
Summer 2025

ELI STUDENT VOICES

Volume 29, Issue 2



UF | English Language Institute
UNIVERSITY *of* FLORIDA

Message from the Editor

Thank you to all who contributed to this edition of the *ELI Student Voices*. To the students who submitted their writing, thank you for your hard work and for having the courage to allow your work to be read by others. To ELI instructors and staff, thank you for always encouraging and supporting ELI students to develop not only as writers but also as people. To the Student Voices Judges: Christine Voigt, Patrick Klager, Jen Ramos, thank you for your time and consideration in reading the submissions.

Editor, Thomas Dolce



Winning Pieces

First Place

“Courage at the Crossroads: Fate.”

Mikail Abdul Hamid

Second Place

“My Watermelon Journey”

Lu Huang



FIRST PLACE

Mikail Abdul Hamid, RW 60

Courage at the Crossroads: Fate.

It was a warm evening in Accra Central, the year 2018, and I was occupied in my duties at the Royal Bank, working then as a National Service Personnel (NSP). As the clock struck the end of the workday, the thought of finally going back home and resting could be seen all over my face. My senior colleague, as he often does, offered me a ride home. We usually picked up his wife from her office nearby, then they dropped me off in front of my house (usually). That was the routine. But little did I know that this boring routine mixed with my colleague's act of generosity would set the stage for a life-altering event.

The sun began to gently descend as we made our way through the bustling streets of Accra. I should mention this—the sunsets in Accra are amazing. The traffic flowed steadily until we reached my junction, a familiar landmark near Latebiokorshie—Radio Gold. And there, at the traffic light, I witnessed a scene that would forever be imprinted in my memory.

Two figures (in masks) stood locked in a heated confrontation. One, a man on a bike, displayed an air of aggression, ready to attack anyone who tried to get involved in their hunt, while the other, standing by a car, wielded a scary machete. Inside the vehicle, a white man (he's actually of Indian ethnicity as I later found out) sat trapped—I could sense the fear across his face. The atmosphere was filled with tension, and as I looked around, I noticed a handful of onlookers, paralyzed by fear or indifference.

An overwhelming surge of empathy rose up within me, overpowering any rational thought. (The normal me would probably be scared to take action, or perhaps this is the normal me.) Without a moment's hesitation, I made the split-second decision to step out of the car, leaving the safety of its confines behind. Heart pounding, I sprinted back toward the unfolding chaos, my adrenaline fueling my determination.

By the time I reached the scene, it was too late. The attackers had successfully robbed the man, leaving him *butchered* and *bleeding* all over his body—the price he paid for resisting their evil intentions. (No one deserves what they did to him.) The sight before me resembled a chilling scene ripped from the pages of a crime novel. (I'm really not a fan of crime novels.) Yet, my focus shifted immediately to the injured man, his life hanging in the balance.

Standing tall in front of the victim—let's call him Vikram—I dropped the log of wood I had instinctively grabbed during my hasty sprint.

—Let me explain: While I got out of my colleague's car, running back to the crime scene, I quickly realized I was entering some sort of "battle zone" without a weapon to protect myself. So I looked around and all I could find was a sizable log. It wasn't bad, I thought, so I picked it up and ran off to the "battle zone."

Walking forward, I calmly approached the wounded man—Vikram—the fear in his eyes mirroring the desperation flowing through his veins. "I don't want to die," he cried, his voice trembling with vulnerability.

Assuring him that he was safe now, I offered to drive him to the hospital. But first, I needed to find out if his vehicle was something I could drive. I asked him, "Is your car manual or automatic?" He replied, "Automatic." I was relieved—I couldn't drive a manual car, and that would've delayed us.

With the help of a compassionate motorcyclist who had arrived just in time, we gently guided the

injured man into the car, shielding him from further harm. The engine roared to life as I accelerated the vehicle as fast as I could, and together, our rescue mission raced against time.

As the vehicle rushed through the chaotic streets of Accra, I found myself in a tense yet tender conversation with Vikram.

Me: "Bro, can you hear me? Stay with me, buddy. You're going to be alright."

