Applied English Center Celebrates 50th Anniversary

For 50 years the Applied English Center (AEC) has been the first stop for many international students coming to the University of Kansas. From its beginning the AEC, formerly the Intensive English Center, has provided intensive English language instruction, student services and activities to help students acclimate to life in the United States.

The center marked its half-century anniversary with a celebration in October attended by former directors Mark Algren (2010-2014), Chuck Seibel (2000-2010), Betty Soppelsa (1980-2000), and Michael Henderson (1975-1979), as well as former staff and students.

“The Applied English Center is a cornerstone of the initiatives we undertake as an international research university. Over the past 50 years it has helped international students transition to studying at an American university, and has connected students and scholars at KU with their colleagues around the globe, enhancing learning and building international understanding,” said Chancellor Bernadette Gray-Little.

The AEC belongs to a select group. In 1964 KU was one of 13 American universities to receive a grant from the Ford Foundation to found an Intensive English Center. Edward Erasmus founded the center with 35 students from 14 countries, nine assistant instructors and a secretary. By 1974 enrollment had increased to more than 100 students a semester. The center became the Applied English Center in 1976. The AEC was among the early programs to receive accreditation from The Commission on English Language Program Accreditation.

As the number of international students attending KU has grown, so has the number of students that the AEC serves. This semester 455 students, ranging from beginner to highly advanced, are taking five levels of instruction. Students enroll on either a full- or part-time basis, depending on their needs.

Over the years the center has expanded its center to include a cross-cultural counseling office and short-term custom-designed programs that run from one to ten months in length. Short-term programs have been offered by the AEC since the early 1970s, when a group of Japanese students came to campus. Undergraduates from Kanagawa University in Hiratsuka, Japan, Lawrence’s sister city, arrived for their first month-long language and culture experience in 1991. AEC short-term programming has hosted 18 regular programs for approximately 1,250 students from more than 90 countries. Some are prestigious federally funded programs for exceptional international students and educators; others are under the auspices of partner overseas universities, or a private sponsoring agency.
Leisring Builds Relationships with Chinese Musicians

Steve Leisring’s first trip to Asia was in 2005 when the associate professor of trumpet traveled to China with the KU Wind Ensemble. He has traveled to China every year since to establish and maintain relationships and share his knowledge.

Funding from the China India Korea Fund helped with his summer 2014 trip during which he taught and performed in six cities, including four major music conservatories; served as a clinician for a symphony orchestra in China; and worked with music educators in Beijing as a guest speaker at a conducting seminar.

His relationships with people in China began with an email that a music professor at the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing sent him asking him to visit and teach a master class. He was asked to come back in 2006 as one of two Americans performing in first international trumpet concert in China.

The Chinese need “quality information” about brass instruments because this area of music education opened up later than others. “The interest is so great; it’s amazing. It’s a great situation for a teacher because students are hungry to learn,” Leisring said.

The 2014 trip was his first time to visit and teach at the Shanghai Conservatory, where they kept the building open for his class on the last day of the semester.

Speaking to music educators at a conducting seminar was important because junior high and high school band programs are just beginning and need encouragement and information. “To be there at the time when that is happening is exciting,” Leisring said.

In the United States, music is taught at universities and conservatories and both can be similar in the quality of education. China has nine conservatories of music, (Leisring has been to seven of them) and the caliber of education at the conservatories is higher, Leisring said. Explaining the American system, and KU’s specifically, helps Leisring demonstrate to potential students that some American universities are better than conservatories. Three students have come to KU as a result of his visits.

“They know the University of Kansas in the China music world,” he said.

Leisring wants his KU students to follow his example of traveling and learning from others. Music is a great way to train people to work with others and working in the international language of music helps with language barriers, he said.
Mullick Leads Prize-Winning Aerospace Team

Traveling quickly back and forth to Europe from the United States used to be possible on the Concorde. Earlier this year, KU aerospace undergraduate students designed an award-winning plane engine that would not leave a large carbon footprint and could pick up where the Concorde left off.

