

Teacher testimonial



Mary Hughes

ESL Instructor, General English Program

What do you teach primarily at INTO OSU?

I teach in the GE program, Listening, Speaking and Vocabulary Level 1 and Reading and Writing Level 2.

What is your educational background?

I graduated with a degree in International Business and Management from Rochester Institute of Technology in Rochester, New York in 1991. I earned my Master's degree in TESOL from Seattle Pacific University in Seattle, Washington in 1999.

How many years have you been teaching?

I've been teaching for about 17 years. I taught EAP in Japan for seven years at several universities, and I also worked part-time teaching young children at a language school and adults at a community center. Most recently, I taught EAP to graduate students at

the American University in Cairo, and I also taught Principles and Practices of Teaching English to mainstream university students. Before that, I was in the United Arab Emirates training Teacher Assistants. I have also taught English in Thailand and Singapore, and in Senegal and Guinea I was in the Peace Corps giving workshops to small business owners.

What inspired you to become an ESL teacher?

When I was in the Peace Corps in a small village in Senegal, a group of women asked me to teach them how to read and write in their native language, Pulaar. They didn't have the opportunity to go to school when they were children because young girls had to stay home and help with chores, so being able to become literate was a great source of pride for them. They arrived beaming with excitement equipped with notebooks and pencils for the first class. When it was time to form the letters that matched the sounds, I saw

Teacher testimonial continued

that most of them did not know how to hold a pencil. This was very humbling, and I realized that we would have to start even more basic than I had thought. It was amazing for me because I really felt like I was helping them achieve something they had truly longed for, and with that tool of literacy they were more able to empower themselves to further improve their lives. This experience crystallized my decision to learn more about teaching language and to pursue a Master's degree in TESOL so I could continue helping people in meaningful ways.

What kinds of professional development activities have you attended/participated in related to ESL?

I have given over 20 presentations on a range of topics in the field at various conferences in Japan, Thailand, Cambodia, the UAE, and the USA. For two of these presentations in Japan, I won Best Speaker awards. In addition, I have seven research reports published in university journals in Japan and one cultural exchange trip report in a local magazine in the UAE. Other publications include a book review and two lesson plans in professional journals in Japan and the UAE. Finally, I co-authored two reading textbooks published in Taiwan and a textbook for TOEIC prep published in Japan.

What do you enjoy the most about teaching English as a Second Language?

Of course it's the teaching and interaction with students. They make me want to come to work every day! They challenge me into finding ways to help them learn better and ways to present the material so that it's meaningful to them. Through our time together, I also enjoy learning of their cultures and backgrounds.

What do you enjoy about work with INTO OSU students?

I teach students in the lower levels, many of whom have just recently arrived. They are truly excited about being in the US and being connected to OSU. I thrive on working with curious students, so interacting with the lower level students is very satisfying to me. I enjoy seeing their quick progress and helping them to adjust to a more academic setting than what they may be used to. I like helping them with survival strategies necessary for their adjustment here. It's also fun to see them interact with the American students that I bring into the class.

Please describe your teaching style/philosophy.

My classes follow a student-centered learning approach, where I guide students to become active participants who take responsibility for their own learning. We explore the differences between active and passive language learners, and students practice language learning strategies. They become more aware of their learning style preferences. My philosophy includes the belief that it is my job to make the content meaningful to the students so that they are engaged and want to learn it. I encourage my students to be open-minded and respectful of the diversity in the classroom and in the community. I am a sympathetic teacher: one who knows what it feels like to be a language learner and a foreigner. My teaching style includes a lot of humor and fun with learning, such as using games for grammar or review. Self-reflection is a part of my daily practice as are topical discussions with colleagues about teaching and learning.

Teacher testimonial continued

What are your expectations of your students?

I expect my students to work hard and stay on top of their studies. I expect them to understand that they are accountable for their progress and that they have to get help if they need it. I expect my students to understand what to do with my feedback, and they should give me feedback on the class as well. I expect them to get along well with others and be willing to work with anyone in the class in a respectful way. In all my classes, I have high standards in terms of behavior and quality and honesty of assignments, and I explain that by adhering to them, they are getting the academic skills training needed to excel in their university studies and beyond.

How do you handle students who struggle in your classes?

As low-level students may be reluctant to come and see me on their own, I schedule conferences with all of my students at least once throughout the term. We talk about their progress and discuss their strengths and what they need to do to improve. I remind them about the learning strategies we talked about in class and ask them to come up with a concrete study plan. I make sure they know when I am available and that they know what other extra help is available such as tutors and online resources.

How do you think you have made an impact in your students' lives?

Helping to shape the lives of students is one of the most special parts about teaching. Students have told me that I have affected their lives in meaningful ways. In the UAE, students picked up on the passion I have for teaching. For example, while guiding Fatima Al Darmaki through her Teaching Assistant practicum, I

encouraged her to continue her studies in the Bachelor of Education program. She is now a primary school teacher and continues to correspond with me about methodology and practice. In Japan, students felt the passion I have for certain causes. Takae Negami told me that after meeting me and taking my classes, she changed her career goals and decided to work in a fair trade company. There are more examples such as these, but I also hope that I have touched all of my students' lives in some positive way.

What is the best advice you can give to students learning English as a second language?

It is natural to feel frustrated with the speed of progress, especially when students compare themselves with others. I tell my students that they can't give up and that language takes time, dedication and practice. So they have to deal with making mistakes and become an active learner in and outside of class. I praise them for how far they have come, and to evoke their desire for learning English, I ask them to remind themselves why they are here and what they want to get out of their education.