English for Speakers of Other Languages

for MIT Service Employees

Celebrating 15 Years of ESOL at MIT

Celebrating 15 years!

by Laura Mali-Astrue



Marlyse Lupis, John DiFava, and Nancy Kelly - Photo: Patti Pisano

As we celebrate 15 years of the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Program, we look back at how much it has grown. In 2007, Nancy Kelly, Co-Founder and Program Coordinator and Marlyse Lupis, Co-Founder and Volunteer Coordinator, met through the MIT Women's League. Familiar with ESL programs for service workers at Stanford University and the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C., Nancy and Marlyse wondered if a similar program could be created at MIT. After much planning and many conversations, they contacted Chief of Police and Director of Public Safety John DiFava who, at the time, was Director of Facilities Operations.

In the spring of 2009, under the auspices of the Women's League and with the full support of the Facilities Department, a pilot class began. In that class, 14 day-shift employees met for group classes or one-on-one tutoring. Key to the program's success was that employees received two hours of paid release time from their jobs to attend classes. Twenty-seven volunteer tutors, many of them also teachers in the Women's League English Conversation classes, worked to plan lessons, assemble materials, and get the program off the ground.

In the fall of 2009, the program expanded to accommodate employees working the evening shift, and in 2011 it grew again to include late night-shift (third shift) employees, doubling the number of Facilities service staff employees attending ESL classes. In October 2014, the program became part of the Human Resources Department. In the spring of 2020, we continued to tutor service employees, and adjusted the way we taught to adhere to the restrictions of the pandemic.

In 2023, with the great support of Gabe Campos, Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Human Resources, ESOL expanded to include eligible employees in Housing & Residential Services and Campus Activities. To help more service staff members improve their English communication skills, many of our resources are now online to make it easy to access materials, share expertise, and collaborate. We also leverage Microsoft Teams to facilitate the growth of this wonderful ESOL community.

The demand for digital literacy continues to expand, and our tutors have been called upon to help their students learn online tasks, such as updating benefits information. To aid in this effort, Human Resources loans laptops to employees while they are enrolled in tutoring. This semester, three students focused their ESOL tutoring sessions on digital literacy in addition to English communication skills.

Our team now includes seven coordinators (six of whom are volunteers), 21 supervisors who help us connect with students, and over 146 volunteer tutors and ambassadors who help us serve 44 employee learners.

Our Community Wiki (bit.ly/mit-esol-community) has information on how to join us. Email esl-admins@mit.edu to learn more about our outreach efforts, or if you would like to become an ambassador.

A SPECIAL THANK YOU to all the volunteers who have served as tutors!
Since our founding in 2009, over 500 individuals have volunteered to tutor MIT service employees in English. Our tutors range from first-year undergraduates to alumni, and bring their many different perspectives, roles, and backgrounds to the program. Some participate for a couple of semesters, and others have been with us since the beginning, working with a series of learners and coaching new tutors. On average, tutors are involved for two to three years. Every tutor adds to the success of our endeavors. **THANK YOU! We couldn't do it without you!**

Our Great Thanks to John DiFava

by Nancy Kelly



John DiFava - Photo: Steph Stevens

Since the very beginning, John DiFava has been a major supporter of the ESOL program. As Director of Facilities Operations in 2009, he welcomed Marlyse Lupis and me into the Facilities Department to set up initial ESOL classes for custodial and grounds employees. John provided encouragement and financial support in addition to allocating spaces on campus for our tutors and students to meet. As the child of Italian immigrants, he wanted to give hard-working service employees an opportunity to achieve the American dream as his parents did.

