

# UF | UNIVERSITY *of* FLORIDA



## ELI STUDENT VOICES

## A Message from the Editor



Thank you to all who contributed to this edition of *ELI Student Voices*. To our student writers—you showed great courage and creativity, and your work shines here. To our dedicated ELI teachers—thank you for inspiring, guiding, and supporting these writers every step of the way. Also, thanks to Megan Forbes and the University of Florida Bookstore for arranging prizes for the winners and to our judges: Thomas Dolce, Patrick Klager, Maya Shastri, Jennifer Ramos, and Christine Voigt who took time to read the submissions and select the winning pieces.

Enjoy this collection and let it inspire you to keep writing and keep sharing your voice!

-Olga Moody

## Winning Pieces

### First Place

**“A Simple Birthday, A Powerful Lesson” by Hayoon Kim**

### Second Place

**“The Autumn That Lives Within Us” by David Medina**



## First Place

Hayoon Kim

RW 40

### A Simple Birthday, A Powerful Lesson in Gainesville



When I moved to Gainesville, I never imagined that one simple birthday party would teach me so much about kindness and belonging. On November 1st, I hosted a small celebration for my daughter Rosie's second birthday at the recreation room in my apartment building. I prepared everything carefully, expecting just a normal party with food, laughter, and photos. But that day turned into one of the most unforgettable experiences of my life.

At first, I felt overwhelmed because, in Korea, I was used to thinking that I had to do everything by myself. It was my first time hosting a birthday party in America, and I was very nervous that I might disappoint my guests or forget something important. In our culture,

guests are considered precious, and it's a tradition that they must be treated with great hospitality. The host does all the work—cooking, decorating, and cleaning—because guests are special and should simply enjoy the moment. But then, something amazing happened.

Gainesville showed me something completely different. The day before the party, my guests started texting me, asking if I needed any help. On the morning of the party, they arrived early, hours before the event, to decorate, set the food, and even cook with me. They worked together as if it were their own celebration.

During the party, we shared delicious Korean dishes that my American friends and I prepared together, such as tteokbokki, japchae, Seaweed soup with beef (Miyeokguk), and some Korean snacks. Everyone loved trying the food, and many said it was their first time tasting Korean home cooking. We also had a special time reading letters for Rosie, playing a fun quiz about her, and giving small gifts. Laughter filled the room, and it felt like a real cultural celebration where everyone truly enjoyed and appreciated our Korean-style birthday party. It was not only a day to celebrate Rosie's birthday and enjoy Korean food, but also a day to share genuine happiness and warm memories together. I was deeply touched by their thoughtfulness and generosity.

Before coming to the U.S., I often felt stressed and exhausted by the high expectations in Korean culture—to always do my best, to be responsible, and to handle everything alone. As a student at ELI, a mother, and an adult with many responsibilities, I also felt pressure to adapt quickly and do well in a new environment. However, this positive cultural experience reminded me that I don't have to do everything by myself. I learned that a true community means helping and caring for each other with open hearts.

ELI has been my very first step in America. After finishing this program, I plan to enter Santa Fe college to study biology. It won't be easy as a mom and international student, but Gainesville has given me confidence and hope. That day, I realized that I want to use my abilities to contribute, share, and give back to this community that welcomed me so warmly. It wasn't just Rosie's birthday we celebrated—it was also the beginning of a new chapter in my life.

## Second Place

**David Medina**

**RW 60**

### **The Autumn That Lives Within Us**

Once you reach autumn, you begin to understand the message behind the falling leaves. If we look at it from another perspective, just as a tree lets go of its leaves, we too learn to release emotions, a feeling, a smile, a tear, a gesture of kindness and love. Because when we flow with life and allow our emotions to be felt, everything that no longer belongs to us gently falls away... and there is no turning back. We become more authentic, more natural. We learn to appreciate the smallest details and understand why our parents always taught us to be patient.

The most beautiful thing about this season is precisely that: "The beauty of the ephemeral" For all of us, ELI has been much more than just a season; it has been a transformative experience. A stage where we learned to let go of our fears, to face challenges with discipline and sacrifice, to improve our English, to discover new cultures, to open ourselves to new friendships, and to build memories that will stay with us forever.

My question is: what sensations and feelings will each of us take from this season? For me, it has been far more than just a chapter, it has been one of the most memorable stages of my life. I have learned the beauty of nature, but also the importance of enjoying the simplest moments. I've come to understand that ELI will always be part of my story, leaving an indelible mark and reminding me how vital human connections are for personal and professional growth. The bonds we've created, the stories we've shared, the lessons we've learned, all of these become part of who we are.

The colors of farewell are not always sad. That's what autumn teaches us: to be resilient, to face our battles no matter how hard they may seem, to be brave and confront our fears. We

all have an inner autumn, that golden space where everything is lived with greater passion. Because even though everything changes, we learn to say goodbye softly, with the same grace as the falling leaves. Letting go also makes us bloom. And nature, in its infinite wisdom, reminds us that everything has its cycle, that we must be patient and trust the moment when colors return to paint our lives once again. Autumn is also calm and peaceful. It's as warm as a mother's hug or a cup of coffee in the morning. For me, that has been one of the most valuable lessons to enjoy every moment to the fullest: a walk, a bus ride, a hallway conversation, or a video call with my parents that fills me with strength to hug them tighter when I return home.