Sunayan Mullick, a master’s student from India, was a member of the four-person team that won first place in the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics Foundation competition. Their engine is capable of cruising at Mach 1.5 or 1.5 times the speed of sound, which would mean that the supersonic jet could fly from the United States to Europe in two hours.

Aerospace has always fascinated Mullick. He was an avid watcher of space shuttle launches. “I wouldn’t let anyone else watch TV when Top Gun was on,” he said.

The United States was the place to be for technical advances and research, Mullick learned, and KU’s worldwide reputation in aerospace engineering got his attention. He came to KU on an International Institute of Education scholarship and received his bachelor’s degree in aerospace last May.

Work on the competition project began in the spring semester in Professor Saeed Farokhi’s class. As leader of Team CASA 25, Mullick worked on the engine software obtained from Germany, while the rest of his team worked on designing other aspects of the engine.

Since variable-cycle engine technology is not widely used, the team had to rely heavily on design theory and computer modeling to prove its idea would be successful.

“It took us more than three months to figure out the design and get a working computer model, but we had it perfected about a week before the competition deadline,” Mullick said in a KU press release. “We knew we had a great concept because variable cycle is a smart system with valves that open and close depending on flight conditions, which can adjust accordingly based on how fast you want to go.”

They submitted their report to the Joint Propulsion Conference and learned that they were one of three teams, including another KU team, to make it to the finals in Cleveland. Each team presented to engine industry experts from companies, including Rolls Royce and General Electric. The KU teams placed first and second, extending KU’s record of excellence in design competitions.

Mullick told the Times of India that he hopes that the engine will eventually be commercially produced, “enabling him to make a nonstop trip to his hometown Kolkata someday.”
Burns, Kansas, Program Marks 60th Anniversary

Thanksgiving is “the happiest time” of the year in Burns, Kan., because KU international students have been spending the holiday with Burns families for 60 years.

That is how Tom Grimwood, son of Betty Grimwood, one of the women who started the Thanksgiving homestay program coordinated by International Student Services, describes what the program has meant to that small community. A magazine article about international students

in her doctor’s office caught Betty Grimwood’s attention in 1954. After talking with her friend Bonnie Lohrentz and getting the support of the Women’s Society of Christian Service at the Burns Methodist Church, Betty Grimwood called KU. The result was that about 10 international students came to Burns for Thanksgiving.

Lohrentz and Betty Grimwood drove to Lawrence to pick up the students. On the way back they stopped to decide which student would go with which Burns family, after they had learned a bit about the students.

“We knew we were doing something that would develop into a program and that would be a tremendous experience for our children,” said the 90-year-old Lohrentz.

The program received national recognition in 1959 when Betty Grimwood and her husband Ed were presented a distinguished service award for Burns from the Institute of International Education. Then Vice-President Richard Nixon presented the Grimwoods with the award and the program was featured in the Saturday Evening Post magazine.

“Globalization” was not a term used in the 1950s, said Tom Grimwood. The experiences were about “friendship, communication and enjoyment.” He was three years old when the first students came, so international students have always been part of his life. Grimwood’s international experiences include living abroad. He and his wife returned to Burns in 2000 after living in Bolivia for 15 years and after his mother’s death, so a Grimwood has hosted an international student for the past 60 years.

“My life would have been so much different without the program,” Tom Grimwood said.

Grimwood and Lohrentz both emphasized that the students were treated like part of the family. They took the students on a hayride; they helped with the cooking, babysat and went shopping.

The connections did not end when the students returned to Lawrence. Lohrentz talked about going to Lawrence to celebrate their birthdays, having picnics and going to the hospital when one of the students was ill. “We celebrated all the traditions we could think of,” she said.

This Thanksgiving, Tom Grimwood and his family continued the tradition of hosting an international student.
Burns Thanksgiving Holds Fond Memories for Couple

By Pierre Bonnavaud

In September 1956 at the age of 21, I arrived in Lawrence from France on a very hot afternoon. I took a cab to Delta Upsilon fraternity where my accommodations and meals were organized through a Fulbright scholarship for two semesters to study Business Administration. Life at KU, including the dormitory with three levels of bunk beds, conversation in the “Kansan” language with the 17-year-old boys around the dinner table, as well as the case courses on the campus, were not easy to adjust to.

