One of the joys of working in the Intensive English Language Institute is the opportunity to meet so many interesting people from different parts of the world. As you can see in the pie chart below, just this semester we have students from 21 countries. Our students come from all walks of life: some have just finished high school and are going to university for the first time, some are graduate students looking for an opportunity to gain more experience and expertise in their chosen field of study, and yet others are U.S. residents and parents who are working full time in order to make a better life for themselves and their family. In this newsletter we share the stories of just a few of our students, stories as diverse and as unique as our students. These students all come from different backgrounds and are pursuing different dreams yet they all come together in our classrooms to improve their language ability so they can achieve their life goals. Please enjoy these stories and get to know a few of our students better.

“I am very grateful to learn in IELI rather than directly study for my major. IELI professors filled my gaps in English and they are filling my gaps to become successful and competent student in USU.”

-Yemisrach Yami

STUDENTS OF THE YEAR

Linh Cam Hoang
Vietnam

Chit Moe
Burma-Thailand

Azalia Caldera
US
I met Mohammed Hussein during the fall of 2014 as a participant of the Teaching Seminar offered to International Teaching Assistants (ITAs) through the Intensive English Language Institute (IELI), where he proved to be one of the top students. His diligence, ability to work well individually as well as in a group, and effective teaching presentations attracted the attention of both his peers and myself. Recently, Mohammed Hussein has received a departmental award as the best graduate instructor. In order to learn more about his background, teaching experiences at USU, and plans for the future, I met with Mohammed Hussein for an interview at a campus cafe.

Mohammed Hussein told me that prior to coming to USU as a Fulbright scholar, he had graduated from Al-Azhar University (Cairo, Egypt) from the School of Language and Translation, majoring in English and Islamic Studies. Back in Cairo, he worked as an Arabic-English translator and as a private tutor in both Arabic and English. The same year, he applied for the Fulbright scholarship (Foreign Language Teaching Assistants Program), to which he was accepted. As a visiting Fulbright scholar at USU, Mohammed Hussein has been mainly engaged in teaching Arabic as a foreign language. At the same time, he became a student in the Masters in Second Language Teaching (MSLT) program at USU, from which he will graduate in May, 2014. Through interactions with his peers in the MSLT program, undergraduate students and professors, he has had many opportunities to practice and improve his English. Mohammed was a student in the IELI Teaching Seminar for ITAs, he said that he had particularly benefitted from the activity related to analyzing and developing a course syllabus, discussions dealing with the U.S. academic culture, and a guest speaker’s presentation about the needs of students with disabilities. Among other topics, he also highlighted his learning about the Socratic method of teaching, which he was able to apply in his teaching (as a substitute instructor) of several classes of the course “Introduction to Islam” at USU. Other topics discussed in the seminar such as, for example, the interactive method of teaching served as a good revision of his previous studies.

As a teacher, Mohammed Hussein believes in the importance of creating a student-centered classroom. In particular, in his classes of Arabic as a foreign language, Mohammed Hussein involves his students in using the target language in meaningful activities, allowing the learners to speak English only for a limited amount of class time. In other words, Mohammed Hussein prioritizes student talk, restricting his own teacher talk during class meetings. During his teaching at USU, he has continuously received positive evaluations from his mentor teachers, which resulted in his receiving the departmental award as the best graduate instructor.

Speaking about his future, Mohammed Hussein admitted that in the nearest future he is interested in getting more teaching and research experience, while simultaneously applying to doctoral programs in Linguistics in the United States. Acknowledging Mohammed Hussein’s taking time to answer my questions, I wished him good luck with both his future research and teaching endeavors.

**IELI Student Activities**

- Ice Skating
- Canoeing on the Bear River
Andrea Bolleta and Sebastián Lagrange, a wife-and-husband team from Argentina, are graduate students at Utah State University studying cattle production and range management. They are here with their children, Lucía, 8, and Thiago, 5, who are in a Spanish dual-immersion school at Bridger Elementary in Logan. It has not been an easy road on the journey towards their academic and professional dreams. Through hard work and perseverance, they have made it to USU.

Both Andrea and Sebastián are from Patagonia, (see map) descendants of European immigrants who farmed the land there. Andrea’s great-grandparents were Italian, while Sebastián’s grandparents came from France. Her father still has the farm, about 40 miles from Bahía Blanca, a city on the Atlantic Coast, where he raises beef cattle and grows wheat, sorghum, and barley. Sebastián’s father is an agricultural engineer, and his mother is a special-education teacher.

Andrea lived and worked full time at a remote research station at the same time she was studying for her master’s degree—15 days before their daughter Lucía was born. Three years later, Sebastián defended his master’s thesis right before Andrea gave birth to their son Thiago. At the research station, they were working as extension agents, sharing information with the local cattle ranchers and helping them improve the quality of their beef production. Seeing the value of her hard work, Andrea loved her job there.

Over time, Andrea became the manager of the agricultural research station, and Sebastián was encouraged to pursue a Ph.D. In 2013 he attended a conference in Indianapolis, Indiana where he met another Argentinian, Juan Villalba, a USU professor in the College of Natural Resources, who specializes in range science. The two spoke about the possibility of studying at Utah State University. Sebastián returned home, conferred with Andrea, and the two of them decided to study for the GRE and TOEFL exams and apply for a scholarship. Not only did they both get a prestigious scholarship from INTA (the equivalent to the U.S. Department of Agriculture), but they also were accepted at USU, Andrea in the Department of Plants, Soils, and Climate, and Sebastián in the Department of Wildland Resources.

The whole Lagrange family arrived in Logan on Andrea and Sebastián’s wedding anniversary, April 29, 2014. Three days later, before they had even found housing or daycare, they took the IELI placement exam and enrolled in Level 4 classes the following week. Recognizing what great scholars they were and how well they interacted with their international classmates, the IELI faculty chose both Andrea and Sebastián as Students of the Semester for the summer term.

Fall semester of 2014 they began their graduate coursework. Enrolled in the same classes, they videotaped the professors and then viewed the recordings together at home. They both earned As. It has been hard, especially the culture shock they experienced and the difficulties finding child care and housing. As for the children, they didn’t know a word of English when they arrived, but within six months, Lucía had made friends and was speaking English—even correcting her parents! As Dr. Jennifer MacAdam in the Department of Plants, Soils, and Climate said about the family, “They seem to be thriving!”

Soon Andrea and Sebastián will start working in the field or in the lab. The plan is for them to return to Argentina in the spring of 2018 as Doctors Bolletta and Lagrange.
IELI’s mission is to help international graduate and undergraduate students improve their use of English for academic purposes while making a transition to university studies. IELI also serves U.S. residents and citizens for whom English is a second language, as well as visiting scholars, post-docs, and government or corporate sponsored students who want to improve their English.

Since Fall 2014, I have had the pleasure of piloting a brand new course. IELI 1000 – Conversational English was created specifically to serve the needs of the spouses of international students who are working on Master’s and PhDs. Most participants do not have student visas, and therefore are not technically students. In fact though, many are already highly educated but are happy for an opportunity to improve their English and to engage more actively in the university community. Among the participants this semester are a dentist, an engineer, and a math teacher. The majority are Arabic speakers from Iraq and Palestine. The others are from Ecuador, Iran, Israel, and Russia. The diversity brings a real cultural richness to the classroom.

I am using principles of content-based instruction to design a course that familiarizes participants with American culture, while encouraging them to share the cultures and traditions of their home countries. We have covered a wide range of topics, many chosen by the students themselves, from travel, work, family, health, and shopping to campus traditions and U.S. history.

IELI 1000 has been a unique and fulfilling class to teach.