Vikram: *Weakly* "Thank you... I... I don't want to... to die."

Me: "You're not going to die, Vikram. Just focus on me, okay? Keep your eyes open, and I'll get you to the hospital as fast as I can."

Vikram: *Nods* "I appreciate... appreciate your help. You're a very good person."

Me: "I'm Mikail, what's your name?"

Vikram: "I'm Vikram." (*I held his hand to stop the bleeding*)

Me: *Nodding softly* "Did you know those guys from anywhere?"

Vikram: *Clenching his jaw* "I felt like... like I was being followed. But by the time... by the time I realized, they just... they just appeared out of nowhere."

Me: "I'm so sorry this happened to you in my country. It's not a reflection of who we are as a people. I promise I'll do everything I can to get you the help you need."

Vikram: *Nods* "I won't hate Ghana for this. It's just... just a bad situation."

Me: "That's the spirit, Vikram. You're strong, and you'll get through this."

Vikram: "Thank you... for helping me. I appreciate it."

Me: "Of course, Vikram. We're almost at the hospital now. You can call your family once we get there if you want."

Vikram: *Weakly smiles* "Thank you... You're a good person."

Me: *Feeling a mix of emotions* "I'm just doing what anyone should do in this situation. Hang in there, Vikram. We'll take care of you."

As Vikram posed the question of what had compelled me to help him, I searched my heart for an honest response. The truth was, I couldn't fully articulate the exact reasons behind my actions. It was an inexplicable urge, a deep-seated need to step in and make a difference in his moment of distress. My heart couldn't bear the thought of standing idly by while he suffered, especially when others around us merely observed.

In sincerity, I shared that I felt a strong sense of responsibility and compassion—an innate desire to offer aid when it was within my power to do so. I expressed regret for the indifference displayed by the onlookers and apologized on their behalf.

I mentioned that my religion emphasized the importance of kindness and extending a helping hand to those in need. It taught me to act with empathy and courage, even in the face of danger. Vikram, however, expressed disagreement—especially when he learned I was Muslim. He dismissed the notion that religion played any role in my actions. It seemed he couldn't understand how faith could be tied to such spontaneous compassion.

Choosing not to debate it, I let the matter rest and focused on the road ahead.

The streets blurred past as we navigated the traffic. Every second counted. Finally, we arrived at Korle Bu, the biggest and most trusted medical center in Ghana. Thankfully, it was just a few minutes from the scene.

At the hospital, I took charge. I checked him in at the emergency center and ensured no time was wasted. I made the necessary arrangements for his treatment and paid with the little change in my pocket. The scent of antiseptic and the cry of a busy hospital surrounded us. It almost triggered a nostalgic memory of when I was hospitalized myself—ah! That wasn't nice. Those mixed scents just amplified the gravity of the moment.

Hours passed like an eternity as I waited for Vikram's family or friends. A brief of emotions surged within me—hope, doubt, and exhaustion. Rumors of the incident spread around the hospital, and soon, a bunch of grateful faces surrounded me. Their words, filled with appreciation, warmed my weary heart. Finally, his family arrived, their faces filled with worry and relief. With a heavy heart, I stepped back, leaving him in their care. My presence was no longer needed, but my mind was still full of unspoken thoughts.

Before I could leave, one of the men—perhaps a relative or close friend—reached out with a small lump of cash, insisting I take it “for an Uber ride home.” I understood the gesture on the surface. Maybe it was meant to be a simple act of appreciation, a quick way to thank me and send me on my way. But something about it didn't sit right with me.

I declined gratefully, but firmly. And yet, even as I smiled and said no, something shifted in the air.

His face changed. There was a flicker of distress—and maybe even suspicion. It was subtle, but it hit me hard. It was as if, in that moment, he wasn't just trying to compensate me for my effort. It felt like he was trying to end the interaction quickly. Like, he didn't trust me. Almost as if he feared that maybe—just maybe—I had something to do with the attack.

That thought crushed me. I had given everything in that moment: my time, my money, my peace of mind—and, more importantly, I had risked my safety. All of that, not for recognition, but because someone needed help. And now, here I was, being looked at as if I could've been part of the setup.