We arrived at this wonderful program full of fear and uncertainty, and we left with strength, motivation, and a burning desire to conquer the world. We have gained confidence, not only in the language but in ourselves. And through this journey, we discovered parts of our essence that we never knew existed.

My final message is simple yet profound: "Be willing to change". Throw yourself down that

slide without fear, let go of what doesn't make you feel alive, cleanse yourself just as nature does, and move forward with faith. Because always, believe me, there is light after the tunnel. The sun always rises again, the colors always return, and we...

We are reborn stronger, wiser, and more human than before.



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**Fall B Intermediate Grammar Class:****Hayun Cho, Seoyun Cho, Mariela Chourio Bertel, Marceau De Ginestet, Isabel Faddoul****Maestre, Patricia Moon, and Hector Hernandez Sosa****Fahad****RW 20/30****My Hobby**

I enjoy kickboxing, and it has become one of my favorite hobbies. I started it not long ago, and my level is still medium, but I really like it. I practice the basic moves, like simple punches and kicks, and every time I learn something new, I feel proud of myself. Kickboxing also helps me stay active and clear my mind after a long day. I like the energy in the class and the way the coach supports us. For me, doing sports is important, but the most important thing is enjoying what you do. When you enjoy a sport, you learn faster and improve naturally. That is why kickboxing is special to me.

**Ildemar Salazar**

**Immersion is the gym, but you build the muscles**

It's often said that immersion is the best way to learn English, and I believed that too. I thought that simply coming to an English-speaking country and being surrounded by the language would make me learn faster. But that's not really true; I wish learning English were as easy as catching a cold! Of course, immersion helps a lot, but it's like going to the gym: nothing really changes just because you walk through the door. What truly matters is what you do once you are inside.

From my first day in Gainesville, many things were challenging, such as trying to understand the orientation presentations, following the teachers' instructions, or simply ordering a coffee without freezing halfway through the sentence. I still remember that first week, especially the welcome picnic. The teachers and my classmates wanted to talk to me, but I didn't want to talk to them not because I didn't like them, but because I couldn't understand them. And when I finally understood, I didn't know how to answer. Then, I realized that real immersion doesn't happen only in the classroom. It's in every "good morning," every confused smile, every time you get lost in a conversation and still try to keep up.

Immersion helps you learn faster and gives you more confidence. When you listen, read, speak, and even think in English all day, something starts to change inside your head. But, just like in a gym, you only see progress if you keep showing up, push yourself a little more, and don't stop when things get hard. Immersion alone is not the miracle; it's only the environment. You are the real athlete. Your effort, your plan, and your discipline decide how far you can go. You can go to the best gym in the world, but if you don't put in real effort every day, the mirror will keep showing the same person.

At the end of the day, immersion is a great way to begin the journey, but the real change has to come from each student. It shows up in the moments when you decide to speak even if you're not sure, when you make a mistake and keep going anyway. Little by little, that's when English stops being just a class and starts becoming part of who you are.



**Rafaela da Rocha Lima**

**RW 40**

### **Lindinho**

Everything started in December 6, when my bunny was born, but I only adopted him in January 15. I called him Lindinho but everyone called him Lin. After this day, we stayed together every time. He was a bunny but he didn't act like a bunny. I taught him to go to the bath, do some tricks, and he learned so fast. He was so loving with me, and literally he could hear my voice without turning crazy searching for me. He entered my life in a hard moment and he made this horrible moment so beautiful. When he saw me he always asked for a lap. I cared for him like a baby, and when he slept for so long, he was always kissing me. My bunny sadly passed away, but the good moments will always be in my memory.



**Haya Abdullah**

**RW 20/30**

### **An Important Day in My Life**

The day I arrived in the United States. I flew from Saudi Arabia to Florida to start studying English at the University of Florida. The flight was very long and I felt tired, but I was also excited to see my sister after many months. When I arrived in Gainesville, the weather was warm and everything looked green and beautiful. My sister met me at the airport with a big smile and helped me carry my luggage. We drove to our apartment, and I looked out the window, amazed by how different everything was. Later that evening, we ate dinner together and talked about my new school and my goals. That day, I felt proud, happy, and ready to begin my new life in America.

**Ayah Zatari****RW 50****Travel to London**

In 2024, when I was working at my company, they required me to travel to London to attend a conference with my co-workers. First, I made my visa online. Before my travel day, I noticed my visa had the wrong date of my birthday, so I made it again with the correct information and booked another date to travel without my friends. I traveled alone — it was my first time.

I felt like a child lost in a public place without my family and friends. In the airport, I took a taxi to go to the hotel. The taxi driver was so chatty; I don't know why but he made me scared because I did not know much English at the time. When I arrived at the hotel, I put my bags at the reception and waited for my room. They told me my room would be available at 11:00 p.m. I told them, "OK, no problem, I will go outside downtown, and then I will come back." When I returned at 11:00 p.m., the receptionist said, "Sorry, we don't have enough rooms today, but we booked a room for you in another hotel." In that moment, I was afraid — how can I go to another hotel at this time? It's so late, and many people are sleeping or walking on the streets. Also, the weather was so cold.

