

Good-bye and thank you!
The English Center is closing its doors
after 40 fabulous years.



December 2016

We say good-bye: The English Center united us for 40 years

The English Center says good-bye, thank you, and good luck to thousands of students and community members. We have been a helping hand to newcomers and internationals since the school was founded in 1977.

The end of The English Center does not stop us from going forward. Students have learned English to live and work together. Local employees have trained for advancement in their positions. Staff, teachers, trainers, testing staff, and teacher trainees have developed as professionals. Donors, board members, and volunteers have given freely and helped us thrive. Please feel free to contact [Seena Clark](#), the president of our Board of Trustees and Acting Executive Director.

Our mission has been to help people transition to their new lives in America and to improve communications skills. Together, we developed global awareness and sought freedom and

prosperity. The first few months in a new country are exciting and challenging. The lessons of those experiences last a lifetime.

This fall English Center students met new experiences eagerly. Read their stories in this newsletter.

In October, the [United Nations Association of the East Bay](#) brought us together with guest speakers, the model UN, and the UN Day Ceremony at the International House, UC Berkeley.

The Community English program taught American history and government, cultural diversity, and nutrition. Students wrote letters to President Obama to express their hopes and concerns. Read some below.

Our valedictorian, Javier Alquicira gives advice and describes academic life. "Be proud of where you came from," he says. Many more people and events filled our students' lives. These include volunteer tutors and teacher assistants, guest speakers, and the English Center Thanksgiving tradition. We will not miss these traditions because we will carry them forward like a light to the future. Our last graduation will be December 23 at 11:40 am to 1:00 pm. Please join us.

United Nations Association Events



Three refugees from Afghanistan, Jalal, Kamal, and Ali Reza, stayed to thank UNA visitors Bruna Allen and Joanne Robinson.

We Welcomed Refugees and Immigrants

Fall 2016

The goals of the United Nations were realized every day at the English Center. This happened in the successful integration of refugees and immigrants. A big part of this was through their knowledge of one another. As students, these new community

members learned the skills they need to understand and participate. The English Center was a safe and welcoming place for English language learning and career readiness.

Learn more about how refugees are resettled by the interfaith community in the East Bay. Our students Jalal and Kamal are featured in this inspiring [story and video](#).

The English Center at the UN Day Celebration

October 23, 2016

The [UN Day Celebration](#) took place at the International House, UC Berkeley. Bravely, English Center students from Syria, Yemen, Afghanistan, Uganda, and Sudan talked to the full assembly about the experiences of refugees. We met other members of the international community, including UC Berkeley students, scholars and leaders of award-winning agencies serving refugees. We also enjoyed a fine dinner in the banquet hall. We are grateful to the UNA, the English Center Board, and our volunteers for supporting us.



Khalid and Maryam, brother and sister, carried the Afghan flag and spoke about refugees who have fled Afghanistan.

Inter-Generational Model UN Conference

October 15, 2016

The [IGMUN](#) conference welcomed our students. We participated in sessions on women's rights, human rights, and Syrian refugees.

Participants had to stand up, watch the clock, and follow the rules of assembly alongside high school students. Our students spoke from first-hand experience, and when they spoke, people listened.



The IGMUN welcomed us warmly. Students from Uganda spoke on human rights and practiced preparing UN policies.



The UN Youth Ambassador and members of the Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority taught us how to be engaged leaders.
Students from China attended the session on women's rights.

This Thanksgiving was both Traditional and International at the English Center



Program Manager Kaya Cohn organized our Thanksgiving and welcomed everyone in front of the "Gratitude Tree." We are very proud to host so many immigrants' first Thanksgiving. [See the video that OZY produced.](#)





Students enjoyed the bonds they developed in class. Thanks to the board members, staff, and students, we had a tasty mix of traditional Thanksgiving food and international food. "Happy First Thanksgiving!"

Academic Life

Instruction and Interaction Make Quality Education

Fall 2016

Community English classes bring American civics to life. Students learned about government and geography by making comparisons and expressing their values.



Maps come alive when your friends teach you where they came from.
Above, students come from Mongolia, Mexico, Nepal, and Afghanistan.
Below, from Burma, Eritrea, Malaysia, and Vietnam.





Students from Mexico, Guatemala, and Colombia prepared a presentation with traditional music, food, and richly embroidered blouses. Wonderful! Thank you!



Students from Ethiopia and Eritrea teamed up to teach their classmates about their cultures. They played music, brought colorful handicrafts, presented the coffee ceremony, and baked bread to share. They explained that Christians and Muslims are friends in their homeland. They brought warmth and friendship to the English Center.

Refugees write letters to President Obama

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

I have been in the United States of America since April 2016, but I am not a citizen. I

am planning to become a US citizen in the future. Even though I am nostalgic and have homesickness, my dream is, as a majority of immigrants, refugees, and asylees, to have US citizenship. I fled from Syria because of the war as the first reason. There are many more reasons. For example, I do not have equality and equal opportunities in my country and no freedom of speech. In contrast, the life in the United States of America has many good qualities, and it will be my new country.



Amro is from Damascus, Syria

Becoming a citizen means you are in the right place. Life in the United States of America has great qualities, specifically, freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and fairness. These freedoms started when the Pilgrims came for freedom in 1620. Then when Americans fought the British Army for independence, the United States was born. Freedom came true when President Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 to free the slaves.

