



# UMBC TESOL Program Newsletter

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*It is the supreme art of  
the teacher to awaken joy  
in creative expression and  
knowledge.*

*Albert Einstein*

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## 8th Annual MDTESOL Graduate Student Conference A Success!



Organizers Owen Silverman Andrews and Tabitha Kidwell.



Participants met for breakfast before the conference began.

On March 7th, our TESOL program and the English Language Institute hosted the conference *Breaking Down Borders: Graduate Students Revolutionizing TESOL*. This conference was sponsored by the TESOL Program of UMBC and MDTESOL, Maryland's professional organization for ESOL educators. The Conference Coordinators were Owen Silverman Andrews (UMBC) and Tabitha Kidwell (UMCP). Graduate students are on the cutting edge of innovation in the field and throughout the conference this theme was very much on display.

Eight exciting presentations were made on issues spanning the discipline. These presentations, made by graduate students and recent graduates, included hot button issues such as bilingual education, the inherently political nature of TESOL, and English language variation, all of which stoked lively conversation. Other presentations provided a showcase for original research on topics such as the use of table computers and qualitative aspects of feedback given to pre-service teachers. Further presentations explored practical classroom techniques, including removing self-imposed limitations and strategies for enlivening dictation.

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### **Greetings from Brazil by Olga Kopiatina**

My name is Olga and I graduated from the TESOL program in May 2013. Right now I am teaching English at FISK in Sao Mateus do Sul, Brazil.

Everything started with an announcement on our ESOL listserv about a paid TEFL internship in Brazil in 2013. Since I was very interested in

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### **More is Both by Renée Burgos**

I was first introduced to bilingual and heritage language education by Dr. Sarah Shin in 2008, as a graduate student at UMBC. I immediately connected with the need for our educational institutions to both guide immigrant students into their new language and culture

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## Finding My Niche and Exploring the World by Anna Smoot

You might recognize Anna's name from her work as the former Graduate Assistant of the ESOL Program. While she has graduated, Anna continues to work hard, balancing work at several organizations nearby.

My name is Anna Smoot and I graduated from the MA TESOL Program in fall 2014. I currently teach at several institutions. I'm



*Bedouin Camp where my group and I went on a camel ride through the Negev Desert*

exploring the various facets of our diverse field in order to find my niche. The most interesting classes I'm currently teaching are an ESL/STEM content class at the English Language Institute, academic writing workshops for international students at the Maryland Institute of College Art and advanced academic reading at the Community College of Baltimore County. I let my reading class choose their reading topics, which means I'm developing lessons around science, psychology, and Sherlock Holmes texts.

Outside of my ESL work, I recently took a trip to Israel and Palestine for 12 days. It was fascinating to observe the use of Hebrew, Arabic and English in different locations. Even more interesting, however, was the cultural history and

cross-cultural interactions and attitudes.

Most of the students I teach at the ELI are from Saudi Arabia or the United Arab Emirates. Of course Israel is quite different from those countries, but there are certain regional cultural values, traditions, religion, and cuisine that are shared throughout the Middle East. I feel a little more in touch with my students' backgrounds and am looking forward to integrating what I can into the classroom.



*The Al-Aqsa mosque on Temple Mount in Jerusalem*

## Learning Spanish to Teach English by Larry Wilt



*Larry and fellow students in Columbia*

I spent January learning Spanish in Medellín, Colombia. Why? Because I wanted to teach English to Spanish-speaking students just a little better than I could with "English only" teaching. But I found two more reasons for doing this project: (1) it helped me to understand how my students learn, and to empathize

with how they feel when their native language is not used in the classroom, and (2) it got me out of a Baltimore Winter.

I went to the Toucan Spanish School and was placed in a home stay by the school. The home stay, with private room, breakfast and dinner, was about \$28/day. More resilient students stayed in dorm hostels for less. Four hours of instruction per day, with classes of three to eight students, cost under \$200 per week. On top of these expenses, you'll need about \$10/day for lunch and transportation, round trip airfare (about \$800 from BWI) and then whatever you spend on recreation. Living costs are low, so total costs can be competitive with a Spring Break in Florida.