In the end, I saw some people from my country; they helped me to move to the new hotel. And this is not the end — there was also an accident that happened, and I learned a lot of things on this trip. It really helped me grow as a person!

**Rawan Althubyani****RW 20/30****My Class**

My class in the ELI is very nice. The teacher is kind and helpful, and the students are friendly. We learn English in a fun way, and we practice speaking, reading, and writing every day. The class is not difficult, and I enjoy learning new words. I feel happy because I am improving my English.

**Selena Carpio****11-13-2025****RW 50****One Hour, One Dream: My experience Learning English**

When I started studying at ELI two semesters ago, I was very nervous and not sure what to expect. I didn't know if I was ready, but I wanted to try my best. Even though, live one hour away from the school, I decided to take this opportunity to learn English for my personal life and for my future job.

My son is my greatest motivation. I want to talk with him in my native language Spanish, but it is important to speak English as he grows up. I don't want the language to be a problem between us. Thinking about him gives me strength on my difficult days.

In my first semester, I had many challenges, but I worked hard, and I was nominated with seven other students for a scholarship. I didn't win the scholarship, but the experience was very special for me because I had my first interview in English in front of Americans. It was difficult but exciting, and it helped me to overcome my fear of speaking and feel more confidence.

This second semester has also been hard because the classes are starting earlier, but I'm trying to stay on time and keep learning. Every week, I keep learning new things and have new experiences that help me grow more.

Looking back, I'm proud of how far I have come through my efforts. Studying at ELI has helped me improve my English and become stronger as a person. Now, I know that with effort and faith, I can reach my goals little by little.

**Haia Alatawi****RW 20/30**

If I could change one rule at our school, I would change the heavy bag. Students should not carry heavy backpacks every day. Heavy bags hurt the back, and the students get tired. If the school gave lockers or tablets, it would be easier. This change would help students feel comfortable at school. Also, students can move faster between classes, and they would have more energy to learn. It's safer because students will not lose their things or leave their bag in the wrong place.

RW 20/30

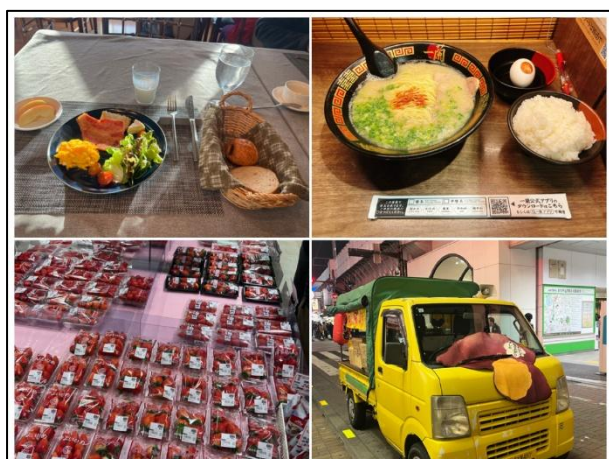
YaHsuan Wang

## My Best Vacation



It was such a satisfying trip. This past January, I took my son and friends to Nagano Prefecture, Japan, for a skiing trip. We traveled by plane, Shinkansen, and a connecting bus to reach Hakuba Ski Resort, a famous place popular among international tourists. We were lucky! Although it was winter and very cold, the weather was sunny.

It was our first time skiing, and riding the cable car up and down the mountain was so much fun and exciting! We took a lot of photos and really enjoyed ourselves. After skiing, we walked along the streets and admired the beautiful scenery around us. We enjoyed relaxing hot spring baths at our guesthouse every night. It was so warm and soothing! We spent the last two days of our vacation shopping in Ueno, Tokyo, and had our favorite Ichiran Ramen with fresh strawberries and grapes. I hoped time would slow down a little because everything felt so special. Finally, I hope everyone can try skiing one day and enjoy this wonderful winter sport!





**RW 60: Excuses, excuses, excuses: emails to our teacher**

**From:** Maia Campos, Marcelo

**Subject:** Absent Today

Good morning Mrs. Clark,

How are you?

Today, I didn't come to class because I had to get my granny to Jiu-Jitsu class. Unfortunately, we totally forgot she would participate in an international championship. The good news is she won! but she had to go to the hospital because she injured her thumbnail.

Now she is euphoric!

I'm sorry about that!

I hope you can understand.

Best regards,

Marcelo

**From:** Murshid, Abdulrahman

**Subject:** Homework

Hi Lynne,

I hope this email finds you well.

I want to apologize for not finishing the homework yesterday. This is because yesterday the world was in danger, and Spider-Man and Iron Man needed help from an ELI student since ELI students have been in situations that require getting to know other cultures. But don't worry!! Since you are reading this email, that means you are okay.

Thank you for your understanding.

Best regards,  
AD

**From:** Colmenares, Fabiola

**Subject:** Appendicitis

I couldn't get to class on time because, to sum it up, around 3 a.m. I had a sharp pain in my lower abdomen. It was so severe that I screamed and told my roommate to call 911. They told me I had signs of acute appendicitis. I went to the hospital, and the doctors performed emergency surgery, which left me very weak, so I fainted. When I woke up, the doctors told me I had survived by a miracle.

