

# ESL classes help struggling students

*With a 17 percent increase in ESL students on campus, the students are having to overcome new problems*

## Valerie Shea

Contributing Writer

They have gathered at Clackamas from all over the world, seeking a new language, the understanding of a new culture and an education that will allow them to find meaningful employment.

They are college students enrolled in ESL (English as a Second Language).

Are they treated with acceptance and respect or just the opposite?

According to ESL Department Co-chair Molly Williams, ESL enrollment at Clackamas is up more than 17 percent this term, and no one really knows why. This is unusual because prior to this year, enrollment in the program was fairly stable.

Whatever the reason, the campus population is very diverse. Williams calculated that the ESL Department currently serves 145 immigrants and 15 international students.

An immigrant is defined as someone who has permanently moved here from another country. An international student is one who has entered the United States with a foreign passport and stays on a temporary basis.

In Cultural Communications, a course Williams co-teaches, students learn that cultural diversity can bring richness to the campus and be a wonderful learning experience for all. However, it can also bring divisiveness and fear of acceptance, caused by stereotyping and prejudice.

To fully understand how the college community accepts these differences, it is essential to learn from those who are most affected.

One of the newest international students on campus is Neuza Delgado, 19.

Delgado arrived in Oregon just seven weeks ago from Portugal. She is living with her mother's cousin in Milwaukie.

At the college Delgado is enrolled in English Conversation, English Grammar, English Reading and Writing and Clackamas Experience. Like

many international students, she does not yet have a driver's license, so she relies on the bus for transportation, which takes 60 to 90 minutes each way between home and school.

She is enjoying the experience of living in Oregon and has found the college's staff and students to be friendly. She looks forward to training as a dental assistant.

Michael Guo, 21, an international student from China, is enrolled in his fourth term at Clackamas. He has family in the area and lives with his grandmother.

In addition to attending classes, Guo works in the media check-out center in the Dye Learning Center.

Guo says the best thing about the college is that he has been able to improve his English.

"The ESL teachers are very nice," he said.

Studying at Clackamas is not always easy for Guo. Two obstacles he faces are adjusting to the local culture and learning to communicate in proper English.

"Some cultures are different, and I feel uncomfortable," he said. "It is difficult to write."

Guo says he is generally quiet in class, but when he does speak to ask a question, students hear his Chinese accent and turn their heads to look at him.

"It makes me nervous," he said.

A more seasoned international student is Junta Chinen, 23, who arrived 15 months ago from Okinawa, Japan. He is hoping to complete the nursing program.

Chinen is no longer taking ESL courses, and he speaks English very articulately. He credits the ESL Department for his progress, and said that when he first arrived, he did not know enough English to say "I am a student."

Chinen enjoys the campus and meeting students from all over the world. But unfortunately, negative incidences do occur.

His smile faded as he told of an experience in the Community Center.

"Just yesterday, I was talking to a Korean friend of mine, and

three guys were laughing at his Korean accent and whispering something about ESL," he said.

Williams discussed the difficulties that our ESL students face, and she confirmed an event that transpired last spring.

Two female students were in a courtyard conversing in Spanish when a male student interrupted them by exclaiming, "This is America. We speak English!" The young women were upset and filed harassment charges against the offending male.

Williams, who has been teaching ESL at Clackamas for the last 28 years, acknowledged that this was an unusual occurrence.

"People should realize how hard it is to learn a new language," she said. "Be patient."

She suggested that individuals who speak English help

these students learn the language by "using different words and pictures" rather than simply talking louder.

Miguel Cardenas, an adviser in the Community Center, confirmed that many students are victims of stereotyping. He suggested that the campus community would benefit from being

more inclusive of our multi-cultural population.

Cardenas would like to see more diversity in school selections of campus events, entertainment, guest speakers and media.

One of the college's student ambassadors is Useni Makano, 21.

Makano immigrated to Oregon eight years ago. Originally from the Congo, he has witnessed the kindnesses and the cruelties that accompany being culturally different.

A constructive attitude helps Makano overcome negative influences.

"I think positive all the time," he said. "Their madness should not affect my happiness."

With a dream of working at the United Nations, perhaps as an ambassador representing the country of his birth, Makano has chosen to major in international studies.

Makano wants to build bridges between nations and between people. He

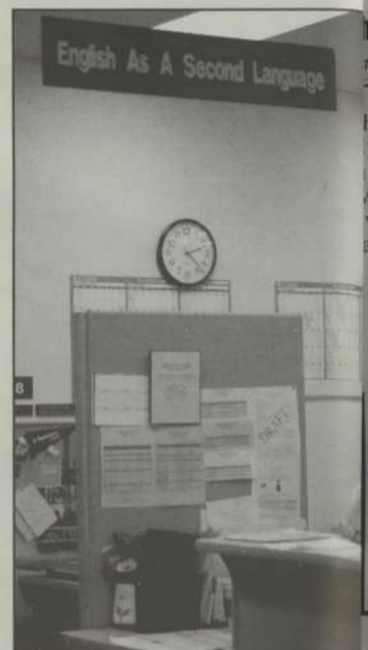
noted that some people feel comfortable talking to individuals who speak their language.

He suggested that "make an effort to understand a culture and help with the language."

"Don't let it stop talking to them ... embrace by understanding."

**"People should realize how hard it is to learn a new language."**

Molly Williams  
ESL Department  
Co-chair



The ESL workstation in the Dye Learning Center.



Photos by Alexandria Valtelunga Clackamas

ESL Department Co-chair Molly Williams talks with student Michael Guo, who works at the Dye Learning Center. ESL enrollment, while usually stable, has seen an increase of 17 percent.

## Events

**OPEN:** The Alexander Gallery's exhibit titled "Confluence," which features works by Tim Lundholm, Mike Suri and Tom Yody, opens on Friday from 5 to 7 p.m. Gallery hours are 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday. "Confluence" will be open until Jan. 18 next year.

**TODAY - 11/29:** There will be one-act plays, improvisation and stand-up comedy in the McLoughlin Theatre at noon, and also at 7 p.m. on Nov. 29, free to all.

**12/2-12/8:** Finals week; see the Fall Term schedule of classes for the finals schedule.