When I learned that people from a small town called Burns in South Kansas were inviting foreign students for Thanksgiving, this just came at the right time. At that time I was the only French student on the campus and only a few Americans from Lawrence, Kansas, were really familiar with the rest of the world. The news from Burns came as a blessing; these people inviting us in their homes, even coming to fetch us from the campus. The organization in Burns was perfect under the leadership of Betty Grimwood. Each of the 10 or so foreign students stayed with different families. I was personally most heartedly welcomed at the Grimwood home by Betty, Ed and their two sons, Tom and Charlie.

We had the opportunity to visit all Burns families . . . [as well as] the church, the bank and Ed’s store. Ed and Betty flew their own plane and I [saw] Burns and its famous water tower from the sky. Each of the foreign students talked about his or her own country and its traditions. We participated in various events and receptions organized for us. I remember turning for some time the ice cream machine in the Grimwoods’ backyard.

Birgitta Haglund, a Swedish student who arrived at KU in September 1957, also became a Burns visitor for Thanksgiving and other occasions, hosted by the Lohrentz family. Birgitta and I were married in 1958 and live in France with a family of three children and eight grandchildren. We had the pleasure to [host] Betty, Ed and Tom several times in our home in France, [as they] discovered the peculiarities of French living habits. Birgitta and I visited Lawrence and Burns in 1989.

The Burns experience counted a lot for both of us, bringing the warm human touch necessary beyond the studies on campus. One of our sons, Stephane, stopped in Burns when [he crossed] the United States in 1987; it was important for him to see Burns and the Grimwood family. He also had Tom tour Paris on the back seat of his motorcycle. Waouh! Tom was really impressed.

In Burns we came to better understand the heart of the United States. I think people from Burns also benefited from these exchanges. We are glad the program is still alive after 60 years. Betty fully deserved the recognition the program got in Washington from the vice president of the United States.
Debicki Award Helps Graduate Student Research in Spain

George Klaeren spent part of his summer reading more than 500 pages of Spanish documents and manuscripts from the 18th century. The doctoral student in history was in Madrid, Spain, conducting archival research with a stipend from the Debicki International Travel Award.

His dissertation topic is “Encountering the Enlightenment: Catholic Epistemologies of the Iberian Atlantic, 1680-1815,” concentrating on inquisition trials dealing with witchcraft related to medical knowledge.

The Debicki award, coordinated by the Hall Center for the Humanities, is given to a graduate student to travel abroad for dissertation research. Andrew Debicki’s long KU career included serving as dean of the Graduate School and International Programs from 1996 until he retired in 2000.

“Receiving this award was a huge relief, because I knew I would have the resources to create original research. This equaled a month of collecting documents,” Klaeren said. He conducted research in three archives: the National Historic Archive of Madrid, the National Library of Spain and the Royal Academy of Medicine.

He chose his dissertation topic because of how it intersected with the intellectual movement that emphasized reason and individualism rather than tradition.

“The Enlightenment was a new way of thinking. What’s science, what’s philosophy? What are the standards of proof? These were hot button topics and magic is the gray area,” Klaeren said.

Being the first person to handle documents in centuries can be exciting. A case that stood out for Klaeren involved a woman who was accused of superstitious practices in the late 18th century. Her name was familiar and Klaeren found an earlier case where she was also investigated. According to the records, she disappeared, so Klaeren does not know what happened to her.

Archival research involves patience. “There are days you don’t find what you need. You need to be able to work with what you find, fit it into the puzzle,” Klaeren said.

Learning how to use an institution—how its data is cataloged, and establishing relationships with librarians and archivists—is another important aspect of research trips. Sharing these “tools of the trade” is standard practice in the Department of History, and he has passed on his knowledge to his peers and the students he teaches.

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English Teacher Training Program Connects KU and Vietnam

Thirteen English teachers from Vietnam are spending the year at the University of Kansas taking Applied English Center (AEC) classes, learning about teaching methods and technology and experiencing different facets of American culture. This program follows AEC Language Specialist Kellie Smith Herrod’s 2013-2014 year in Hanoi, Vietnam on a Fulbright grant.