The whole thing was so extraordinary that the Pope came to the hospital to bless me, and thanks to the Pope's power, I recovered quickly enough to get to class. Now I am a legend to the boys and girls of the Pope's congregation as the woman who survived acute appendicitis, which according to the Pope was from the devil trying to obtain my soul, and according to the doctors the Pope was drugged and so was I because it was all finally a hallucination due to the antibiotics and the local anesthetic.

**From:** Kim, Gyeongmyo

**Subject:** Working Out

I'm so sorry that I didn't work out. You know there is a lot of food that i want to eat in these days. Also, my route which I run got an earthquake, so I couldn't run well.

Ari



**From:** Ramanitrarivo, Tolotrindiray

**Subject:** Tardy today

Hello,

Apologies for being late — nature called, and unfortunately, only my home bathroom could answer.

Thank you for your understanding, and I'll make sure it doesn't happen again.

Best regards,

**From:** Perez, Eva S.

**Subject:** Absent today

Good morning, Teacher

I am sorry that I didn't come to class today because yesterday I took my clothes to the laundromat and they were stolen all of them.

Really sorry,

Eva Sosa

**From:** Medina, David

**Subject:** Absent last week

Hi, good morning

Sorry for missing last week. I accidentally fell asleep on the bus, went around twice, and when the driver finally woke me up, he felt so bad for me that he invited me to have breakfast with him. At that point, I figured I'd already missed class, so at least I wasn't going to miss pancakes too.

David Medina

**From:** Albashri, Duaa

**Subject:** Tardy this morning

Good morning,

Sorry for being late — I accidentally hit “snooze” instead of “wake up.”

Best regards,  
Duaa



**From:** Yanez Salas, Javier

**Subject:** My homework

I'm sorry I didn't do my homework for today because I was working on it yesterday, but my Wi-Fi went down... and so did my motivation. On top of that, my computer felt emotionally overwhelmed and decided to take an eternal break. It wasn't my fault! Thankfully, my computer feels better today.

Javier

**From:** Cao, Haifeng

**Subject:** Absent today

Dear Lynne

I'm so sorry that I couldn't come class today. This is because when I was just walking on the school way, and a guy suddenly appeared and said, "do you need any help?", but he didn't wait for me to say anything and dragged me straight to the internet cafe. So, I'm so sorry about that.

Best regards,

Haifeng Cao

**Silvano Tandela****LS 30****My High School Hobby**

When I was at high school, my hobby used to be developing electronic projects. I started developing electronic projects on my first high school year and I loved the experience of creating entire projects. That's why I made it my hobby after class when I got home, I used to keep trying the same projects in different ways. I really like to develop projects because it makes me feel productive and powerful because I can make extraordinary things such as making my own games like memory games, the classic snake game, piano game, etc. It was really nice time and the best and the most important electronic project I made was a smart house as my final project at high school. I made a lot of interesting stuff for my house project like develop a system to turn on the light with voice command, open door with fingerprint, open garage with RFID tags, automatic system for plant when the soil get dry, automatic lights for yard at noon when it is dark, etc. It was an amazing experience and I really loved it.



**Cristian Andrés Matallana Castellanos**

**LS 30**

### **Tropical rice pudding recipe**

Today I am going to talk about the process for cooking a traditional dessert in Colombia, the name of which is rice pudding. This dessert is very popular at Christmas; it is a traditional food for this celebration. Today we are going to see the variation to the traditional recipe, this is the tropical version with coconut. The quantities are calculated for approximately 4 servings

The ingredients are:

- 1 cup of white rice
- 4 cups of milk
- 1 cup of coconut milk
- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup of sugar
- 1 cinnamon sliver
- Peel of half a lemon
- 1 pinch of salt
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of shredded coconut (This is optional for decoration)

The first step is to put 4 cups of milk, 1 cup of coconut milk, the Peel of half a lemon and 1 cinnamon sliver in one big pot. Heat over medium heat until the milk begins to boil. Meanwhile, wash the rice well.

When the milk boils, add 1 cup of white rice (prewash) and salt to taste. After, less the heat and cook slowly for about 30 to 40 minutes returning frequently until rice is soft and the mixture has thickened,

This step is optional, if you want the rice to be more creamy, add a little extra of coconut milk.

Then add the sugar and continue cooking for about 10 more minutes. After ten minutes, test the texture of the rice. If the rice is ready, turn off the heat and remove the lemon peel and cinnamon.

Now let it cool and finally server, decorate with shredded coconut and enjoying this dessert from Colombia.



**Yuli Arenas****RW 50****The most effective way to learn English**

Globalization and worldwide cultural exchange through the internet are making speaking English more and more important and necessary. Currently, it is possible to make friends across the world or have a well-paying job in another country without leaving your home. However, learning English is hard and requires time, constancy, and determination. For that, when people decide to learn a second language, they usually have an important question: What is the most effective way to learn the language? This question may have several answers, but English students' experiences show that the best way to learn is studying in an English-speaking country because it offers full language immersion, learning from native speakers, and significant benefits for personal growth.