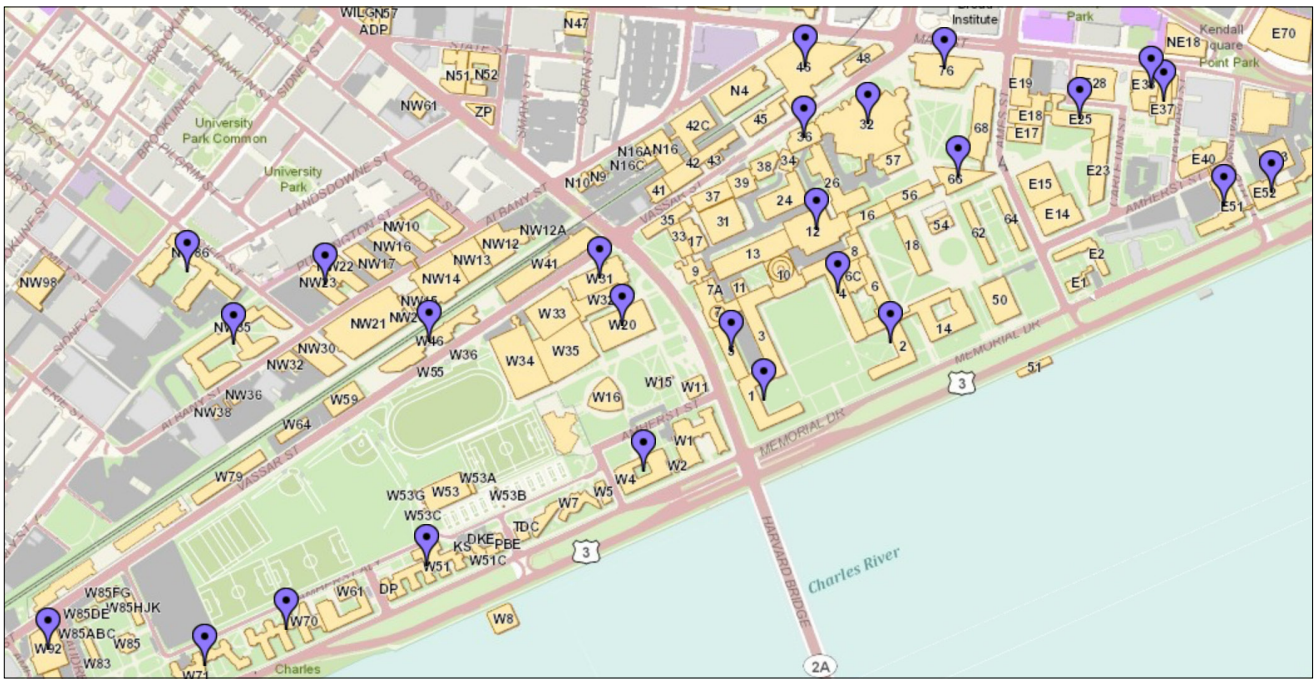
Over the last 15 years, through our move to the Human Resources Department and the expansion of the program, John has supported our efforts to help those working to improve their English, obtain new certifications and licenses, and advance their careers at MIT. In addition to providing Facilities support, John talked about the program with various senior leaders at MIT, resulting in their support. He has often told us that the "ESOL program exemplifies the very best of MIT: helping people to achieve the very best for themselves, their families, and the Institute."

John, who is now Director, Public Safety and Chief of Police, appreciates that communication is key to working together in our community. He has mentioned the importance of language skills in his own department. Going forward, John would like to provide an opportunity for a graduate of the ESOL program to obtain a position at the police department.

As we celebrate our 15th anniversary, we want to express our gratitude to John for his ongoing support!

To learn more about John, please watch an interview from 2011 as part of the MIT150 Infinite History Project: infinite.mit.edu/video/john-difava.

ESOL Service Areas: Reaching every corner of campus!



Tutor Spotlights



Volunteer tutors featured on MIT's website

by Monia Doandes

We love seeing familiar names and faces on the MIT website like the volunteers below! Do you have news you would like to share and celebrate? Let us know by emailing esl-admins@mit.edu.



Amina Abdalla - Photo: Courtesy of Amina Abdalla

Amina Abdalla

Amina has a strong interest in public healthcare and health equity across socioeconomic classes and plans to go to medical school. Her social impact internships with MassHealth's Health Plan Administration and Oversight (HPAO) gave her an opportunity to use her skills to research gaps in healthcare access, as well as make healthcare-related documents easier to read, being mindful of members with low health literacy. She has been tutoring through ESOL in reading and pronunciation.

Quote from the article: "I know I want to be a doctor [. . .] but if I could do some kind of public sector impact with that knowledge, I would definitely be interested in doing that."

Read more about Amina:
news.mit.edu/2023/putting-public-service-practice-0901



Avni Singhal - Photo: Cody O'Loughlin

Avni Singhal

Avni has a keen interest in teaching and improving the learning experience for both her students and her grad peers. She has a diverse educational background in materials science, bioengineering, and electrical engineering and computer science, and is interested in combining computing with other disciplines. She is a champion of digital literacy for our service employees and has helped them navigate the complexities of online tools.

