



# UMBC TESOL Program Newsletter

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Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.

-Nelson Mandela-

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## TESOL International 50th Anniversary To Be Hosted in Baltimore, April 2016

UMBC Alumnae **Laura Hook** (2003), **Doaa Rashed** (2008) and **Yeji Yoon** (2012) currently serve as Local Co-Chairs for the 2016 TESOL International Convention and English Language Expo. **The conference will be held April 5-8th 2016 in Baltimore.**

Laura works at MSDE as a Title III/ELL Specialist, Doaa is an adjunct in the MA TESOL program and Doctoral Candidate in the Language, Literacy, and Culture program at UMBC, and Yeji is a Faculty Research Assistant in the Office of Field Experiences & Clinical Practice in the Education Department at UMBC. They all share a passion for community service and professional development, and have been serving in different leadership roles for the past few years for Maryland TESOL.



## Meet the Faculty: Dr. Jiyoan Lee By Katie Edwards



*The UMBC ESOL Program welcomed a new faculty member this summer. I sat down and spoke with Dr. Jiyoan Lee about how she got involved in the field of TESOL, her research interests and how she ended up at UMBC.*

Dr. Lee, who grew up in Korea, says that ever since she watched the movie *My Fair Lady*, she has been impressed with the power of linguistics and language. In elementary and middle school, she had expo-

sure to other languages through experiential learning. This continued through high school, where Dr. Lee attended a foreign language high school. She received a secondary education teaching certificate in Korea but found that it wasn't enough. She wanted to keep going!

Dr. Lee attended graduate school at the University of Pennsylvania. Dr. Teresa Pica, who was a professor at the University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education and one of the world's leading experts in the field of second language acquisition, was her mentor. (LEE CONTINUED PAGE 2)

(LEE CONTINUED) Dr. Lee considers her “a great scholar and teacher.” She says, “She made all of us feel appreciated and valued as her students. She had an incredible memory about people. Now I have both a motivation and burden to be like her—as responsive and caring as she was. I don’t feel that I will ever live up to that.”

Currently, she is researching speaking assessment, most particularly the interaction between test taker and the raters. Dr. Lee also has spent time researching second language acquisition, including one interesting research project related to using music to help people remember vocabulary. The cognitivists say there is an overlap between processing music and language. She notes it’s interesting to see that a good melodic structure aids memorization

more than a poor melodic structure. Dr. Lee was able to do this research jointly with her fiancé, a classical music composer. She also does research involving testing and assessment, which she attributes to her background growing up in Korea. “It’s a very competitive environment with lots of pressure,” she says.

Dr. Lee is excited to work with the students and faculty here at UMBC. In her previous work at the University of Georgia, she was a clinical assistant professor, so here she has more opportunities for research as well as teaching. She says she is still learning, as well as getting adjusted to living in Maryland after spending several years in Georgia.

When asked if she had any further she wanted students to know, Dr. Lee said, “If you’re interested in research—get in touch!”

## More than Teaching English: A Journey of Cultural Reflection by Vathany Say

When I was five years old I came to the United States as a refugee. Although I don’t remember much about my birth country, Cambodia, my family and community were strong connections to my culture, traditions, and language. Outside the comforts of my home environment, I attempted to navigate an unfamiliar way of life here in Maryland. Several years later I acquired enough language skills to exit the ESOL program. That was when I began to compartmentalize my two worlds because to me they were so different from the other. I felt isolated, torn and resentful at not being able to be “normal” and fit in. Seeking to understand more about my Cambodian culture, I went on to receive a BA in Anthropology and Sociology from UMBC and then an MA in Anthropology of International Development from George Washington University.

In between my studies, I spent years traveling and working with international human rights organizations searching and hoping I would find where I belonged. If not in United States, perhaps my true self belonged in Cambodia. Through a long, rich (but painful at times) period of soul searching in Cambodia, I realized that I was not Cambodian either. I didn’t dress like them, act like them, even my Khmer was different from the modern day Khmer language. That was when I realized in fact I am Cambodian-American. A mixture of Cambodian heritage in my blood and American in my soul. It was that perfect balance where the cultural borders blended together and I had the power to choose when and where I wanted more or less of either cultural identities.