First, the possibility of having a full immersion in the second language allows students to learn faster, naturally, and in context. They will be surrounded by English all the time, not only in the classroom. For example, students will be exposed to English during transportation, in stores, while watching TV shows, or walking on the street, which favors the understanding of the language in real life. Moreover, they can use the language every day to order food, participate in cultural activities, or make friends. This daily practice makes the learning process faster and helps students improve their confidence, according to Rebeca Ruiz "learning English in the United States is very different than in my country because students can learn faster just by social interaction and carry out the daily life. Also, it is better for learning idioms and specific expressions." Therefore, immersion increases natural comprehension and develops faster fluency.

Second, students could learn English from native speakers. It benefits their pronunciation and listening skills because native speakers use natural pronunciation and intonation. As a result, students will have better capability to understand English, accurate pronunciation and connected speech. For instance, Laura Benshoff (2018) in the article "With

fewer foreign students taking intensive English classes, Philly universities pivot” illustrates this advantage when she shares the student Ali Ashkanani's experience in Pennsylvania, “Coming here, he said he found gaps in his language skills he couldn’t recognize before. For example, pronunciation. Simple phrases learned by rote in Kuwait sounded completely different on the lips of native English speakers.” Furthermore, they will be learning different accents and types of English from their professors, improving their listening skills and comprehension ability because professors are from different places around the country and around the world.

Third, studying English abroad significantly contributes to personal growth because students must adapt to a new context and manage different challenges on their own. According to Colomba Martinez, an English student from Chile, people can develop more personal skills studying in the United States than in their own country because they know people from different cultures, and learn how to communicate in a better way, and become more independent. She believes that, beyond learning English, the experience leads to personal empowerment. For instance, international students must find a new housing, for that they need to figure out neighborhoods, compare prices, contact owners or agents, read and understand rental contracts in English. This experience forces students to communicate effectively in a language that they are not fluent, facing language barrier and making suitable decision. These leads students become more independent, resilient, and develops the ability to solve problems. Consequently, studying abroad also helps students to grow in personal skills, which will support their performance in other areas of their life or career.

In conclusion, studying in a native speaker country is the best option to learn English faster and better because immersion provides daily and accurate learning. Just moving around the city or campus, students will be learning the language, plus, learning from native speakers assures better speaking and listening skills. Consequently, better comprehension and confidence with the language. In addition, living in a new country and having to handle life in a second language, builds independence, resilience, and problem-solving abilities. In this way, people can master English by investing less time and gaining wonderful life experiences, making new international friends, and opening their minds to a new culture and personal challenges.

Zennure Arga

RW 40

### My Experience as a Student at ELI



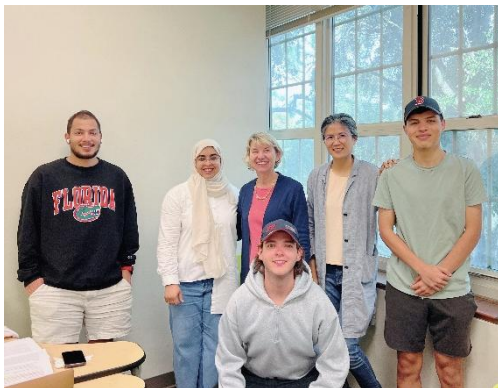
My Experience as a Student at ELI Being a student at ELI has been an incredibly special and valuable experience for me. Before I start, I want to mention how important “Student Voices” is. It gives students the chance to share their thoughts and memories. I believe this project helps us leave something meaningful behind. First, from my first day at ELI, I felt special. On the first day of school, there was a great orientation program with all the teachers and staff, and then they organized a welcome picnic for us. It really made me feel special. The teachers care about every student. They work hard to help us improve our English. They give detailed feedback on our homework and exams. In my first Reading and Writing 20 class at ELI, Ms. Zoe gave feedback on my homework with every little detail, even commas and periods. That really surprised me. Sometimes they care more about our progress than we do. That is impressive. Second, the office staff is extremely helpful. They support students with every problem. I remember I had trouble connecting my tablet to the school Wi-Fi, and Ms. Christine spent her own time helping me fix it. I was so surprised because it was my personal problem. This makes me feel safe and comfortable. ELI is not just a school, but also a caring community.



Next, I met students from many different countries. It was great to learn about their cultures directly from them. I did not just learn from books. I learned from real people. I also had the chance to share my own culture with others. After-class activities at ELI also help us understand American culture better and spend enjoyable, quality time together. We should also remember the hard work and support of the language assistants during these events. In conclusion, studying at ELI is not only about learning English. It also helped me grow through cultural experiences. My time at ELI will always be a valuable and unforgettable memory in my life.

**RW 20/30****YaHsuan Wang****My Life at the ELI**

I study English at ELI, and it has amazing and wonderful program. I enjoy the courses



here. I like to study reading / writing and grammar. The teachers are all very friendly, kind, and professional. The courses are also very helpful to me. I like listening / speaking because I can meet new classmates, and I talk with them about anything. You know what? I can say hello in Spanish and Arabic. It's very interesting. I like to participate in activities

organized by CIP because the LAs are so energetic and enthusiastic. They make me feel relaxed and comfortable. Now we have new students joining us — Fall B, so we can create more delightful memories!