Medellín is a safe, welcoming, clean and fun city. Public transportation, at under a dollar per ride, is excellent. It is always like spring there. Depending on how ambitious you are, you can connect with locals in Spanish, or hang out with other students using English (or a Spanish/English mix) in your off hours.

From the instructors (usually university grad students) I quickly got a sense of the difference between Spanish used in instruction (slow and clear, with attention to keeping the vocabulary simple) and street Spanish. I felt that I was not just learning Spanish from classes, but absorbing it from the environment. I also got a tan.

*Larry Wilt received a TESOL certificate from UMBC in 2014.*

Chris McKinnon, a UMBC MA candidate, was selected to give a version of his presentation, "Removing Learning Limitations in the Classroom" at MDTESOL's Fall Conference on October 17th at Washington College.

While the decision was based on attendee evaluation data, it was clear that this session provoked participants to consider how standard tropes around error correction, technology, and translation may actually be imposing unnecessary limitations on language acquisition. Congratulations, Chris!

Finally, it is never too early to start composing a presentation for next year's MDTESOL Graduate Student Conference, traditionally held the first Saturday of March at the ELI.

How have you put theory into practice? What is the most exciting concept you have been exposed to in your coursework? What experiences with English language learners motivate you to teach? Building a presentation around these questions or others will enrich our cohorts understanding of what it means to be a graduate stu-

dent of TESOL. Besides, it will be a nice feather in your cap!



Participants at Chris McKinnon's presentation

## More is Both by Renée Burgos —continued from page 1

while simultaneously and intentionally valuing their home culture and language as essential resources. Seven years later, though within a context other than the United States, I feel grateful to be part of reconstructing the instructional model of a bilingual school so as to honor the value of both English and Spanish.

This school year, the Cloud Forest School – a small, independent school in Costa Rica where I am the dual language coordinator - has taken on a programmatic change that seeks to elevate the level of academics, enrich the development of identity within the student population and create leadership roles for long-term Costa Rican teachers. The primary school has adopted the dual immersion model, dedicating 50% of classroom instruction to each language from preschool through fourth grade. Prior to this year, about 80% of instructional time was dedicated to English, while 20% was dedicated to Spanish.

### Identity

Language, culture and identity are deeply intertwined. Since the majority of our students speak Spanish in their homes, we wanted our programmatic model to demonstrate that Spanish is valuable in social, academic, and professional settings. A dual language 50:50 model attributes equal value to both languages.

### Leadership

The Cloud Forest School has the marvelous ability to attract international teaching and administrative staff, affording the school multiple perspectives. At the same time, the fact that there is frequent change in the international staff, makes it challenging to pass on institutional knowledge. By adopting the dual language model, we set the stage for both Spanish and English language staff to be familiar with curriculum across content areas. This allows for generally longer-term Spanish language staff to take on leadership roles in supporting new staff members as

*"Soy bilingüe, yo sé dos idiomas, órale.  
I'm bilingual, I'm cool. Spanish and  
English, they both rule. Spanish and  
English, they both rule."*

*School bilingual song*

they orient themselves in the dual language model and new school environment.

We are now ¾ of the way into the pilot year of the dual immersion program and our teachers note the value of considering all the resources a child has in his or her first language to build upon in the development of the second.

As well, we recognize the challenges. Many of our teachers are not trained language teachers. Can we offer a strong program as we develop teachers' abilities to foster language acquisition? Can we support them adequately to connect despite their differences and engage in collaboration that benefits students? Can we stress the value of English as a foreign language in the midst of a Spanish speaking country?

I invite you to stay tuned as we figure out what a bilingual program looks like and expand our research. We hope to demonstrate that "more" equals "both."



Renee, a graduate of UMBC's ESOL Program, is currently the dual language coordinator at Cloud Forest School in Monteverde, Costa Rica and EDUC 666 Instructor.

teaching abroad and exploring South America, I applied for the position and got it after submitting all necessary documents and passing a Skype interview with Marcelo, the director of my current school. However, it took me a while to finish all my studies, so I finally managed to arrive in Brazil only in January 2015.

