation in the initiative!

Embracing Diversity



at the University of Maryland, or your seventh semester volunteering for the ESOL Conversation Program, I want to thank the students, the volunteers, and the wonderful staff from Learning

Global Experience here at UMD~ Rachel Alade

My experience in the ESOL program at UMD has been quite an experience. Although I am a senior, I had not heard of the ESOL program until the beginning of this fall semester. Hearing about the opportunity to interact with international students connected to the university seemed like the

ideal way to expand my global horizons within the university setting. I have been able to travel abroad quite extensively through my teen years, and had the unique experience of being the foreigner on someone else's soil. I understand the feelings of frustration, awe, and insufficiency especially

when stepping into a land where English is not the primary language. I thought that if I could have the opportunity to help someone make the transition from their home country to UMD a little easier, I would. My favorite part of this semester so far is how my students challenge me.

(Continued on page 5).

End-of-Semester Social

The ESOL Conversation End-of-the-semester social event will take place in the **multipurpose room in St. Mary's Hall** (near University Health Center) on **Monday, December 5, 2011 from 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.**

Inside this issue:

Program Updates	1
Global Experience	185
Collaborative Effort	2
Studying Abroad	3
Unforgettable Experience	3
Initiatives for our Program	4
Coordinator's response to mid-semester comments	485

Collaborative Effort- Ziwei Ouyang

It really sounds crazy to be an ESOL volunteer for my first semester at UMD – I did not even know how it works! For me, I think it is even crazier to lead the conversation group as a non-native speaker! I really wondered whether I was qualified when I attended the orientation because almost all the other volunteers were native speakers. I even thought about quitting. Then I asked myself, “Does it really matter who the other volunteers are?” I knew the challenge when I pre-registered, didn’t I?” To take it or not to take it, it is no longer a question. Then it is the question of how to make it interesting and irresistible for my students. Analyzing the

strengths and weaknesses of my group, I came up with the idea of Major-Exchange. Simply put, it means that students present some fundamental and interesting concepts from their own majors to their peers and answer questions from them. It was very engaging and it worked well because it is so different to explain something you use daily to new learners, and the questions that they ask encourage you to “think outside the box.” At the same time, other students also benefit. I am grateful that all my students supported this idea – we had excellent Finance, Geography, Plant Science and Computer Science sections. I know that it

would never have been successful without their dedicated contributions. While the Major-Exchange consisted of the largest part, we also had some other interesting activities, such as, “Leaderless group discussion” and “Guessing the word.” It is almost the end of the semester, and I am so glad and proud of the happy and comfortable atmosphere in my group. I can hardly summarize all I have gained from this program as a volunteer, but I am sure that I understand myself better. Additionally, I have gained friendship and have been exposed to some other cultures. It is really a great experience!



Engaging in a lively conversation about friendships and relationships.

Comment from the mid-semester survey

“The opportunity to help the wide range of participants is very satisfying. It can mean much more than just having conversations because of each person’s needs and goals.”

~ Anonymous

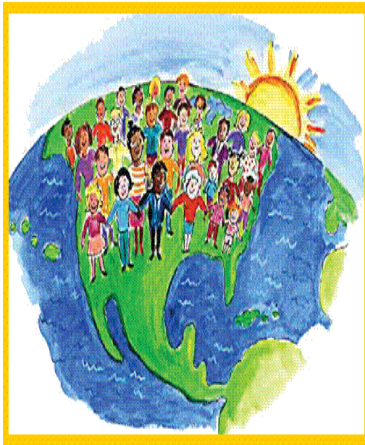


Students playing yut in the conversation group.
Cheng, Kung Chun, Ming, and Seokhwan (from left to right)



Mengying, Yongdan, Hyunjong, Ziwei and Qing (from left to right)

Studying Abroad by Wenting Wang



I came to the U.S. this August. Studying abroad is really an exciting experience. The people and the culture are totally different from those in my home country. But speaking is always a big problem for non-native speakers. It also happens to me, especially when ordering food. I didn't even know how to say

McNuggets at first, which now have become one of my favorite foods now. But after all, it just takes time to be familiar with those nouns. It may be the same thing with speaking. We just need time to practice. I am very lucky to join the ESOL program. Every week, I have about two-and-a-half hours to

talk to people, purely in English about American culture, and about my daily life. I made friends in this program. Practice makes perfect, so I believe I will benefit a lot from the ESOL program. Best wishes to all international students.