**RW 20/30****Norah Alharbi****My Class**

My first day in English grammar class was an interesting experience. I felt a mix of excitement and nervousness because I knew that grammar can be challenging, but I was ready to learn. We started with easy things: Nouns and verbs. My grammar class is short, but good. It starts at 11:45 and finishes at 12:35. The teacher Lynne was nice, and the other students are very kind. I like grammar class and the people in it. I feel happy to learn more English grammar.

**Seoyun Cho****LS 30****My Childhood Bucket List****The First Meeting Is Always Hard**

Have you ever experienced something on your bucket list suddenly coming true long after you had forgotten about it?

For me, one of the dreams on my childhood bucket list was to go to the United States.

It was my dream to make friends in another language, experience different cultures, and see the world beyond my own.

But as time went by, I began to think it was something too difficult, something that belonged to a faraway future. Eventually, I forgot about it.

Then one day, I had a chance to stay in the U.S. for two and a half months.

During that time, I joined the ELI program at the University of Florida.

At first, I was full of worries. I always thought English didn't suit me, and whenever I had to speak it, I froze up from nervousness.

Also, since I joined as a B-term student in the middle of the program, I was worried about whether I could adapt well.

During my first week in the U.S., my worries kept growing.

Just as I feared, when I tried to speak English, I froze and couldn't say anything.

There were many times when I couldn't understand what other people were saying.



On my first day of school, I couldn't fully understand the announcements, and that made me feel even more scared.

It was truly exciting to be surrounded by people from different cultures and languages, but at the same time, everything felt so unfamiliar to me.

### Activities

The first activity for the B-term students was a picnic.

There, I met other ELI students, CPs, and LAs for the first time.

I still couldn't understand much of the conversations, and it was hard to speak smoothly without using a translator.

But everyone waited for me patiently, smiled, and tried to talk with me.

At that moment, I felt like I had broken through a wall inside me.

Before that, I had barely spoken a few sentences in English because I was afraid of making mistakes.

However, during the picnic, even when I said something wrong, people patiently listened and understood what I meant.

I realized that to them, it didn't matter whether my English was perfect or not.

After breaking that wall, it became much easier for me to greet others and have conversations, even if I made mistakes.



From then on, I joined many more activities and always sat in the front row during class to participate eagerly.

During breaks, I tried talking to new people, having small conversations, and making new friends.

## My American Dreams

As I slowly started to adjust, I began to feel a desire to experience more things — for example, the things I had been curious about since I was a child.

When I thought about America as a child, there were many things I was curious about— things like backyards, home parties, homecoming parades, Halloween, and Christmas. It might sound funny, but those were part of my little American dreams.

I didn't really know much about the Homecoming Parade before.

In Korea, we have university festivals, but I had never seen a parade so big that the whole town could hear the excitement.

On the day of the UF Homecoming Parade, everyone was dressed in orange and blue.

The day before, my brother and I went to the Reitz Union to buy matching outfits.

Even the day before, I could feel the festive atmosphere as people were preparing for the event.

On the day of the parade, not only students but many people from the town were wearing orange and blue, waiting along the streets.

I waited with ELI friends, full of excitement.

The parade was beyond what I imagined. So many groups participated, shouting “Go Gators!” and waving cheerfully.

The energy was amazing, and I felt like I became part of the crowd.

What impressed me most was how everyone—from police officers to firefighters to small local groups—was enjoying it together with genuine happiness.

Their sincerity and joy made me happy too.



Next, I'd like to talk about Halloween, which was one of the most impressive experiences for me.

The week before Halloween, we wore costumes and joined ELI activities where we painted pumpkins and watched bats.

On another day, we visited a haunted house set up on a farm, complete with small attractions and mazes.

On Halloween day itself, many students wore costumes.

At UF, I even saw students attending class in costumes!

At ELI, everyone was excited and full of Halloween spirit.

After class, I also dressed up and joined the activities.



Later, my friends and I went trick-or-treating in the Town of Tioga.

The streets were filled with people in costumes, and every front yard was beautifully decorated for Halloween.

People gave out candy, complimented each other's costumes, and enjoyed the night together.

Even during the weekend after Halloween, people were still celebrating with home parties.

I didn't join the parties, but I enjoyed the festive atmosphere around the school.

This Halloween was so impressive to me because Halloween in Korea isn't celebrated this widely.

Also, in Seoul, where I live, most people live in apartments, so houses with front yards are rare.

Here, however, people decorated their yards and waited outside to give candy to children — it was so cute and heartwarming.

Even though many of them were strangers to each other, they all shared the joy of Halloween.

It was such a lovely experience for me.

**Breaking the Wall**

Now, it's been about a month since I came to the U.S.

One day, I realized that all the things I had once thought were impossible had become real.

I used to envy my Korean friends who went abroad and made friends in English, thinking that it was something too far from my reach.

Even though I once wrote "go to America" on my childhood bucket list, I had forgotten about it because it felt unrealistic.

But now, it has become real.

I've made friends at ELI, experienced so many things in America, and learned English from wonderful teachers.

Through this experience, many of my fears have disappeared.

I've learned that the things I used to think were difficult might not be as hard as I imagined.

I still have a little time left before I return to Korea in December.

I plan to make the most of my remaining time — to learn more, experience more, and enjoy every moment.

When I go back to Korea, I know I'll miss these memories so much.