To make it worse, the amount he tried to give me was not close to what I had paid for Vikram's treatment at the hospital.

It wasn't about money. It was never about money. And in that moment, all I wanted was for them to see the intention, not the action. I wanted them to feel the sincerity behind my decision to help. But instead, I left feeling like a question mark in their minds—a stranger they couldn't quite place, couldn't fully trust.

As I left the hospital—blood-stained and exhausted—I couldn't help but question everything.

Had my intervention made a difference?

Did my act of courage even matter?

Would it all go unnoticed?

The questions lingered. But then something deeper settled in me: **the impact of our actions isn't measured by the thanks we get, but by the kind of people we become in the process.**

This whole experience had changed me. It awakened something in me—a deeper sense of empathy and

what it means to be human.

The next morning, I reflected on everything. It had felt like something from a movie. But it wasn't. It was real. It had tested my faith, my courage, and I had answered.

Still, I was a bit disappointed by how his family responded. Even so, the experience gave me a deeper appreciation for life, for kindness, and for the complexities of people.

Later that night, I took a long, well-deserved shower. (My entire outfit was stained with Vikram's blood.)

I thanked God for guiding me and giving me the strength to help. I made a decision not to keep replaying it all. Instead, I chose to rest, hoping for a better tomorrow.

Weeks passed. Silence. No word from Vikram or his family.

I tried calling the number they had given me—many times. When they finally picked up, they pretended there was poor network reception. I felt confused. Disappointed.

As time went on, I buried the memory. Life kept moving.

Then one late afternoon, while out for a run in my neighborhood, I saw him. Vikram.

He was standing outside, cleaning his car. I froze.

I hesitated, unsure if I should approach. In the end, I gave him his space. Let life have its mystery.

That's when I realized—he lived just a stone's throw from me. Right there, in my own neighborhood.

Our paths had crossed again.

As I look back on that night, I know there will always be questions.

Why did they go silent?

What did they really think?

Maybe I'll never know.

But I'm okay with that now.

Some stories are meant to be unfinished.

This was mine.

A true story.

SECOND PLACE

Lu Huang, RW 60

My Watermelon Journey

Have you ever bought an unripe and tasteless watermelon — neither fresh nor sweet? Every time that happens, I feel an urge to grow a juicy and sweet watermelon myself. So, two months ago, I began my watermelon-growing journey.

ChatGPT assured me that Gainesville's weather is perfect for growing watermelons. As long as they bask in 10 hours of Florida's beautiful sunshine every day, they will turn out juicy and sweet. Full of confidence, I sowed ten seeds. At first, I felt excited to realize it didn't seem that hard. I could almost see a pile of tasty watermelons appearing in my mind.

But the truth was, the growing process was much more fragile than I had imagined. In the first stage, I didn't even know why, but only a few seeds survived. In the second stage, the seedlings were attacked by leaf miners, which drained their sap and left them unable to perform photosynthesis. To fight back, I alternated between natural repellents and organic pesticides, but after half a month of effort, only six strong plants remained. The third stage was even more frustrating — because the soil was too fertile, weeds grew wildly and wrapped around the watermelon roots which slowly suffocated. In the end, only four plants survived. After two months of carefully tending to them, watching them grow, bloom, and bear fruit, I was overjoyed. But just as I began to feel hopeful, Gainesville's rainy season arrived unexpectedly. With continuous rain and insufficient sunlight for photosynthesis, the little watermelons fell off one by one. Now, only one brave watermelon continues to grow...

Through this watermelon-growing experience, I realized that learning is a lot like growing watermelons. Sometimes, we long to become better versions of ourselves, so we actively seek ways to improve and set out on a journey of learning. At first sight, learning may seem as simple as planting a watermelon, but the process is far more complicated than it appears. Reflecting on my planting journey, I feel it is very much like my experience of studying at ELI. At first, I believed that simply attending class would naturally improve my English, but in truth, showing up to class is just the most basic and easiest step. Without fully engaging in each task, time will pass, and we'll still gain nothing. Just as I had learned the methods for growing watermelons from ChatGPT, I still faced many challenges in practice. Therefore, we must not only follow the teacher's guidance but also preview, review, and think independently. The teacher's guidance is like the bricks of a house, while our own active exploration is the mortar that holds them together. Good process management is more important than grades — it helps us accumulate experience, build patience, and develop problem-solving skills.