"The deepest impression I have is everyone's smiles."

~Wenzhou Liang

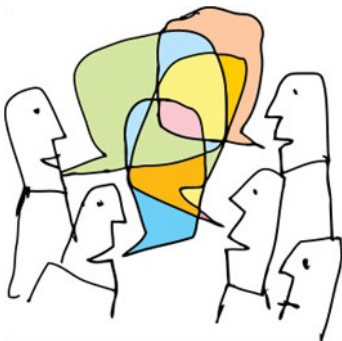
Unforgettable Experience by Wenzhou Liang

The experiences that I gained from the ESOL Conversation Program are very unforgettable. I made friends and improve my oral skills from every week's conversation group. The culture I learned is useful and helps me get accustomed to the American life. I will go on joining the group next semester.

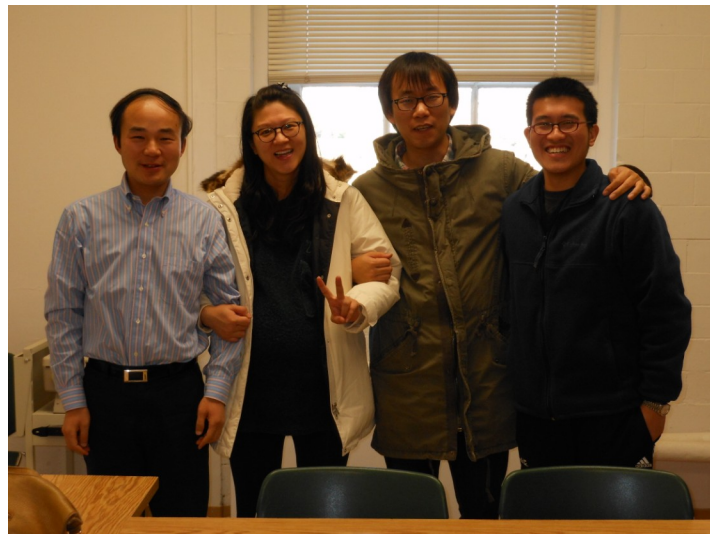
What's more, the reason why the time is limited every time is that 90 minutes is not enough for us to convey our opinions. That means everyone plays an active role in the "family" and the whole conversation is very successful. I heard from Ziwei, a friend of mine who is a volunteer in the program, that her

group is always out of time as well. Last but not least, the deepest impression I have is everyone's smiles. Especially [my volunteer], [she is] so busy but [she] can use [her] smile to beat the trouble.

~Wenzhou Liang
Graduate Student,
Electrical Engineering



Xianwen, Eunice, Insun and Wenzhou (from left to right) Visiting scholars, spouse of post-doc researcher, and graduate student from UMD.



Initiatives for Our Program

Funds of Knowledge Exchange Initiative

For ESOL participants who would like to have a conversation partner but are not assigned one, students are encouraged to go to our program’s Facebook webpage to indicate what expertise they have so they could trade with another English speaker for conversation sessions! Nonetheless, the ESOL Conversation Program is

not responsible for coordinating students and volunteers for the Funds of Knowledge Exchange Initiative. The ESOL facilitator in the pair do not receive community service hours as it is an exchange of expertise.

Substitute Initiative

Over the course of this semester, we were able to have several groups and conversation grouped/pairs covered as a result of the initiative. However,

because there is often a delay between when the coordinator sees the message, sends it out to the volunteers on the substitute list, hears back from those volunteers, and contacts the students, volunteers are encouraged to send the request to the other volunteers on the substitute list starting the spring semester of 2011. More information will be given at the registration sessions coming up in January.