But I also know that they will become a precious part of me, helping me grow.

I'm truly thankful to everyone I met here —

to those who helped me overcome my fears and shared these memories with me.

I hope that they, too, can overcome their own fears in life,

and that all the dreams written on their bucket lists will come true easily.

Thank you for reading my story.

**Pozos Royz, Gabriela Lucia**

**RW 40**

**Sugar Problems**

Do you know all the effects that sugar can have on you? Research shows that 75% of the US population consumes excess added sugar, exceeding daily recommendations and that affects our future, present and people around us. I consider myself a little addicted to sugar, and I know that many other people do too. Sugar produces dopamine, which creates a feeling of

pleasure and reward. At the same time, it increases our cortisol levels, which makes us feel stressed and anxious. Sugar has more effects than we think, that is why consuming a lot of sugar is a serious problem.

One major effect in my life is that people near me eat more sugar because I always want sugar and I “infect” them. That is really bad because later they will also have problems with sugar. Consequently, sugar problems will have many effects on our body and not only now, but also in our future. For example, in our present, sugar creates fatigue, acne, thirst, irritability, weight gain, frequent urinating, hunger, blurred vision, nervousness, tiredness and weakness. Personally, sugar makes me feel thirsty, causes frequent urination, and gives me acne. On the other hand, the major effect is in our future because there are many serious effects, obesity, type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, damage to the nerves, skin, eyes and kidneys, dehydration that can lead to dryness, nerves, dental problems and mental problems. To prevent these effects, it is important to find the causes and how to solve that.

One main cause of the sugar problem is that sugar creates dopamine and cortisol. These make us feel anxious and it gives us the sensation that we can't live without sugar but obviously that is not true. To solve this, one biggest solution for me is to eat less sugar because probably we can't stop immediately so we need to practice self-control and this can be easier if we drink more water, sleep the best possible and do exercise. Specifically I like to walk or swim, for me it is the best exercise. However, I drink more water when I crave sugar and I try to sleep very well.

Another cause of the sugar problem is our emotions and habits. For example, if you have a lot of stress or do not do physical activity and you have a bad diet, that may be the cause of your problem. Personally I don't do enough exercise so, to solve this problem we need to try eating a balanced diet and maintain a healthy weight because that improves our insulin sensitivity so dopamine and cortisol less affect us, the same if we manage stress, do exercise like yoga or any exercise to relax. Although we can change the sugar for fruit, or if the problem is very serious and just it is necessary medication is another option. The most important thing is to be aware of how our habits affect our health and start making small changes.



In conclusion, reducing sugar consumption is essential for our physical and mental health because sugar affects the body's ability to control insulin sensitivity, which impacts not only ourselves but also those around us. That is why we need to make positive changes in our habits. However, maintaining a balanced diet, exercising regularly, getting enough sleep, drinking water, and practicing self-control can help prevent and control sugar problems. Living a healthy lifestyle is the best way to keep our sugar levels stable and protect our overall health, mental and physical. Personally, I know it's not easy to change, but every small step we take to be healthier makes a big difference in how we feel and live.

**RW 20/30****Samha Alasmari****Why I Love Sewing**

Most people know that my favorite hobby is sewing. I started learning it 20 years ago when my mother gave me a small sewing kit and taught me the basics. At first, I could only fix simple things like loose buttons or small tears, but with practice, I improved a lot. Now I can design and sew bags, cushions, and even simple clothes. Sewing makes me feel relaxed and creative because I enjoy choosing fabrics, matching colors, and seeing my ideas come to life. I sometimes make gifts for my sisters, and it makes me happy when they smile and use something I made. Sewing is not just a hobby for me it's a peaceful way to express myself and create something special.

**Yunkyoung Oh****RW 50****New Friends, New Stories**

Meeting a new person means beginning something new. You can be exposed to a new culture, ideas, and experiences. Of course, it was the same for my mom.

On the last day of September, my mom met a woman with her baby in the library near my mother's house. Since it was a weekday morning, there were only my mom, the other woman, and her baby. A few minutes later, the baby started crying. The woman went out quickly, and



my mom wanted to tell her that she and her baby were okay. So she followed them outside, said “You guys are okay,” and started to make small talk. Through their conversation, she knew the woman was from Uzbekistan, had been a kindergarten teacher in her country, and was now living here with her husband. During their conversation, my mom wanted to be a good friend and a Korean teacher for her, because she felt that this woman reminded her of me. Soon, they became good friends.

When I have a video call with my mom, she always shares her stories about her new friend. They exchange languages twice a week, share their foods and recipes, and just hang out together like a needle and thread. My mom has always been a sociable person, but after meeting her friend, she seemed more like a human magnet. Like a sponge soaking up water, she also absorbed many aspects of Uzbek culture.

Seeing this side of my mom, I realized how important it is to meet and interact with new friends, especially those who want to be exposed to other cultures and languages, and to expand their worldview. It is the same for me. After I heard her story, I became thankful for being in a diverse environment like ELI, where there are many activities, and I have been actively participating in them. Because of this, I hope to keep learning from my friends, broadening my worldview, and beginning new things together with them. Maybe one day, I’ll have my own story like hers to tell.