As the semester comes to an end, I hope we can all enjoy our own "watermelon-growing" journeys in the future, manage the process well, and make every journey meaningful. After all, the sweetest fruit is the one nurtured by yourself.



Maria Moncada, RW 40

A letter for my future self

Dear future me, how is your life going right now? I will probably know in a couple of years. I am writing this letter to a 17-year-old. I am a baby for many people in this program. Everybody tells me that, and it is fun because this way I can know that I have a long time for life. I decided to write this letter not just because I want to see my way of thinking at this age in the future, but also because I want to show in real life a teenager the questions that everybody thinks about one day. What am I going to do in my life? What degree are you going to study? Am I making the correct decision?

Right now, I am passionate about volleyball, and I hope to one day play in the big leagues as a university student. When I say that in a high voice, it sounds like sometimes it is a little difficult. But maybe not impossible. Also, I am studying English. I have always heard that English is one of the most important languages in the world, but do you know something? That is the truth. I can't deny it. The beginning was difficult, a different language from a different country. I wonder now. Am I going to feel that feeling when I start my degree? Confusion, fear, feelings that I am in the wrong place. Probably yes. Nobody knows that something is for you until you try it. As my mom said to me: "Who knows? They might be about to give it to her."

I want to study architecture in the near future. That is what I always say to everybody when they ask me what I am going to do. If you ask little Maria, she is going to say she is an actress. If you ask Maria one year ago, she is going to say lawyer. Now I want to be an architect. It is fun how our dreams change during the years. Sometimes it sounds a little too difficult, like an actress in my case (I just wanted to be famous, rich, I didn't know anything about acting), but your specific situation (or country) can change your way of thinking. Although being a lawyer is always going to be my little dream, my country is now another thing. Anyways, the topic is not about my incredible country. It is about the dream, the future, and how it all depends on one important decision. What am I going to do now? What I am going to study, in my mind, architecture, sounds like the most logical decision. I don't think that architecture is easy, NEVER. But at this moment, if this important decision that I make is wrong, maybe my destination is to be an astronaut. I decided this choice because I love to draw and create, and this is the risk that I'm going to take. The only important thing is to believe in you, anybody could cheer you up, but if you don't believe, nothing is going to work. And after all, Maria, what do you expect for your life? Your health is first, isn't it?

In summary, don't give up, keep trying and one day, when no one notices, you will exceed your own expectations. You don't know if something is the best choice until you try and get success.

Valeria Venero, RW 50**Trip to St. Augustine!**

One of our last trips of this semester in the ELI was to the beach, more specific, to St. Augustine, an historical place that holds history and beauty.

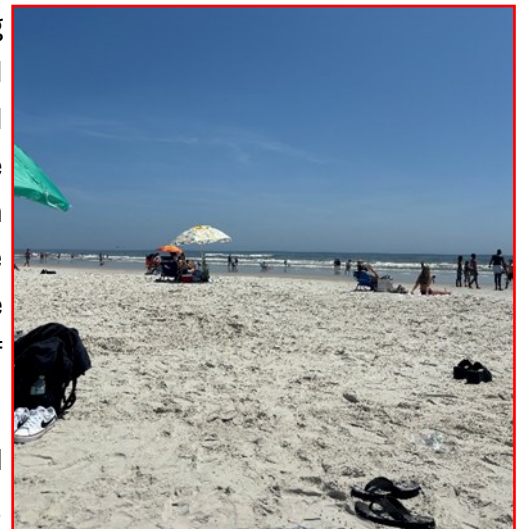
That day we had to get up early because the distances its almost 2 hours far form Gainesville, “Getting up early is easy”, no one ever said. But despite of the fact that some of us didn’t have the chance to have breakfast, we began the journey with all the energy!