With my new found Cambodian-American identity, I returned to the United States to start the next chapter of my life. I was hesitant to continue in the human rights field because it was mentally exhausting and took a toll on my health. But I still wanted to do something I was passionate about which was to help people. So I turned to my alma mater, UMBC. Fortunately, I discovered UMBC’s MA-TESOL program. This program, with its rigorous theoretical framework and emphasis on cross-cultural experiences, has trained me to teach English while (MORE CONTINUED PAGE 3)



Vathany Say presents at October’s MDTESOL conference.

(MORE CONTINUED) deepening my understanding of myself as an English Language Learner and a bilingual/bicultural Cambodian-American. As a result of this program, I have become a skilled educator and grown into a more socially and culturally mindful person. I was able to quickly apply what I learned and started teaching at UMBC's English Language Institute and now at Montgomery College's Adult ESOL program. I've also presented at the last two MD-TESOL conferences; my first presentation addressed how to involve parents in young learners' language learning process, and the second presentation addressed how to build cultural capital awareness to enhance student learning.

As I near graduation, I reflect upon how much I have grown not only in my profession but as an individual. I am thankful to have found this program and all the wonderful people who have warmly welcomed me into the field and provided me with so much support along the way.

## Unifying Refugees through Soccer by Ragan Cote

It is easy to disassociate ourselves from a situation that, in most cases, does not affect our daily life. Take the current global refugee crisis, for example. Many of us are only exposed to this situation through the media. The only information we know is what we see on television or read

about in the newspaper. Because of this, it is easy to turn a blind eye to what is truly a worldwide crisis. What many don't realize is that the families and children we are seeing on the news and reading about in the paper are more a part of our daily lives than we think. They are moving to our cities, becoming members of our communities, and trying to assimilate into our culture.

For many of these refugees, especially children, the transition to a new community and essentially a new life can prove to be quite a challenge. Not only are most children thrown into a new school with little-to-no knowledge of the English language, they often have few friends and are unfamiliar with social norms and expectations of their new community. These obstacles, along with the high probability that many of these children suffer from the effects of traumatic experiences, make the assimilation process even more difficult.

This is where we come in. At **Soccer Without Borders**, we use soccer as a vehicle for positive change, providing new-

comer refugee and immigrant youth a toolkit to overcome obstacles to growth, inclusion, and personal success. Here in Baltimore, we work with the growing refugee and immigrant population, focusing on youth between the ages of twelve to eighteen. We serve a very diverse population,

and while many of our youth do not speak the same language they all share the same passion: soccer. Through our soccer-based programming, our youth are given opportunities to develop their English-language abilities, build cross-cultural skills, receive academic support, and countless other valuable tools that prepare them for success.



At **Soccer Without Borders**, we truly are a family – a wonderfully diverse, ever-growing family. As our family continues to grow, so does our need for others who share our vision and passion. We have various coaching, volunteer, and mentorship opportunities available and encourage you to get involved! To learn more about Soccer Without Borders Baltimore and get in contact with us, visit our website at:

[www.swbbaltimore.org](http://www.swbbaltimore.org).



*The Soccer Without Borders mission is to use soccer as a vehicle for positive change, providing under-served youth with a toolkit to overcome obstacles to growth, inclusion, and personal success.*

## Alumni Spotlight: Jaewon

*Jaewon graduated from UMBC's ESOL program in 1999. Here's what she's been up to since then.*

In 2004, I got married to a German man and now we have two children. We lived in Germany for a while and I started my PhD in 2009 at the University of Cologne. My dissertation topic is trilingual children's code switching in relation to parental discourse strategies. The focus of the study is my own children's code switching – specifically how their non-Korean utterances (German and English) are embedded in Korean structure.