Vietnam 2020 is a Vietnamese government initiative to create a modern industrialized state. In support of Vietnam 2020, the U.S. Department of State Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs directed funds to the State Department Bureau in Hanoi to bring talented Vietnamese high school teachers of English to the United States. The AEC was the only U.S. English language center to be awarded the program, thanks to relationships forged in Vietnam by Smith Herrod and the AEC’s strong short term programs.

The teachers, all of whom serve at gifted high schools in Vietnam’s underserved provinces that have substantial ethnic minority populations, were selected through a competitive process that was vetted by the State Department Hanoi Bureau.

Participants Thuy Nyguen and Khanh Ha both appreciate what they are gaining from their AEC classes, emphasizing the improved listening and speaking skills that will benefit their students.

“I thought that studying would be stressful. I’ve found it to be not stressful, but useful,” Ha said.

The group has taken advantage of campus resources, including the libraries, computer labs and the AEC’s help center, The Point, in Anschutz Library. Each teacher has an AEC faculty mentor so they have one-on-one time to share professional practices with an American English language teacher.

Professional development is the point of the program. To that end, the group attended the MIDTESOL conference in Missouri. Along with AEC faculty and other TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages) professionals in the region, the Vietnamese teachers attended sessions, connected with presenters and learned about current research topics. They will also visit area high school foreign language classes.

AEC Associate Director and short term programs director, Margaret Coffey, is very appreciative of this opportunity. “The Vietnamese teachers program is an example of international education exchange at its finest. Very talented and dedicated Vietnamese high school teachers are having an immersion experience at the University and in Lawrence. They will take much of what they learn back to Vietnam to provide training for other English language teachers and to share with their students. Applied English Center faculty and students and Lawrence community members are learning about Vietnam – its culture, its citizens and education system. Everyone is enriched through mutual exchange and understanding.”

During their program, the group is participating in a wide variety of activities to learn about American culture and to connect with members of the community in which they are living. They spent Thanksgiving with American families; they attended a KU basketball game; and they visited a local farm. Before the end of the year they will volunteer for Lawrence agencies. They will also go to Kansas City to visit museums, go shopping and see the Christmas decorations.
International Student Leadership Transforms Communities

José Aldana chose to come to KU because the university makes “an investment in international students.” The sophomore from Bolivia has proven himself to be a good investment. From his community service to his work in the Honors Program, Aldana has made his mark on campus.

This semester Aldana was the youngest team member chosen to represent KU and the School of Business at the National Team Selling Competition at Indiana University. The team was given a case to analyze and then develop a business plan to sell to investors. His team placed fifth.

“The best part of that experience was the opportunity to be exposed to a challenging task in a field of my interest (marketing). I had a great time working with a very talented team. The relationships I’ve developed with professors and peers were also a huge plus,” he said.

Aldana is majoring in marketing and management with a concentration in international business. “I’m gaining a good business understanding and transferable skills to try to help Bolivia,” he said.

Aldana knew he wanted to go to college in the United States, and he chose KU out of 10 universities. The personal touch helped; he learned about the university from a KU student who visited one of his high school classes.

Receiving an International Institute for Education scholarship solidified his choice.

In addition to having a strong academic record, Aldan is heavily involved in campus activities. He is the culture chair for the International Student Association, a KU Honors Program ambassador and an international student ambassador for International Recruitment & Undergraduate Admissions (IRUA).

“The reason I chose to be an ambassador is that once I was an international kid from Bolivia who had no clue about what the University of Kansas looked like or what Kansas looked like. I want to help bring students to KU because I know what this place can offer to students, more specifically international students. I love studying here,” he said in a video for IRUA.

Last spring break he led a group of students to Oklahoma City, Okla., for an Alternative Break program. The KU group built a house for Habitat for Humanity and helped an elderly woman repair her damaged house.

His interest in community service comes from his father’s influence. During his childhood, his father took him to projects coordinated by the not-for-profit organization dedicated to child development that he worked for. “That impacted me to do something,” Aldana said.