After 2 hours of road, the first place we visited was the beach, a beautiful place where you can do different activities like swimming (or surviving the waves), playing volleyball, getting a tan or burying your friend in the sand (highly recommended). If you want to visit this beautiful place deeper you may visit the downtown area, where you can relax and learn about the history of this place.

This is an old town full of beauty and history, and according to the official website, it is the oldest continuously inhabited European-established settlement in the continental United States. We visited places that keep history and beauty like the church or the castle that they used to protect themselves from external danger. Then you can visit other historical places like “Castillo de San Marcos”, “the cathedral church”, Saint George Street, the Lightner museum, The colonial Quarter and a lot of places that holds history and memories.

There we found a lot of different stores where you can find all kinds of stuff like souvenirs and to spend your money on. Also, there are a lot of restaurants with delicious food that you must try.

A group of us went to a Colombbian restaurant that so much, however, there is a lot more restaurants were you can find delicious sea food.



The trip ended at 7, when we arrived back on the bus to come back to Gainesville. After almost 2 hours of Latin music and a lot of photos, we arrived at Gainesville with the thought that we had a great day in a beautiful place, and more important, with friends that we made this semester. So, if you ever had the opportunity to visit this amazing place, you should take it!

Anghelo Ita Durand, RW 40**Factors to consider when leaving your country or city of origin**

Many people in the world leave their city or home country for a new job or study opportunities, and in most cases, those trips are made alone without the company of family. There are several negative and positive factors that act in the process of this life change, such as anxiety, depression and resilience respectively.

The first factor to address is anxiety, which is a negative factor. As Freud quotes, "Anxiety is like a sign of danger or internal conflict where the "I" feels threatened by unacceptable impulses and moral demands or external reality." This is really reflected when the person does not visualize their educational, work and life objectives in a quick way. For example, in the educational field, a person may feel anxiety about exam grades, tasks, etc. At work, a person may feel anxiety by not getting a job or by not being able to develop as planned. In these situations, it is recommended first to identify the moment of anxiety and address it with deep breathing techniques and meditation. Also, implementing a healthy diet on a day-to-day basis, getting adequate rest for 8 hours, and performing an exercise routine at home or at a gym, are great ways to address anxiety.

The second factor to address is depression, which is also a negative factor in this life-changing process. According to Freud, "Depression or melancholy as he called it originates in an internal conflict related to the loss of a beloved object, both internal and external." It can be identified that most people who leave their country or city to move to another destination are affected by depression when they feel the absence of their loved ones, such as parents, children, friends, etc. This leads to feelings such as sadness, grief, guilt and all this results in a lack of interest in doing things, loss of sleep, loss of appetite and even negative ideas such as hurting oneself. It is recommended to face depression and adopt positive habits such as relaxation exercises, physical exercise routines at home or the gym, and take care of the right diet to be healthy. It is also important to be able to have inter-daily communication with loved ones such as parents, partners, children or friends.

As a final factor, we have resilience, which is a positive factor within this process of life change. From the American Psychological Association (APA) "Resilience is the process of adapting well to adversity, trauma, tragedy, threat, or significant sources of tension." Resilience is something that all people have. In the face of situations or negative factors such as those described above, this assumes a fundamental role because it is not only about resisting but also about recovering and learning in most situations. This helps to strengthen and successfully overcome adverse situations. It is important not to forget that building friendships both in the educational field and in the workplace strengthens our resilience.

In conclusion, various positive and negative factors such as anxiety, depression and resilience are often seen in the process of changing a person's life when leaving their city or country of origin. Despite this, remember that you can always face negative factors with healthy habits, such as physical exercises at home or in the gym, deep breathing exercises, a balanced and healthy diet, and always resting for 8 hours. Have you already experienced the same factors or some other similar ones since you left your country?

Jaden Kim, RW 60**Dreams Come True**

Have you ever heard of the quote, *“If you do not give up, your dreams will come true”*? I used to think it was just an empty phrase, which sounds nice but does not really happen. But now, I would say it can be real because I have experienced it firsthand in my life. Coming back to Gainesville made me realize that my vague dream is starting to come true. Let me tell you the story of how it happened.