Quote from the article: "Grad school doesn't mean I have to do one thing. I can stay open to all the possibilities of what comes next."

Read more about Avni:
news.mit.edu/2023/avni-singhal-computation-sustainable-materials-0922

The **ESOL Program for MIT Service Employees** helps employees who are not native English speakers improve their English communication skills and advance their careers.

Learn about becoming a tutor at bit.ly/mit-esol-community.

Spotlight on Students

by Laura Mali-Astrue

Since 2009, hundreds of MIT employees have participated in training sessions with volunteer teachers and tutors. All students focus on improving English language communications skills: speaking, aural comprehension, reading, and writing. Additionally, some have focused on preparing for specific examinations, like licensing exams or the U.S. citizenship exam. Some have used ESOL program support to complete degrees, including diplomas at the Peterson School and high school equivalency degrees (HiSET and GED). Many participants have changed jobs within the Institute, and are seeing success in their lives inside and outside of work. [See the box below.] Since our last newsletter, several students have hit important milestones.



Andrea Santamaria



Karen Huete

Thanks to the guidance and dedication of volunteer tutors Justine, Leibiana, Bonnie, Jeanne, and Lale, as well as the students' hard work studying for the exam, ESOL participants **Andrea Santamaria** and **Karen Huete** passed the U.S. citizenship exam. Karen attended her Oath Ceremony and is now a U.S. citizen.



Rafael Monteiro

Rafael Monteiro successfully passed the hoisting exam and is now licensed as a Massachusetts Hoisting Engineer. This was possible thanks to volunteer tutors Bettina and Kat who guided him through the process and helped him get a good grasp of the materials, resources, concepts, and vocabulary needed to study for the exam. Rafael is planning to continue his training in using hoisting equipment, allowing for advancing his career at MIT.



Adriana Catano Galvis

After many years in the U.S., **Adriana Catano Galvis** is now independently driving to many places she has been wanting to go! Her tutor Jared went above and beyond to help her study to obtain a driver's license: finding resources, flashcards, and videos; working on related vocabulary; practicing for the exam and the road test; and offering encouragement along the way.



Estela Fernandes

Estela Fernandes has utilized her improved skills in her new job as Dormitory Patrol, and she has been accepted as a part-time student at Lesley University. Estela says "Having the tutoring class not only helped me with English but also gave me the inspiration to seek more for myself personally and professionally."

Congratulations to these colleagues on their accomplishments, and thank you to all the volunteers who supported them!

Photos: Courtesy of A. Santamaria, K. Huete, R. Monteiro, A. Catano Galvis, E. Fernandes

With the help of the program's dedicated tutors:

- **4** students passed the hoisting exams and obtained their Hoisting Engineer License
- **2** students graduated with honors from the Peterson School Facilities Management Certificate Program
- **1** student was accepted to Lesley University
- **2** students completed the Adult Diploma Program (ADP), including passing multiple Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) exams
- **3** students are working towards HiSET certificates
- **12** students passed the United States Citizenship Exam
- **1** student received an MIT Excellence Award

MIT Supervisors Weigh In

by Nancy Kelly



From left to right: Ismael Madrigal, Brian Pitts, Raissa Bessa, Michael Leriche, Peter Dawe - Photo: Nereida Gonzalez

The shift supervisors in Facilities and Housing and Residential Services are important partners of the ESOL program. They help the ESOL coordinators identify eligible employees and keep communication going as semesters, employee work shifts, and tutor schedules change. Supervisors and their departments also support their employees financially by offering up to two hours of paid release time so that employees can meet with their tutors during the work day.