UMBC's Dr. Sarah Shin has inspired me quite a lot. Her book, *Developing in Two Languages*, and her paper, *Differentiating Language Contact Phenomena: Evidence from Korean-English Bilingualism*, have been my bible. I am still working on correcting and revising my first draft and hope I can soon take the final exam next year in Germany. It has been tough as I started my PhD after having been away from an academic environment for a long time. In addition, I am studying long distance, as we are now living in Shenyang, China for my husband's job.

Shenyang is a relatively big industry city located north of North Korea. I forced my husband to take this opportunity to work in China when he told me that we had the choice! I thought it would be a great chance for me and the children to learn Chinese on top of German, English, and Korean but it seems that learning Chinese is fun only for the children and a pain for me. I am struggling with four different tones and no one understands my Chinese so far!

My wish is to finish my PhD next year and get a job in the linguistic or teaching fields. I am thankful for Dr. Sarah Shin and the program, proud of the classes that I took at UMBC and inspired and grateful to be a part of this community.



## The Road Less Traveled by Christopher McKinnon



*Christopher McKinnon, pictured here on a warm day in Poland, is an MA TESOL student who has had experience teaching in many countries.*

*Here, he shares some hard won advice.*

Many TESOL graduates dream about working abroad; however, it pays to do a bit of research into your destination before you sign a contract. I can vividly recall stepping off a rickety train in southern Poland that had been speeding along at a whopping ten kilometers an hour and finding myself looking into a field of snow with a small sign in

Polish stating "Zawiercie", the city where my student worked. I had spent the last two hours shivering in the unheated passenger compartment on solid metal seats to arrive ... at a field.

My directions from the local language school I had been working at said to get off at this station, and that I would see the building almost immediately. I solemnly watched as the train I had been riding on lumbered on toward its next stop and away from me. I reached for my prepaid mobile phone, which charged me by the second, to call my boss and ask what went wrong. "You're there. Walk through the field. It's right there." [click]. The phone quickly disconnected so as not to waste anymore of our precious prepaid time together. I then trudged through nearly four feet of soft, fluffy snow until I found a small office building where I assumed my student worked. I managed to make it into the (ROAD CONTINUED PAGE 5)

(ROAD CONTINUED) complex with little difficulty, but it turned out my student had gone home sick and failed to cancel my appointment. I was still paid for the sixty minute lesson, but then had to spend another hour waiting for a connecting, unheated, metal-seated, two-hour train ride to whisk me back home at eleven kilometers an hour. Total time spent: over five hours; total income made: one hour's worth.

## My Teaching Journey by Alena Yazykova



*Alena, who will begin the UMBC TESOL program in January, is from Vladimir, Russia. Here, she discusses her experience teaching Russian as a foreign language as well as her experiences in teaching English.*

Some people would probably say I was destined to become a teacher. I would say it just happened. My mother, a teacher of English, was never my teacher at school, but she was the first one who started teaching me English at home when I was about 4 years old and who got me enrolled in a special English school as a child. The way I look at it now, it is thanks to my mother, and later, of course, to my school and university teachers, that English has become my favorite foreign language.

I have been working as an ESL teacher for more than 10 years now. In addition, owing to my linguistics education, I teach not only English as a second language, but Russian as a foreign language as well.

In 2007-2008 I was incredibly lucky to be a Fulbright FLTA grantee at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island.

All this being stated, I actually thoroughly enjoyed my nearly six-years in Poland working as an English teacher. Just be aware, the idea of sipping espresso along the Seine or plum vodka by the Vltava isn't always the first job you will be offered. Make sure to check some pertinent details before signing that contract.

Maybe, those of you reading my story now already know about Brown or at least have heard something about it. When I received my placement at Brown, I knew nothing about it and had never heard of it. But on the first day of my arrival at Brown, I realized how fortunate I was to have been given such an amazing opportunity to study and teach there. I attended classes in American Studies and French, and, of course, I taught American students. I met three times a week with my students and we shared something new with each other. I shared my knowledge with them and they shared theirs with me. I would say it was quite exciting!