5 years ago, I had a vague dream of studying sport management in the United States, since it is the largest sports market in the world. In addition, I am a big fan of sports. However, my plan to become an exchange student was completely disrupted by COVID-19, which brought all international programs to shut down. Then in 2021, just one semester before my graduation from Gachon University, the UF ELI exchange program was offered at my school for the first time. I was on the fence between two choices: finding a job after graduation or taking this rare opportunity to study abroad. After much consideration, I decided to follow my heart—because the chance might only come once in my lifetime. Fortunately, I was selected through a very rigorous competition and was able to study at the ELI in the fall semester of 2021.

Before I arrived in Gainesville, I was nervous and unsure whether I could do well in the U.S. However, the moment I set foot on American soil, all my fears disappeared and turned into excitement. Everything I experienced in Gainesville felt new and refreshing; the weather, the relaxed atmosphere and friendly people, and the way students could freely ask questions in class, which was quite different from South Korea. Because I had always dreamed of studying in the U.S., I put great effort into my studies and was honored to receive two awards: “Most Improved in Speaking Award” and “Academic Excellence in Grammar”. At the same time, I made sure to fully enjoy life outside the classroom, because I believe that having fun is also an important part of learning about culture. By spending time with friends from different backgrounds, I was able to experience and understand a variety of cultures firsthand.

It was truly difficult for me to return to Korea after completing the ELI program because my time in Gainesville was the happiest moment of my life. On the plane back home, I thought to myself “I am not sure how or when, but I think I can come back to study for a master’s degree at UF someday.

When I returned to South Korea, I initiated to find actively the way that I can come back to the U.S. Unfortunately, studying for a master’s program in the U.S is much more expensive than in Korea. At first glance, it looked unachievable and impossible because I had been had to be independent from parent’s support since I was 20.

Fortunately, I found the only means to achieve my goal. I needed to win a highly competitive government scholarship and then gain admission from universities within one year. Being selected as a scholarship recipient was extremely challenging because only 20 people would be chosen, and there are no resources or information available online to help with preparation. To make matters worse, receiving the scholarship wasn’t enough. I also had to be accepted by one of the five universities I listed on my scholarship application. It means that I was able to apply to only five universities. Does not that sound almost impossible? Everything is uncertain, and if have to guess, I would say the chances were less than 5%. In addition, most people around me, even my family, questioned why I was chasing such a difficult dream instead of getting a job. Despite all the doubts, I faced every challenge on my own, step by step. I followed my heart. After a long and difficult journey, I was finally awarded the scholarship and accepted into one of the top universities in Sport Management, which is the University of Florida.

Even now, there are moments when I can't quite believe I've made it back to Gainesville — taking ELI classes again and preparing for a master's degree. To be honest, even writing this essay right now feels like a dream. Looking back, nothing about the process was easy, but I never gave up on my dream. Even if I had failed, I would not have regretted it because during that journey I was able to learn about perseverance, self-belief, and resilience. No matter what I do in the future, I know these experiences will always guide and support me.

Do you have a dream or something you truly want to achieve? If so, do not give up. Even if the odds are low, keep going until the end. If an AI were told that there's only a 49% chance of success, it might refuse to act. But we are human. We move not just by logic, but with **passion** and determination. I sincerely believe your dream can come true.

Cristian Matallana Castellanos, RW 30

Salsa, a Language Without Borders

Salsa is not just a musical genre; it is a form of expression and a cultural phenomenon that has transcended borders and languages. Since its inception in the 1960s. In the New York neighborhoods of Cuban and Puerto Rican immigrants, this blend of various Caribbean musical styles with Afro-American rhythms has become a universal language that connects people regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, or language. Whether in New York, Puerto Rico, Colombia, Cuba, Gainesville, or any Latin American country, the energy on the dance floor heats up when that characteristic “tac, tac, tac... tac, tac” of the clave (the instrument that marks the time in salsa) plays, the instruments vibrate, and the body almost naturally begins to move to the rhythm of the music. Dancing to a 4/4 beat (8 counts), Cuban style, salsa on the line, casino, caleño, or Puerto Rican style, it doesn't matter the dance language, the only translation is to enjoy and celebrate life. To feel the invitation from the percussion to move and flow. That's the most important thing: to flow and transmit, to transmit the joy of dancing and living. That's why it doesn't matter the age, gender, or language, because salsa is not spoken with words, it's spoken with the body in every turn and every step. Dancing salsa is like creating a new story with words of 4/4.