Brazil is a truly amazing country. Warm weather, exotic fruits, beautiful nature and amazing people! I came here one month ago and started teaching six intermediate to advanced groups and four individual students. There are a lot of people willing to learn English here so there is no problem with motivation. This



explains why most of my students excel at doing homework on time and fully participating in activities during the class. FISK promotes communicative language teaching methodology, as well as cooperative learning through pair and group work, which matches my interests and preferred teaching methods very well.

The school offered to let me to stay with a host family, very nice and welcoming Brazilian people. I enjoy learning about Brazilian lifestyle as well as learning Brazilian Portuguese. In addition, I have Portuguese classes at FISK so it is not only a

teaching, but also a learning experience.

On Sunday, February 15 I flew to Rio de Janeiro for the carnival, the biggest and most popular event in Brazil, which is known all over the world. It was great to see the Statue of Christ the Redeemer at Corcovado, beautiful beaches, such as Copacabana and Ipanema, and to be a part of the greatest Brazilian show called Sambodromo presenting the best samba schools of the world.

I hope that all of you get to experience teaching English abroad, visiting amazing places, meeting interesting people and brushing up your teaching skills. If you have any questions about coming to Brazil to teach, let me know. FISK accepts interns from different countries who are willing to teach English every semester.

## Student Q & A: Long Nguyen, former ESOL Student

*One of the great aspects of this program is the diverse backgrounds and experiences of our students. Some have spent time overseas, some are transiting from a second career and all have had a unique path that has led them to this field.*

Long Nguyen, a current certificate student, went through ESOL as a student after he moved to Maryland from Vietnam as a teenager in September of 2003. He currently works alongside his former teachers at his old high school. In this article, he answers a few questions about how his experiences have shaped him.

**What made you decide to focus on ESOL instruction as a teacher?**

I want to focus on ESOL instruction as a teacher because I want to give back. I want to contribute to the ESOL community. My experience with the ESOL program as a former ESOL student was greatly impactful. The program not only introduced and presented American culture but also raised awareness of other cultures and paid so much respect for diversity.

I had my struggles learning and living here in the US. I feel empathy for my immigrant students, their pain, sorrow, and their

struggles. I want to be able to inspire my immigrant students or at least one of them that they can make it here as well. Patience is the key to success.

**Where there any moments where something really ‘clicked’ for either you as a student?**

I think the moments where something really clicked for me as a former student were pretty subtle. But what really helped me to learn English was the full immersion in the new culture and the new language. I was more motivated to learn English because I wanted to get my point across. I wanted to stay and live here. In order for me to do so, I had to master the language.

**What advice do you have for current and future ESOL teachers?**

Remain driven, passionate, patient, and sensitive to our ESOL students. Don't give up on them. Our students have to deal with a lot of things at home from family issues, to financial issues to news from back home and so on while they are trying to adjust to the new culture and language. I know it is not easy to get to know every student in your classroom. But if we can get to know at least just one student of ours, that's a good start.

# Spring 2015 Graduates !

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

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

## MA TESOL:

Cara Aaron	Shannon McClung
Kate AlHakeem	Susan Thwang Piang
Jessica Allman	Hye-Kyong Ruffa
Rosanna Bartoletti	Ryan Sheldon
Rebecca Brahm	Linda Vesey
Robert Douglass	Stephanie Ward
Michelle Hanus	Rachelle Woods
Laurel Kircher	Erin Odgers-Chew
Alice-Ann Menjivar	

## CERTIFICATE:

Hillary Fowler	Megan Trivisonno
Saulio Saleta-Gonzalez	Barbara Toure
Yu Hao	
Elizabeth Helsel	
Emily Hernandez	
Maria Muller	
Linda Neuman	
Corrine Shaw	
Marina Shwartz	



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**TESOL**

## FREE FIRST YEAR MEMBERSHIP

*After reading about the MDTESOL Graduate conference, you might want more information about MDTESOL. Check out their website at [www.mdtesol.org](http://www.mdtesol.org). The first year membership is free!*

*Upcoming educational events include Techuity: Technology, Content, and Language for All Learners at Glen Burnie High School on April 13 and Supporting Long-Term English Language Learners on April 25 at the East Columbia Branch of the Howard County Library System.*



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