From the Editor

This semester we reboot the newsletter, after a two-year hiatus, with a retrospective on the disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic and our recent return from the isolation of it all.

In Spring 2020, about 75% of IELI’s students were international—the rest were emerging bilingual U.S. citizens or residents. The semester was unfolding as most semesters do.

On Thursday, March 12, many of us taught our last in-person classes of the semester. Later the same day, USU announced the cancellation of all classes from March 13 to March 17 and directed instructors to transition all courses to an online format. By Wednesday, March 18, we were all teaching our classes either asynchronously online or via Zoom.

Student Appreciation Luncheon—cancelled. IELUSA, our student association—forced to abandon any further plans. Normal operations in IELI—so disrupted that it was all we could do to finish the semester. Newsletter—forget it.

Students in the China Cooperative Program wanting to come from China to finish their degrees on the Logan campus—forced to stay home, causing our summer program to plummet from 33 the previous summer to 8 in the summer of 2020.

Any hopes of a return to safe in-person classes by Fall of 2020 were soon dashed. A few brave teachers attempted physically distanced face-to-face and hybrid classes, but most of us retreated to home offices and used Zoom for everything work-related.

Only 33% of IELI students were international by then, and total enrollment was down 40% as a result.

With vaccine uptake on the rise, many of us finally returned to in-person teaching in Fall 2021. Being back in the classroom again was a joy and a relief, and while we cannot yet announce a full return to normal, we are getting closer.

IELUSA has been able to host a couple of events since Fall 2021, and this semester we were able to recognize student achievement at a formal luncheon, the first in two years.

Despite our many COVID compromises, life has gone on. It has been an eventful two years, and we will touch on many of the highlights in this newsletter.

— Nolan Weil, Associate Professor
IELI Has a New Director

In 2021, Dr. Marta Halaczkiewicz took the position as the new IELI director. Marta has been doing a wonderful job navigating the difficulties that COVID has brought to the IELI program. This is no surprise to anyone that knows her as she brings a lot of diverse experience to the Director’s position.

Marta arrived at USU 10 years ago, taking a position as a lecturer in IELI. Over her time here she has taught almost every class at every level in the IELI program. She has also been working with teachers in China to help them teach IELI classes to Chinese students in the China Cooperative Academic Program which is hosted in the Jon Huntsman School of Business. As if this wasn’t enough, Marta decided she would get her PhD and recently defended her dissertation (research project) that looked at using games in the classroom.

Marta brings a lot of teaching experience to her role as director. Before she came to USU, Marta worked at Western Michigan University where she got her Master’s degree in Educational Technology. She also has a Master’s degree in TESOL from Madonna University and an undergraduate degree in teaching English as a Foreign Language from her native country of Poland, where she taught business English before coming to the United States in 2001.

When she is not teaching, working with faculty, or advising students, you can find Marta with her husband and two children in the mountains. She loves to snowboard, hike, and, when she has enough time, she heads to the ocean to enjoy the beach. IELI is lucky to have a vibrant, smart, and passionate new director! —Jim Rogers (former IELI Director)

... And Another Associate Professor

The IELI family also celebrates the promotion of Elena (Lena) Taylor in April 2022 from the position of Assistant Professor to Associate Professor.

A warm and hearty congratulations to Lena!
IELI has traditionally been an in-person, face-to-face endeavor. While our instructors have always sought to integrate technology into the learning space, we have never seen online learning as an optimal substitute for in-person learning. But during COVID, we had little choice but to conduct our classes virtually. In response to these adaptations, some instructors asked students to sound off on their experiences studying in IELI during the pandemic. Here we publish some student writing on the IELI experience, abridged and lightly edited to better suit the newsletter format.

Perspectives on Studying Through the Pandemic

— Geiza Karren (Spring 2021)

Besides my own studies, I had to help my children with their homeschooling and do everything I could to keep everyone safe and emotionally in control. I confess that I was concerned about my family, friends, and everyone around me. The experience of seeing many people struggling and trying to stay safe was difficult. It was a challenge to keep my mind calm every day to be part of the classes and interact with my professor and peers. So many days in isolation with only receiving sad news about people suffering can affect our lives mentally.

The positive thing about having online classes was that it gave me the opportunity to continue studying and meeting new people, and it helped me not only learn but it also kept my mind busy. The Zoom classes have been a great experience for me.

I hope when everything comes back to normal, people will start to appreciate the connection with others more than before because life can be unpredictable.

— Yunuen Carmago Gonzalez (Spring 2021)

Being a college student was always one of my dreams. Living the student life, making friends, walking through the campus every day, sharing and learning from others, being part of social events ...

What I miss most, are the connections, the relationships that you can establish with people. My family always told to me that some college classmates are friends for life, business partners, etc. But you cannot truly make a connection like that through the screen.

For me, the hardest part was keeping myself focused on my classes. Every day, I had to motivate myself to start my day, without leaving my home, and sitting only a few small steps from my bed. Besides, I really enjoy being at home, cooking my own food, and if I need a break, there is no better place to be than home.