Norah Alghamdi, RW 20

Why Learning English Changed My Life

Learning English has opened many doors for me. In the past, I was very shy to speak. Now, I can speak a little with new people and understand movies and books. English helps me in my daily life, at the institute, and when I go shopping or meet my friends. I feel more confident and happier. I know this is just the beginning, but I believe I improve every day. My goal is to speak fluently and get my PhD. I am truly thankful for my teachers who support me and help me grow.

Pamela Campuzano, RW 30**My Experience at ELI**

Hello everyone! My name is Pamela. I'm 35 years old, have two daughters, and I'm Argentinian. I want to tell you about my experience in the ELI program at the University of Florida. I've been living in the United States with part of my family for almost two years. I started this program because I didn't know any English. I started at level 10. My first day was terrible because I was scared, embarrassed, and had many other emotions, like with anything new. I had good days and not-so-good days. During my first semester, I had Dary as my teacher, and I remember telling him many times that I was having trouble speaking, and he would tell me, "You're doing great." I also had Thomas as my teacher, and when I got a good grade, he would put a happy face next to it.

Today, I'm in my second semester at level 30, and I thought I'd feel the same when I returned, and I can say that the progress I've made is positive. This semester, I have a new teacher; her name is Zoe. Zoe is amazing! She always reminds me that I'm a good student. Daryl, Thomas, and Zoe, without knowing it, helped me get ahead, with their words or with a simple gesture.

To everyone participating in this program, I want to say enjoy it and take advantage of this opportunity. Not everyone has the chance. It is also the effort of those who make it possible. In my case, I am here thanks to my mom. Thank you, Mom! If you are not in this program yet and have the opportunity, but have doubts, I encourage you to try it! The experience ELI offers are wonderful; it is an opportunity to learn English, learn about many cultures, and even make good friends like me. And as they say in my country: "Every effort has its reward." See you next semester!

**Jose Toro Trochez, RW 30****Overcoming Fears**

When you are an adult man in your 30s, or even approaching or past your 40s, you might have some fears about studying English at University Florida at the English Language Institute (ELI). In the following text we will try to resolve some of the concerns you may have about studying at Eli. The first fears, the biggest fear that an adult man could have regarding studying English is the fear of not fitting in because you are an adult man. However, everyone at ELI gets along wonderfully in a way that is hard to explain. As a result, the pleasant academic is environment regardless of age. The second fear is always a concern when interacting with other cultures yet might be the least of your concerns, but if you ever feel anxious, one of the most enjoyable aspects is learning a bit about your classmates' cultures. Consequently, the various accents help improve your listening skills. The third fear is concern that teaching methods won't be suitable for an adult man although in the first week, you'll stop worrying about this. ELI teachers are wonderful. In some cases, you even feel the teacher's caring almost in a paternal way. These are some of the fears you might encounter if you want to study at ELI. If you have the opportunity and can afford it, leave any hesitation behind and go for it you won't regret it.

Hector Delgado, RW 30**The Best University in Florida**

UF is the best university in Florida for many reasons. First, it offers a high-quality education. It offers a wide range of programs in fields like medicine, engineering, and business. In addition, scientific and technological research. Its campus in Gainesville is modern, is calm, and full of student opportunities. UF also has one of the high job opportunities in Florida. Students come from all over the world, enriching the college experience. The cost is affordable for state residents without sacrificing quality. College sports like the Gators foster university pride and spirit. The university has a strong alumnus that supports recent graduates. All of this makes UF the best educational option in the state.