Coordinator’s response to volunteers’ comments

“Volunteers should fill out a short Bio about themselves and students should be able to select a suitable class. Perhaps try and have options for classes of different backgrounds.”

I think it is a great idea for students to be grouped or paired with volunteers who may have similar interests. We will try to give volunteers the option of providing a short bio

during pre-registration or registration sessions in the spring. With that being said, sometimes it is good to work with people with different interests as one may learn more. In terms of grouping students with different backgrounds, the majority of our students is from Asian countries. Thus, it is difficult to avoid grouping students from the same ethnic backgrounds together.

However, as culture is not only defined by one’s ethnicity but also by one’s social experiences, such as one’s home cultures, students with similar ethnic backgrounds may have different cultural experiences.

*“Make attendance taking easier.”*As many volunteers have expressed concern for the attendance taking process, volunteers get to vote on whether to continue

using the current method of taking attendance (Batch Visit Entry) or the previous method (Calendar Page) on the end-of-the-semester survey. Please respond to the survey to give us your input as we do listen to our volunteers’ feedback.

Coordinator’s response to students’ comments

“To have some games with the volunteers. I mean all of the participants.”

Volunteers and students are encouraged to explore ideas on how to build a sense of community for our conversation

program. If you have an idea for some activities that we can do as a group or even as small groups, feel free to e-mail the coordinator, comment on our Facebook page or leave a message on Blackboard. For next semester, we are definitely looking at

more activities for our program both on campus and off-campus. However, due to the budget constraints at the center, all expenses for the activities need to come out-of-pocket for both the volunteers and the ESOL participants.

“Culture is not only defined by one’s ethnicity but also by social experiences,... students with similar ethnic backgrounds may have different cultural experiences.”

We are on the Web!

<http://www.counseling.umd.edu/LAS/html/esolconvprog.html> or
Google: "UMD ESOL Conversation Program"

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Global Experience~

Rachel Alade

(continued from page 1)

Their expectation of learning something new and interesting every class motivates me to come up with new and innovative knowledge and sometimes challenges my own supposed proficiency in English. I would definitely recommend this program to any UMD student, native or foreign, as an opportunity to open one's horizons to the diversity present on our campus and to maybe make a friend or two in the process.



Rachel's group gathered off-campus for a Thanksgiving Dinner.

Arian Asefazdeh, Armin Norouzi, Yu-Hsin Ko, Rachel Alade, Maritza Velasquez, Azadeh Norouzi (and her son Jiwan), and Hui Zhang (from left to right)

Coordinator's response to students' comments

"Give more suggestion or training for volunteers."

Starting next semester, there will be more mandatory training sessions for the volunteers. This semester we were experimenting with the possibilities of using Blackboard as a tool to collaborate and build communities. However, we find that it is still important to engage in face-to-face collaboration and communication among the volunteers.

"Vary the discussion materials and methods."

Over the winter break, the program coordinator welcomes volunteers and students who are in town to provide feedback on developing the curriculum for our Spring Semester. If you are around over the winter break in

January, please join us for some snacks and brain dump on topics and methods on how to vary our conversation session style. More information will be e-mailed to students and volunteers.

"Having happy hour."

Volunteers or ESOL Participants are welcomed to initiate a happy hour in which members from the ESOL Conversation Program can get together to chat and have lunch at Stamp or elsewhere on campus. With that being said, there is also an International Coffee Hour on campus held by the Office of International Students (OIS) every Wednesday from 3:00 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. (For more information, check out their website at <http://www.international.umd.edu/ies/83>). ESOL Participants and volunteers

are encouraged to attend there for more casual conversations with other international students.

"Some students might already quit their session, and some students might want to participate more sessions when possible. If there is a new opportunity to join other group(s) after mid-semester, that will be great."

This is definitely a great idea. Unfortunately, due to the nature of taking attendance for this semester, it was difficult to gauge exactly how many students were in a group at a particular time without asking the volunteers individually. Thus, we were unable to do so. We will definitely work on the logistics of this so that students can receive the maximum support possible.

