What’s New

ESOL 12th Anniversary

It is our pleasure to offer once again the ESOL Newsletter! ESOL stands for English for Speakers of Other Languages. Twelve years ago, an ESL Group was founded under the Nabors Service League at Washington and Lee University. Today, ESOL is a successful student volunteer organization with an amazing impact in the community. Each semester, eager Washington and Lee students with an interest in international cultures and service help facilitate communication in Rockbridge County. The organization provides the following services, all at no cost:

- English classes at the Rockbridge Regional Library, Glasgow Library and one-on-one English tutoring
- Interpretations for parent-teacher conferences, medical appointments, etc.
- Tutoring in other languages, when requested
- Translations of documents for community agencies
- In-home tutoring.

ESOL is comprised of four main sections: in-school education, translations, adult and family education, and the international trip. The first three focus on local needs, and the international trip is aimed at global outreach and experiences for W&L students.

Dominican Republic Trip 2013 Photo

Alumni Corner

Rebecca Beeson is a current first year graduate student at the University of Virginia. She is pursuing a Ph.D. in Education Policy/ Master of Public Policy while focusing her research on bilingual education, especially in low-income areas.

Life After ESOL

The things Rebecca learned and found important in ESOL influenced her goals for after graduation from W&L. After college, she became a bilingual fifth grade teacher in Dallas, Texas, with Teach for America. We asked Rebecca a few questions about her experience with ESOL as an undergrad to give people a few ideas about the continued work of our organization.

What is your fondest ESOL memory?

"My trip to the Dominican Republic was amazing. We worked with future professional baseball players as well as children in the surrounding, highly impoverished community. Not only did I have the opportunity to improve my Spanish-speaking and English-teaching skills, seeing that dichotomy in a developing nation was eye-opening. Most important, however, were the relationships we developed among ESOL members. Our common experience bonded us together and made us a stronger organization from that point onward."

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Reaching Rockbridge County

This year ESOL has grown and mobilized a large volunteer base. Our English tutoring has more than doubled this year and expanded out to reach families in Glasgow and Fairfield. Currently 14 different families are being reached and tutored throughout the county, including one Chinese and one Vietnamese family. Our tutors work with both parents and children, either at home, after school, or in public libraries. We have continued to work closely with ESL coordinators for local schools and rely on their relationships with families to connect us with people who can use our services. Another huge goal of reaching out to the Rockbridge community is to build companionship with families and to serve as resources for them outside of tutoring. Creating a strong network in this community will help everyone in the long run and help make the greatest impact.

Guatemala Trip

This year, ESOL is breaking away from its usual trip to the Dominican Republic to partner with W&L’s Engineers Without Borders. Last February, EWB traveled to San Pedro, Guatemala, to assess water access and quality, and found that much of the community’s water was contaminated, even at local schools. Over spring break this year, EWB returns to San Pedro to install reliable water sanitation systems. ESOL students will help in the process by serving as interpreters, educating people about water safety and sanitation, and acting as a link between the local people and the engineers.
ESOL Reflections

Evelyn Rupert became involved in ESOL during freshman year and has been immersed in the program ever since. As she is leaving, this is what she has to say about her experience. I got involved in ESOL fall term of my freshman year doing the weekly English classes at the Lexington library. The same couple, Inés and Rigo, came almost every week and I ended up working with them up until I went abroad second semester of junior year. I will always be grateful for the friendship that I made with the family I tutored. It is really great to make connections with people who are a part of the Rockbridge community, but separate from W&L. It really keeps things in perspective and reminded me that the world is so much bigger than the campus bubble. They are just two of the nicest people I have ever known and have added so much to my time at W&L. My ESOL experience would not have been as outstanding without them.

Because of this long-term connection, I encourage current volunteers to try to do the same: make yourself accessible outside of English classes or homework help. It means a lot just to give someone your phone number and encourage them to call if they need anything. This can be a more meaningful experience than a boring one-hour tutoring session every week. That's where working around peoples' schedules and trying to keep tutors with the same families as long as possible is key.

ESOL volunteers hail from many different parts of the United States and the world. ESOL leaders have gone on to posts in teaching and international ESOL, medical school, and law school, and eight have been Fulbright recipients. It is clear that the organization attracts quality students and that these students strengthen their college experience through ESOL.

If you want to join ESOL, visit our website at esolacademic.wlu.edu or email us at esol@wlu.edu.

Reflections Cont’d

For example, Janey Fugate has worked with the same family for quite some time. Last semester, she even brought Magali and her three daughters to the dance concert at W&L because the girls really love dance. Those are the kinds of interactions we want to encourage, and I think that a long-standing relationship between volunteers and ESL families can be just as beneficial as the lessons themselves and where both tutor and student make the most out of the ESOL experience.

Alumni Corner Cont’d

What advice do you have for students who are trying to teach and help the people they are working with?

“Listen! I learned so much from my child and adult students in ESOL and the classroom that I hope I taught them half as much as they taught me. Approach every teaching situation with humility and open ears. You reach many more students when you treat them as equals than when you talk down to them.”

W&L students began ESOL in the Fall of 2002. Volunteers recognized the needs for language instruction and services for the growing Hispanic population in Rockbridge County to ease the transition into life in the area. It is our pleasure to dedicate a section of our Newsletter to the ESOL alumni who helped make the organization what it is now. We have given these alumni who participated in the growth of the organization a chance to write about their perspectives and memories of ESOL.

Donating to ESOL

One of our most challenging tasks continues to be raising enough funds for our yearly operating budget. If you are considering giving to Washington and Lee, please keep ESOL in mind. Thank you!

Staying in Touch

We would love to hear more about our alums and what they are up to. If you have a moment to drop us a line, please do! Our advisor is Professor Ellen Maycock, and the organization’s e-mail address is esol@wlu.edu.