COVID 19 isolated me and kept me apart from family and friends; it also took away the opportunity to make new friends, but it also brought me close to myself and helped me understand myself.
Student Takes on the Benefits of IELI

— Soraya Nasiri (Summer, 2021)

The most important thing is how much my communication has improved. I learned to speak, cooperate and make relationships with others by learning English. Through IELI, I have found international friends to meet and speak with in English every week.

My confidence has also improved. I used to think I would not be able to begin my education in the U.S., but the IELI program changed my opinion. Learning to believe in myself has helped me to succeed in my studies and in my life. My skills in writing and reading have also improved. Today, I can write a substantial paper and finalize it without assistance.

Based on my experiences in IELI, I have several recommendations for future IELI students.

1. IELI classes are as important and useful as any university classes; students that struggle with English should take all the IELI classes.
2. Try your best to do all the assignments and homework, and also pay attention to your teachers’ comments.
3. Practice English in your free time by watching English movies, reading different papers and articles and talking to your international friends.

— Julio Landinez Aponte (Summer, 2021)

I would like to share comments about my experience with the Listening 3 class. This class gives you tools and methods that allow you to be a successful listener.

The instructor prepared an interesting selection of videos on various topics. The selections were about 10 minutes long on average, and they were presented daily. Students would listen to the materials on their own time between class meetings.

The instructor included specific questions to go along with each video. This approach helped me attend carefully to the material in order to pick out the information needed to respond successfully to the questions. The class also met daily on Zoom to discuss the assignments.

I liked that the course did not require a textbook with pre-established conversations that in my opinion as a student are not very effective for helping you progress in your listening skills.

I recommend this course for anybody looking to improve their listening skills.

— Aminata Sylla (Summer 2021)

I learned about the Intensive English Language Institute from friends who also went through the program before starting their college classes. It may be a long pathway to complete before starting college, but not a wasting of time.

IELI has helped me enhance my English comprehension and communication in general, including writing, reading, listening, speaking, cultural knowledge, and knowledge of the American academic system. I started at a low level, and improved continually as I went through the program. It is truly a challenging life, but it is not impossible at all.

IELI instructors teach well, respect their students, treat everyone fairly, and are kind and always available to help. They encourage student participation and interactions through class activities which are substantial, and they use appropriate but challenging materials. They also cooperate well with each other for the success of the students.

IELI is simply one of the best introductions to college for international students.
Student Appreciation Luncheon

The Student Appreciation Luncheon was held on April 11 in the Eccles Conference Center for the first time in two years. Each semester, IELI recognizes students who excel academically and exhibit cross-cultural outreach.

A special “Thanks” to Margaret Garr for organizing the event!

Lavina Lo, Jusphinena Rose, Erlina Topi, Asma Akmed, and Isaac Trejo share a table. Isaac (right) was Fall 2021 Student of the Semester and one of three Students of the Year for 2021. See history of all IELI Award recipients.

Spring 2022 Students of the Semester

Asma Ahmed (left) and Akari Kawamura (right) with IELI Director, Marta Halaczkiewicz
Haowen Chang received this year’s Fujiwara Scholarship, eligible to outstanding former IELI students continuing their studies at USU. Haowen, who is from Taiwan, started IELI classes in Fall 2019 and finished them in Spring 2020. Now a music major, Haowen is an accomplished pianist with a list of awards so numerous we do not have the space to list them all.

“Music provides a common element of beauty,” Haowen tells us, “that can help people connect with others that are different from them, but more importantly with themselves. I am happiest when I am playing it,” she said.

Haowen expects to graduate in Spring 2023 and audition for admission to master’s programs at Juilliard and a number of other top music schools.

The livestream recording of her junior piano recital in April 2022 is on YouTube.
IELI Conversation Class

IELI offers Conversational English every Fall and Spring semester as a service to USU. Taught by a Graduate Instructor from the Master of Second Language Teaching program, the course provides opportunities for English language practice and social interaction to dependents of international graduate students and visiting scholars. This semester, IELI salutes Zach Brown, as the longest serving instructor for the course, having taught four consecutive semesters since Fall 2020. – (Zach is 3rd from left in the class photo.)

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, I had to teach for the first time via videoconferencing, with which neither I nor most of my students had any prior experience. Together we all learned to navigate shared screens and typed chat messages, but we soon settled on breakout rooms as the way to converse freely in small groups, which maximized opportunities to participate.

While the video format limited some aspects of teaching, it did enable students to participate who wouldn’t have otherwise been able to. A number of students regularly attended class while caring for children; one even joined from a hotel while travelling back home across the ocean, and another participated from a laundromat and park while caring for a baby.

Our eventual return to in-person classes brought different benefits. We enjoyed discussing artwork at the Nora Eccles Harrison Museum of Art and on the USU Sculpture Walk, for example. We even shared some end-of-semester meals, perfect for making small talk, one of the class topics.

With my time as Graduate Instructor and Master’s student ending, I’m headed to Salt Lake City to work as the Humanitarian Center coordinator in the English Skills Learning Center. While I look forward to the new people I will meet, I will also dearly miss the friends I’ve made in IELI, and I thank you all for a wonderful experience. — Zachary Brown
The IELI Student Association, unable to meet during the height of the pandemic made an effort to regroup for Fall 2021 and scheduled a Logan Canyon Hike.

