



Speaking of Vanderbilt's
English Language Center

by PATRICK NITCH

To the Vanderbilt international community, 1208 18th Avenue South is more than a building that houses the Vanderbilt University English Language Center (ELC). 1208 is hope, it is family, and it is home.

While we all benefit from an international campus, we often ignore the struggle and sacrifice of our international friends. On my first day working at the ELC, I stood in front of a classroom of international students and panicked. How could I connect with a group of students I knew nothing about? As I started to listen to their stories, however, I realized that 1208 is the cornerstone of intercultural learning at Vanderbilt; so many of the contributions international students, scholars, faculty, and staff make to create a global living-learning community at Vanderbilt originate from 1208. I am honored by their willingness to welcome me into their lives.

Since 1978, the ELC has been supporting the international community in building the most fundamental academic skill set—the ability to communicate effectively in a dynamic, English-speaking, university classroom setting. As a novice to the field of international education, I am struck by the rapid growth of the field in the past few decades. According to the Institute of International Education's Open Doors Report, international student enrollment has increased from 263,938 in 1978–79 to 690,923 in 2009–10. The 2011–12 academic year welcomes 297 new international students and scholars to Vanderbilt's campus, for a total international student and scholar enrollment of 1,307.

In many ways, the 2011–12 academic year is a transition year for the ELC as it expands its programming to meet the demands of a growing international population on campus. The ELC expansion reflects Vanderbilt University's ongoing support for international activity and its commitment to ensure that there are sufficient resources



for international students and scholars to thrive in the Vanderbilt community. “The provost’s office wants Vanderbilt to be a truly international university, and we are making investments in many areas to enhance its global impact and visibility. Our support for the English Language Center recognizes its invaluable role in helping our international students, faculty, and staff become fully integrated into the life of the university,” says Tim McNamara, vice provost for faculty and international affairs.

More students will be served by the ELC’s expanded course offerings in the popular multidisciplinary English for Academics and Professionals (EAP) program, which is open to students and scholars from all university schools and departments. In addition to EAP courses, the ELC will be offering academic workshops next spring that target specific learning objectives. The ELC has also expanded its discipline-specific programs in the professional schools on campus. This expansion includes working with Owen Graduate School of Management in offering Managerial Writing, a credit-bearing course for MBA students, and with the Vanderbilt Law School in supporting

LL.M. students. The ELC is also working with Peabody College to offer a program for its international graduate students, and the M.Ed. program in Teaching English as a Foreign Language has added specific ELC academic writing courses to its program curriculum.

The ELC also offers Introduction to Teaching English as a Foreign Language, a semester-long class for undergraduate students either returning from study abroad experiences or preparing for their overseas experience through the Office of Active Citizenship and Service. Additionally, the ELC plays an advisory role for programs and groups of students developing community outreach programs.

All over campus, communication is integral to developing sound academic and professional programs in a top-tier university setting, and the ELC is committed to supporting this vital role. So, next time you stroll along 18th Avenue South, feel free to stop in and meet some of your international neighbors!

Patrick Nitch is an Education Specialist at the ELC.

A Few Words with Linda Roth and Susan Barone

The ELC's ability to adapt to the changing needs of its international students and scholars is due in large part to the experience of two long-term ELC employees, Linda Roth and Susan Barone. This year, Roth, a language teaching specialist, and Barone, ELC director, reached their respective 15- and 20-year anniversaries as Vanderbilt employees. As a new ELC employee, I asked them about their recipes for success.

PN: How have you advanced professionally and how has Vanderbilt supported you in progressing in the field?



LR: I've become a better teacher and learned more than I taught through participation in national and international conferences, taking workshops on campus, talking to colleagues, and reading. Vanderbilt has supported these activities, welcomed me at its libraries, centers, and schools, provided the technology I needed, and had a steady supply of curious, smart international students to challenge me. Honestly, even though it's not an "official" answer, working within Vanderbilt's arboretum has been a continual source of calm and pleasure. If the campus had been high rises in a concrete jungle, I wouldn't have lasted 15 years.

SB: When I first started at the ELC, I was offered wonderful opportunities to try what was uncharted territory in the day—discipline-specific language instruction. I was intrigued by the model and methodologies and have been honored to be a part of developing this area of second language acquisition within our profession.

PN: How has your view of English language teaching changed since you first started?

LR: Now I don't feel like I need to 'pour' English skills into students so much as facilitate their own pouring out of what they are capable of. I have to give them tools, but they will use the tools to create whatever they are motivated to create. I've also learned that digging Bermuda grass out of the garden is a very good context in which to solve educational problems and do lesson planning!



SB: As a novice, I did not realize the extent to which context plays such a critical role in what we do here at ELC. Understanding the specific context of a discipline is critical to creating a meaningful language curriculum.

PN: How do you continue to challenge yourself in such a familiar field?

LR: Since each student is an individual with new needs, this presents a new challenge each time we get new students. I guess always having something new to learn, having some new problem to solve, and trying out some new technology or activity is what keeps me challenged.

SB: The field is quite vast with a wide range of applications. I constantly learn from students, colleagues, and current research.

PN: What have been some of your most memorable moments?

LR: I'll never forget when VU sent me to India for three weeks with a carefully worked out, Internet-based curriculum for nurses, but when I arrived in Kerala, no computers had been installed and only intermittent Internet connection was available. Having to reinvent the curriculum practically overnight, by myself, in a totally foreign environment is something I'll never forget.

SB: Some of my most memorable moments have been when I was teaching full time and would take students on service-learning projects (although that term wasn't used then). Some of those students became my lifelong friends.

For more information on the ELC, visit www.vanderbilt.edu/elc