

# ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

## CSUF students help immigrants improve their English speaking and writing

BY [ANGIE MARCOS](#)

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Amanda Humber has collected international cuisine recipes over the past couple of years. She has learned about world cultures and customs, and she's made numerous new friends – each of them United States immigrants.

The individuals, typically over 50, don't know very much English. With the help of English as a Second Language teachers and classes offered throughout the North Orange County Community College District, and also because of student volunteers like Humber, these individuals are improving their English at an older age.

Humber, 21, has served as the student coordinator for Students Helping in the Naturalization of Elders, or SHINE, program at Cal State Fullerton for the past two years. She served as a SHINE volunteer in 2012-13.

"They want to be able to get around their daily life, go to the supermarket and help their kids out at school," said Humber, who is studying communicative disorders at CSUF with a minor in English.

"I know how to talk to someone in that context. I know the lingo," she said. "We want to break down those barriers and help them to communicate. We provide that extra support that is needed."

SHINE volunteers spend time one-on-one with students, reading passages, practicing writing or just having a personal conversation.

About 40 ESL students are in each class, along with an ESL-qualified teacher and a SHINE volunteer, Humber said.

The student volunteer program has been at CSUF for 14 years. Each semester about 40 CSUF students volunteer to participate.

The university works closely with the North Orange County Community College District, which organizes and hosts ESL classes in the district.

"There are a lot of students that come into our ESL program because they realize that they want to do better for themselves," said Dennis E. Sauers, assistant manager of the North Orange County Community College District's ESL Department.

"They may have seen that others are progressing and they know that the only way to do that is to improve their English skills," he said.

Project SHINE is a national program. Founded in 1985, it aims to help older immigrants and refugees engage in civic activities and contribute to their communities by helping them improve their English speaking, reading and writing skills.

A vast number of ESL teachers in the district are from CSUF, Sauers said.

“This program is important because it gives students a one-on-one opportunity for coaching and tutoring,” he said. “It is an excellent opportunity for students who are hoping to become teachers to get community and teaching experience.”

While serving as a volunteer in 2012 as part of a sociology class requirement, Humber was assigned to work with a woman who had emigrated from Mexico more than 40 years ago. While she had a basic understanding of spoken English, she could not write.

“Every little thing we would talk about, we would write down,” Humber said. Topics would range from the woman’s favorite color to a detailed description of her hometown.

Students who are enrolled in the 10-week SHINE program are required to devote at least two hours a week assisting ESL teachers and students. SHINE volunteers are not required to know a second language.

This spring semester, Humber aims to recruit 50 students to participate in the program.

Her experience as a SHINE volunteer provided her with a “reality check,” she said.

One of the students she worked with was a man who stopped going to school after the fifth grade. He was forced to drop out because he needed to work to help provide for his family, Humber said.

“I never felt that I was spoiled, but after I would hear some of these stories, I thought I had it made,” she said.

The ESL students were just as interested to learn about Humber’s life growing up in the United States.

They asked: How did she apply to college? What was her major? Where does she live? What is her family like? What was it like growing up in the United States?

“I found that they are very interested in schooling and education,” Humber said. “They value education and they want to pass that information along to their kids or grandkids.”

Humber would provide those interested in college with websites and other resources on how to apply and succeed in college, not just for their children and grandchildren, but in the hopes they might one day attend, she said.

Humber found that the majority of the individuals decided to improve their English later in life because they had more time now that their children were grown or they had previously feared losing their culture.

“I just love learning about them, their history and their home lives. They shared their past experiences, their cultures and their lives with me,” she said. “You really start to make a personal connection with them.”

Humber hopes to study abroad this summer, ideally in Guatemala.

“I have been wanting to study abroad since I was a child,” she said.

She credits the decision to her adventurous lifestyle – she celebrated her birthday in October by skydiving.

A couple of years ago she changed her mind about majoring in English, and instead decided to specialize in communicative disorders because she wanted to offer her future students personalized attention, much like she has done as a SHINE volunteer.

“I knew that as an English teacher, I was not going to be having seven kids in my classroom,” Humber said. “And that’s the kind of environment I want.”

Once she graduates from CSUF, she hopes to become a speech therapist, helping children in preschool and kindergarten who have speech impediments or autism.

Project SHINE is a part of the university’s Center for Internships and Community Engagement. The center focuses on matching students with internships and community programs.