From left to right: Shintaro Shibata, Isaac Trejo, Yousef Yaseen, Aminata Sylla, Bharti Sharma, Patt Kwan, IELI Director, Marta Halaczkiewicz (kneeling with mascot Obi). Photo by IELISA Faculty Advisor, Nolan Weil
IELI Faculty on the Conference Circuit

When COVID-19 drove conference venues online, Ekaterina Arshavskaya, Kim Andrus, Marta Halaczkiewicz, and Lena Taylor made the leap to virtual conferencing, while others, like Ann Roemer and Nolan Weil preferred to sit them out. We were already getting too much screen time via remote teaching and other scheduled Zoom meetings. But as possibilities for air travel increased, Ann couldn’t wait to fly again, whereas Nolan is still in no hurry to board a plane.

Three perspectives on the conference scene in the age of COVID

At first, I was curious to experience the various online conference venues. Last year, I attended TESOL 2021 entirely online. However, as time went on, I was gradually getting "Zoomed out" and eager to return to an in-person conference, which I did for the first time with this year’s TESOL 2022 in Pittsburgh. It was wonderful to see my colleagues again in the flesh. Occasionally, I had an odd feeling of familiarity in meeting people I felt I knew, but then realizing that I had never actually met them in-person—but only virtually. Mutually shared experiences like this were not unusual. It was quite funny when we both realized that it was our first face-to-face meeting, even though we felt as if we had already known each other for ages. — Ekaterina Arshavskaya

It was energizing to walk the streets of a big city again and look up at so many skyscrapers. Pittsburgh was a new city for me—I was pleasantly suprised to see all the historic architecture and renovated buildings. As for the conference, I saw TESOL colleagues from Utah whom I hadn’t seen for years . . . from the University of Utah and Snow College, as well as others who teach abroad. Most of us recognized each other even though we were wearing our Covid masks! Instead of seven or eight thousand attendees, there were a little over two thousand, so the academic sessions were not as crowded as usual. — Ann Roemer
The Remote Conference Experience

IELI Director, Marta Halaczkiewicz, who chairs TESOL’s Computer-Assisted Language Learning Interest Section, and plays a role as a conference organizer, continued her service to TESOL virtually. Here is her take on the upside of COVID adaptations for her Interest Section.

Since TESOL was a hybrid event this year, with both in-person and virtual sessions, some organizers showed up in Pittsburg in-person. Others, like me, stayed home and oversaw virtual conference events from afar.

Fellow tech enthusiasts and I put together a series of events focused on augmenting language learning via digital technology. The COVID pandemic actually enabled us to spread our reach and provide support to a larger TESOL audience. We modified the virtual event lineup we had piloted last year and offered it again this year—for free—as part of the TESOL program but without requiring participants to register for the conference.

This innovation enabled us to reach audiences that had not been able to attend the conference before due to travel restrictions or lack of funding. This year, we reached 4,000 participants from 135 countries, a number unheard of during the in-person event.

Another perk of the virtual event was that even after the conference officially ended, the virtual event continued with asynchronous events which are all available here.

Yes, I did miss the in-person networking and collaboration of an actual conference, and I hope to be at next year’s TESOL Conference in Portal, OR in-person. — Marta Halaczkiewicz

IELI’s Marta Halaczkiewicz and Kim Andrus (top row: 2nd and 4th from left) attending a virtual session.
TESOL Certificate Program Approved

In Spring 2022, the IELI faculty launched a TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) certificate program designed to give undergraduate students a pre-professional foundation for teaching English to those whose native language is not English.

Opportunities for certificate holders can include supporting teachers of English as a foreign language in schools outside the U.S., teaching adult learners in the U.S., working with immigrant and refugee populations through nonprofit agencies, or teaching in private language schools, among other things.

Courses included in the program are geared toward helping students gain important pedagogic, linguistic, and cultural knowledge as well as giving them the opportunity to apply this knowledge in real classrooms.

The idea of creating a TESOL certificate emerged years ago in one of those strategic planning sessions that generate more ideas than can be practically managed in the near-term. Many thanks are due to Ann Roemer for keeping the idea alive year after year until it could finally be brought to fruition.

Thanks, too, to program coordinator, Lena Taylor for her hard work promoting the program this semester. Questions can be addressed to her at elena.taylor@usu.edu

Upcoming Core Course Offerings

SU 2022 – LANG 3110 - Language Learning Pedagogy – 3 credits
FA 2022 – LANG 3100 - A Linguistic Introduction to English – 3 credits
  LANG 3120 - Introduction to English Language Assessment – 3 credits
SP 2023 – LANG 3110 - Language Learning Pedagogy – 3 credits
  LANG 3150 - Practicum – 4 credits

This semester, Gabriela Christianson (right) became the first student to pursue the TESOL certificate and Kim Andrus became the first IELI instructor to teach a core course in the program. Gabriela presented her end-of-semester project to a small but enthusiastic group of IELI faculty.