**Zennure Arga**

**RW 40**

### **How I Found ELI: A Personal Story**

I would like to share a short story about how I found the English language Institute (ELI). I had been thinking about coming to the US to study English. For many years, I lived and worked in a very cold city in Türkiye. Winters were long and extremely hard. After that, I did not want to see snow again. I wanted to live in a warm place at least for one winter, so I started looking for a state with hot weather and long summers. Florida sounded perfect for me. Also, one of my friends who finishes his PhD in the U.S. he told me that Florida was like Antalya in

Türkiye. He said if he could live in the U.S., he would choose Florida. His love for Florida made me interested too. I thought “If I go to U.S. for language education, it should be in Florida” Later, another friend who also studied in the U.S. helped me with the school application process. She asked me “Where do you want to study?” I said I was very curious about Florida and wanted to study there.

We opened the map of the U.S. and zoomed into Florida. The first thing we saw was a university icon. We clicked on it and saw that it was the University of Florida. Then my friend said, “Let’s see which city is it in?” We zoomed in again and saw the name “Gainesville.” My friend said she once passed through that city and heard good things about the university. She also said other her friends had studied English there and they were incredibly happy. So, I applied to ELI at the University of Florida that appeared randomly on the map. Now, when I think back, I know the map could have shown me a school in Jacksonville, Orlando, or Miami. But it showed Gainesville.

Later, when I came to Gainesville and started my first day at ELI, I felt very safe and sure I was in the right place. All the teachers and staff were kind, friendly, and helpful. That day, I thanked Allah. I thought I made a random choice, but maybe it was not random at all. Maybe Allah showed me the best language school in the U.S.

**Jose Toro**

**LS 30**

### **Why should you visit Cali?**

When you think about traveling to Colombia, the first places you usually hear about are Bogotá, Medellín, Cartagena, or Santa Marta. However, in the southwestern part of the country, there is one of the best cities to visit when you come to Colombia. In the following text, we will explain three reasons to visit Cali. The first reason is that it has beautiful landscapes. Cali is surrounded to the west by amazing mountains that are part of the Western Andes range. In the south of Cali, you can enjoy the Pance River, known for its crystal-clear waters. In addition, the Pacific Ocean is less than three hours away by car, where you can experience magnificent sunsets and even whale watching all in a single day. The second reason, Cali’s gastronomy is unique because of its geographical location. The city offers traditional dishes such as *sancocho*, *chuleta de cerdo*, and *bandeja paisa*; and it also has

delicious seafood thanks to its proximity to the Pacific coast. Finally, Cali is known as the Capital of Salsa. The city has a large number of salsa schools and more than 60 *salsotecas*. People in Cali live and feel salsa intensely, and the dance style developed there is fast, energetic, and full of impressive turns. In conclusion, when you visit Colombia, do not hesitate to make a stop in Cali to enjoy its wonderful and diverse landscapes, exquisite food, and excellent salsa lessons.

**RW 41****Silvano Tandela****Insomnia**

One of the most important times of our days is when we are doing nothing just sleeping. Sleep connects the end of one day to the start of another one sleep defines the quality of our day giving us energy to deal with all our tasks during the day so if we do not take a good night of rest probably, we won't be able to have a great day with high levels of energy. Why is sleep so important? The answer is more simple when we expect, we cannot spend our whole live spending energy without replacing them so sleep is very important because it is during sleep that our body does the necessary maintenance to provide us well-being in the next moment of the day. Unfortunately for different reasons not everyone are able to take a full normal hour of sleep because of insomnia that is a medical condition that unable people to sleep, according to Cleveland Clinic about 10% of the world population live daily with this illness or condition. Nowadays insomnia is a problem and three possible solution to deal with that are: Listen white noise while are trying to sleep instead of use telephone, Look a medical help and avoid drinking coffee.

The first solution to deal with insomnia is to stop doing a very common ability that is using mobile phone in our bed before sleep, the best thing to do instead of use our phone to scroll on social media is listen to white noise which are sound that relax us while scroll on social media usually increase the dopamine levels and this Keep us awake while was supposed to sleep, it is a personal advice, listen to white noise is very helpful and I think it could result with everyone.

Another way to lead with insomnia is to look for medical help it is important look for medical help not because we are very bad but because sometimes the insomnia can be because of another illness or medical condition that we don't know and firstly we have to deal with another kind of illness before insomnia. After that our sleep will be normal again.

The most useful solution to insomnia is to stop drinking coffee or some kind of drink with caffeine there are several types of food that we eat daily which contains caffeine and when we also drink coffee our levels of caffeine increase drastically and it prejudice our precious sleep. To improve our sleep avoid and if possible stop drinking coffee will be the best thing that we will do for our sleep.

Our life is a sequence of tasks, every day we have pending tasks and performing them makes us tired and we need energy to continue performing our tasks. We need to fight until we win the insomnia because we need energy in the same way that we need to solve our tasks and our energy we acquire faster a good night's sleep. People who lives with insomnia can do several things to deal with this. Listen to withe noise while are trying to sleep, look for medical help and stop or avoid drinking coffee are a few possible solutions. If we are addicted to coffee we have to make a choice between coffee and our precious sleep, I believe we all agree that sleep is the choice, so even if we are addicted there is hope to WIN THE INSOMNIA.



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