Several supervisors shared how important the ESOL program is to their employees and departments:

> Not only has the ESOL program improved the English skills of the employees enrolled in tutoring, it has also improved communication, team collaboration, self-confidence, and overall workplace morale. We are truly thankful for the hard work and dedication put into this program and hope it continues to be a success.
>
> *– Nereida Gonzalez, Assistant Manager, Custodial Services, Department of Facilities*
>
> I've seen the enthusiasm of the team members that have signed up for the ESOL classes. They look forward to improving communication between coworkers and supervisors, which will be a huge benefit to the MIT community.
>
> *– Brian Pitts, Supervisor, Custodial Services, Department of Facilities*
>
> ESOL training has created a more cohesive and supportive work environment by facilitating clearer communication and empowering employees to fully engage in and contribute to the Institute's success.
>
> *– Sean Durst, Assistant Director of Third-Shift Operations and Training, Division of Student Life/Housing and Residential Services*
>
> These sessions not only enhanced the employees' grasp of the English language, but also boosted their confidence in using it in practical, everyday scenarios. Employees enrolled in the program are now more active in meetings, contribute more confidently to discussions, and express their ideas more clearly. This has fostered a more inclusive and dynamic work environment, enhancing collaboration and productivity.
>
> The cultural exchange component of the program has provided valuable insights into different cultures, promoting a deeper sense of understanding and respect among our team members. This aspect of the program has not only enriched our employees' language skills, but also broadened their global perspective, which is invaluable in our increasingly interconnected world.
>
> *– Ismael Madrigal, Supervisor, Custodial Services, Department of Facilities*
>
> The ESOL program helps promote a strong sense of community at the workplace and beyond. While ESOL helps the department operate more efficiently, it should also be championed for facilitating amazing personal accomplishments, such as gaining U.S. citizenship.
>
> *– Peter Dawe, Senior Supervisor, Custodial Services, Department of Facilities*

We are grateful for all the support provided by Facilities and Housing and Residential Services supervisors and celebrate the success of their employees with them.

Night Owl?
On-campus volunteers needed
11:00 p.m. – midnight

Did you know?
Our ESOL Wiki is updated regularly with new resources requested or shared by our volunteer tutors. Check it out at **bit.ly/mit-esol-wiki-main**.

Nine Things I've Learned as an ESOL Volunteer

by Christina Davis

My MIT experience has become so much richer after joining the ESOL program as a tutor that I'm compelled to inform other potential volunteers and tutees about the laughs they'll share together, the meaningful moments they'll experience, and the knowledge they'll exchange as participants in this program.



Christina Davis and Marcia Carvalho - Photo: Christina Davis

1. You learn a tremendous amount about yourself through interacting with your fellow MIT counterparts. In addition to being helpful, my tutee thinks I'm hilarious, which was news to me!
2. There is nothing to fear but fear itself! I initially didn't think I had enough of the "right stuff" to offer a student (I was wrong!). I'm glad that I took the chance and volunteered. Even engaging in a simple conversation goes a long way toward helping service employees who are not native English speakers develop their English language skills.
3. There's more than one way to teach English. I can teach English in ways that I enjoy and that are fun. Neither learning nor teaching must be boring or traditional.
4. You'll make a friend! I have a lot in common with my student, Marcia. Although I teach remotely, I see Marcia often after my shift ends at work. We talk a lot about meditation, books, and yoga. I truly enjoy interacting with her.
5. You'll learn a thing or two from your tutee. Marcia has taught me about her culture, spirituality, and her MIT experience. It's amazing to see the magic of MIT through another person's eyes.
6. You'll be supported by the program's coordinators. Not only will you be armed with information to make you confident and comfortable being a tutor, ESOL program coordinator Nancy Kelly, as well as many volunteer coordinators, will support you in everything you do. They all love the program and the people involved and will listen to your ideas, wants, and desires in order to make the program even more successful.
7. The scope of time in which you volunteer to tutor flies by. If you wish to continue your sessions with your student after the end of the ESOL semester, simply renew. If you have time constraints, you can always stop temporarily and continue tutoring later.
8. You can choose to teach in-person or remotely, which I'm grateful for! As an active member of the MIT community my availability is limited. I was pleasantly surprised by the options regarding both how I wanted to teach and when I wanted to teach. This made the process very convenient.

   And finally, I've learned that...

9. Tutoring service workers is a full circle process; this helps the employees both personally and professionally. The more effort we put into our community the more it will give back to us collectively.

Volunteer tutors needed one hour per week:

- No tutoring experience required
- Pick your own schedule
- Visit **bit.ly/esol-signup** or scan the QR code to sign up

Session Dates

Spring 2024: Now to May 14
Summer 2024: June 10 – July 26

Visit **hr.mit.edu/learn/esol** or contact **esl-admins@mit.edu** for more information.