When I first met with my students, I was really nervous and almost scared. I asked myself a lot of questions, like "What will they think of me?", "What if they don't like me?", "What if they ask me questions and I don't have answers?" However, everything turned out to be perfect with my students. We liked each other, we understood each other from the very first meeting and everything went very well. My students were keen people, interesting and pleasant to talk to. All of them had been to Russia at least once before, and all of them wanted to go back. I think it was much easier for me to relate to them because they had already known something about my country. They had known both positive and negative aspects of life in Russia. Our classroom discussions were based on stories and excerpts my students had read at home. In a word, I tried to make my students speak in class as much as possible because I knew how important it was to practice orally while learning a foreign language. We talked about men and women in the United States and Russia, religion and superstitions, youth problems and politics. Still, there were (JOURNEY CONTINUED PAGE 6)

*"What will they think of me?" "What if they don't like me?" "What if they ask me questions and I don't have answers?"*

(JOURNEY CONTINUED) classes when we did not have discussions and I explained grammatical usage that they had forgotten or just had not paid much attention to.

In summary, it was fascinating, as well as exciting, for me to teach Russian to people who had a deep desire to learn it and were able to see advantages and disadvantages in everything they experienced and/or read about while I was in a foreign country. The real challenge lay in teaching both the Russian language itself and the culture of my native country.

You might probably ask now why I have started my story by sharing my experience in teaching Russian. Well, first and foremost, not only did this experience in teaching Russian at the US University give me an opportunity to improve my English language teaching proficiency, but I was also able to perfect my English language by communicating with native speakers. Furthermore, I had a chance to get to know the techniques and methods my American colleagues are using when teaching a foreign language.

Secondly, despite the fact that my experience in teaching English is greater than in teaching Russian, still whenever I start teaching English to a new student or a group of students, I become nervous and ask myself the same questions “What will they think of me?”, “What if they don’t like me?”, “What if they ask me questions and I don’t have answers?” Nevertheless, everything has been going well so far. If I do not know the answers to some of my students’

questions, I honestly tell them I have no answer right now and promise to clear it up. Luckily, my students are patient and understanding enough to wait, and they are very thankful when I refer to their questions later and give them the answers they need.

Thirdly, like my American students who learnt Russian, my Russian students who learn English come from different backgrounds and have various interests, but still they always have one thing in common – they wish to know the English language and are eager to speak it as fluently as possible. So, just as I did in my Russian classes, I let my students speak English in class as much as possible because oral practice contributes greatly to improving their skills in learning a foreign language.

*Nothing can be more satisfying for me than seeing the result of my work when I follow my students’ progress...*

In conclusion, teaching my native language is interesting and exciting, but teaching English as a second language is no less involving and challenging. What is more, it is a never ending learning process for me. When I have some difficulties in finding a more appropriate way of teaching this or that aspect, I consult with my older colleagues who have a broader experience or with my mother who

has been teaching English for more than 25 years by now. I feel real pleasure when I manage to inspire my students to learn, especially when at first they may think they are not good at learning English or are not capable of doing it. Nothing can be more satisfying for me than seeing the real result of my work when I follow my students’ progress and make their learning process a positive and rewarding experience.

## Upcoming Events:

*December 2015*—**Study Break** for current students hosted by the ESOL Club

*March 2016*—**MD TESOL Graduate Student Conference** on campus at UMBC

*April 5-8, 2016* —**2016 TESOL International Convention & English Language Expo** in Baltimore, MD

# Fall 2015 Graduates !

The ESOL/Bilingual students listed here have applied to graduate from the MA program or to complete the certificate program this fall. Congratulations and best of luck in your future endeavors.

## Certificate:

**Erin Brock**

**Sherry Defrancisci**

**Harriet Hamlin**

**Nancy Horton**

**Cynthia Malcolmson**

**Jessica Shelton**

## MA TESOL:

**Somerset Kim**

**Noah Northcott-Grant**

**Katherine Ung**

*Please keep in touch with us as we greatly enjoying hearing from our graduates!*



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