I can see that the American people believe in freedom, equality, and fairness. These thoughts are enough to be a human and live a great life with people who let you know your rights, responsibilities, and how to respect the laws. Furthermore, if I am a citizen, I will have many more rights, for example, the right to vote and the right to bring the family to the United States of America. I am thinking about how life has many good things that are waiting for me.

Thank you, Mr. President, for being our president and for welcoming us from many parts of the world. I am hopeful that this will continue and America will be truly free.

Sincerely,
Amro Marwan Othman Agha

A Letter about Freedom



Paw Eh, like several of her classmates, fled Burma seeking political asylum. She came from the Karen state and often represents the culture and political interests of her region.

Paw Eh wrote letters to US President Obama, California Governor Brown, and Oakland Mayor Schaaf. She assured them

Paw Eh is from the Karen state in Burma,
Myanmar

all that she wants to be a US
citizen in the future. She wrote to

the President:

Back in the refugee camp, we always had to worry about our safety, the Burmese Army and the Thai police. Here in the United States, we have so much freedom. I can go to school, get higher education, and everyone has the same equality. I am so grateful for the opportunity to write a letter to you.

She also told the Oakland mayor about the need for fair rent and better employment. Life is good, but the work for a better life is never done.

Valedictorian Speech: Javier Alquicira

Summer 2016

Good morning. Thank you, everybody, for being here: the English Center Board of Directors, the management team, all of our teachers, all of our tutors, and all of my classmates.

It is a pleasure to be here together with you all. Today we finish a small cycle in our lives. During my time here, first as international student, and now as a permanent resident, I have had an excellent experience. I have had a lot of support from the staff of English Center, and the staff of the Diversity in Health Training Institute, and from each of my classmates. A big thank you to each of my teachers; you are all special and I will always think of you. Finally, I especially want to thank my wife, because without her, this adventure would have never happened.



Javier is a physician trained in Mexico.
He's also a new father of a baby boy.

Today I want to say a few words to each of my classmates. I know that you all have very important reasons why you're here. I know that each one of you works hard, and will continue to work harder to reach your dreams.

For me it is important to not forget why we are here and where we came from. These are the things that make us who we are, and make us stronger so that we can build the society we want. Do not forget that our journey is very long. It is. Do not forget that we have much to learn. We do. But most importantly, please do not forget that we also have a lot to teach and a lot to contribute to our new community. So be brave and be worthy. Be proud of where you came from. Be strong, and carry that wherever you go. Please feel proud of what we have achieved today. Congratulations!

May you always have a bright light within you!
Thank you.

Healthy Food Quests

Recently, our beginning students participated in a food quest. Their grammar teacher, Elena Sorokova, wanted to help her students practice comparative and superlative adjectives along with food vocabulary. Early in the morning, all 16 students headed to the nearest Lucky store. In groups of four, students browsed through the store, completing different tasks and taking pictures for confirmation. Then there was a little tea party upon their return to the English Center. Back in the classroom, students reported on the results of the quest. Everyone enjoyed this interactive learning experience. Thank you, Elena!





Betta and Ronnie compare prices at the Friday farmers market.



Public Safety Ranks High

Students listened to a talk on public safety. Our classroom building hosts, the Argosy University staff, explained how police and other security personnel are educated in the [Criminal Justice program](#). Ronnie, foreground, speaks with authority on these topics. He was a paralegal in Uganda working on human rights. Now he is a student and a security guard. Ronnie and his classmates pictured here are all refugees seeking safety in our community.



Volunteers came on Wednesdays at 1:00 to tutor and lead conversation groups in the library. Thank you tutors!

Student Life



Classmates Emily and Anh met up at the Chinatown Streetfair.



Connoisseurs from different continents had to agree while ordering lunch in a Chinese restaurant.



Friends sang in Spanish to satisfy a dare.



At the UN Day Celebration, Nedal spoke at the podium about the issues in Sudan. Then she enjoyed her meal using an American fork for the first time.



Mulwinda Joseph met a family from his native Uganda at the Inter-Generational Model United Nations at UC Berkeley.



Volunteer TA, Steve Chinnavaso helped us practice songs for the Argosy ribbon cutting ceremony. We could not stop singing "Stand by Me." We have so much gratitude for our many volunteers.



The UN Flag raising ceremony at Jack London Square presented speeches, a flock of doves, hundreds of flags, a girls' choir, and dance performances.



We had a baby shower for Guobin and Becky Liu. "Babies Rock!"



Nedal and Maryam met UC Berkeley graduate student Violeta (center) at the UN Day Celebration.



The
**English
Center**

Farewell and Best Wishes
from Seena Clark, President, Board of
Trustees & Acting Executive Director

To all our students, alumni, clients,
partners, teachers, staff, volunteers,
board members, funders, supporters and
friends, we wish you a wonderful holiday

season. We have fulfilled our mission of serving thousands of students, both international and in the East Bay community, with excellent teaching, coaching, job placement and additional support, and we are proud to have known and worked with each of you. We will miss our daily work and the excitement of witnessing the transformation of people as they learn to express themselves more fully and in complete freedom. We will think of you often and wish you well in all your future endeavors. Thank you for your wonderful support over the years.

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