Nan Lin, RW 30**My Favorite Thing**

My favorite thing is going to the gym. When I was little, I didn't like sports. I just liked eating junk very so much. Therefore, I became very fat. My classmates liked to make fun of me. They called me fat boy. In China, we have physical education test. The one-thousand-meter test is what gave me the most headache. I have never passed any exam since I was a child. So, I decided to lose weight when I entered Chinese university. I got a gym membership with my roommate. And I learn all kinds of knowledge about fitness. I count my calories every day. Because you can only lose weight if you ensure you have a sufficient caloric deficit. Unconsciously, this is already my fourth year of fitness. Compared to losing weight and gaining muscle, I think what I have learned most in these four years is persistence. I've thought about giving up. Because fitness is also a very boring thing. I believe I will keep going no matter the wind or rain. It helped me defeat my cowardly self.

Abdulahdi Ajoozah, RW 30**Where My Heart Belongs**

For me, family is the most valuable and meaningful part of life. They are not just the people I live with, they are the ones who truly know me and accept me no matter what. My family has always stood by my side through every challenge and every success. Their love gives me the strength to keep going, even when things get tough. When I feel lost or broken, they remind me of who I am and help me find my way again. The comfort of their presence, the warmth of their words, and the simple moments we share mean more to me than anything else. I believe that no matter where life takes me, my heart will always belong with my family. They are my safe.

Inner Peace

The world through my eyes is
mistreated —
Like an Ashanti prince,
enchained,
Cast into a godforsaken ship.
Inner peace — the level I want to
reach.
The world through my eyes is
mistreated —
Like a wild animal, forced into
domestication.
Inner peace, I pray.
The world through my eyes is
beautiful:
Ever shining,
Ever brilliant,
Ever peaceful,
Ever satisfying —
Never lasting.
Inner peace, I have achieved.
The world through my eyes is
short.
So why long for it
as though you won't fall.

Mikail Abdul Hamid, RW 60

“Inner Peace” is a thought on the difference between the external world and the internal self. It begins by highlighting how I see the world as unjust and broken. Drawing on strong imagery like an “Ashanti prince enchained” and a “wild animal forced into domestication” to represent historical trauma, cultural displacement, and the loss of freedom.

The poem then shifts toward a spiritual and emotional longing — a desire to rise above that chaos and attain inner peace. The tone softens as the speaker glimpses beauty in the world, yet acknowledges its impermanence: peace is real, but short-lived.

In the final lines, I confront the shortness of life, “The world through my eye is short,” and question our tendency to cling to it as though we’re invincible. The poem ends not in despair, but in grounded wisdom: a quiet surrender to life’s fragile, imperfect nature, and an appreciation of peace when it finally arrives

Fahad Sumait, RW 20**The Man Who Shaped Me**

My father was one of the most important people in my life. He worked very hard to take care of our family and always put our needs before his own. He taught me many valuable lessons about life respect, and responsibility. He was kind honest, and always there when I needed help. Unfortunately, he passed away, and that was the most painful moment in my life. I felt a deep sadness that I cannot describe. Losing him left a big space in my heart, and I miss him every day. Even though he is gone, I will always remember his words, his smile and the love he gave us. I am proud to be his son, and I hope to make him proud too.

Sandra Sacupima, RW 30**My Experience in Gainesville**

Sometimes life throws us into great challenges we could never imagine, and I'm specifically talking about the City of Gainesville. For people who love living in a quiet place with polite people from children to seniors, and always willing to help others, walking to exercise safely, as well as easy access to public transportation, the city of Gainesville is perfect to live in. However, my experience with the excessive heat and constant rain has not been so pleasant. The city of Gainesville is not only clean but also has beautiful green spaces that shine with sunlight. A city with students of various nationalities, that is, despite being American, I feel like I'm in a multicultural land. On the other hand, one of the things that I love most is the fact that people complement each other when they see something beautiful and different. I really love that, and I've learned a lot in these 3 months here in Gainesville. In conclusion, despite life's ups and downs, I can truly say that my experience in Gainesville is enjoyable.



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