

ELI STUDENT VOICES

Spring 2026, Volume 30, Issue 1



A Message from the Editor



Dearest Reader,

It is difficult to say goodbye to something that has meant so much for me. For five years, *Student Voices* has been more than a publication – it has been a home. This issue is my last as editor.

Within these pages are voices that have inspired me, affected me, and stayed with me. I am deeply grateful to every writer who shared their truth and every reader who chose to listen.

Thanks to Megan Forbes and the University of Florida Bookstore for arranging prizes for the winners of this edition and the judges: Thomas Dolce, Patrick Klager, Patricia Moon, and Christine Voigt who took time to read and select the winning pieces.

Though I am stepping away, I know that *Student Voices* will continue to evolve and inspire.

Thank you for being a part of this journey.

With gratitude,

Olga Moody

Winning Pieces

First Place

“Friendship doesn't know about languages” by Tiffany Salazar

Second Place

“Tormenta: A Heart In Two Souls” by Andres Gonzalez

First Place

Tiffany Salazar

RW 50

Friendship doesn't know about languages

I still remember how I felt the first time I arrived at the ELI, the fear of speaking with new people and making new friends, I didn't go to the welcome picnic so in my head everyone knew each other and my job was going to enter the groups.

That same day I met Yun.

I knew from the very beginning that Listening/Speaking class was going to be the perfect place to introduce myself to new classmates. In my native language I'm not used to being a shy person, I always take the first step to speak with anyone. Imagine my surprise when a little woman with kind eyes and a gentle smile greeted me, she introduced herself as "Yun", a Korean student that started in Fall 2025.

The most difficult part of making new friendships in your second language is the fear of not being funny enough, close enough or being yourself enough, learning how to be comfortable with the new sound of your voice, new expressions, and new tones. Adding to it, a space with different cultures and ways to see life, creating a different context when we are looking at an equal point to create a connection.

I saw myself in that same experience when I watched *Hoppers*, the new Disney Pixar movie, where Mabel, the protagonist, becomes a beaver to save a special place for her; maybe my Journey is not safe a sacred place to my family fighting with the governmental system, but definitely I empathize with her when she had to fit with new friends to understand how to reach her goals.

She met George, the leader of the pond, a gentle beaver that everyone loves. He explained to Mabel the importance of making everyone feel welcome in the community, knowing everyone's names and talking with all of them. Mabel and George develop a strong friendship in a short time, based in trust and helping each other in harsh times. It's hard to imagine how a human and a beaver can share things that make them connect, however the context and the right approach create a timeless relationship.



George is the person that I want to become, the person that Yun is.



I never thought that can be possible a genuine friendship relationship between a venezuelan and korean person, being honest I'm very intense with my relations and for the moment one I acclaimed that Yun is my best friend, joking with being jealous about her

and make jokes all the time, she always understand my humor and my behavior about it, she laugh and plays along with me. I feel so fully and happy to be myself with someone.

Maybe I'm not a beaver and Yun, as far as I know, neither but I can say for sure that the support and friendship that she gave me all this time can make me imagine her with a crown in her head.

Second Place

Andres Gonzalez

RW 20

Tormenta: A Heart In Two Souls

The Beginning of a Dream

Our story began on September 17, 2019. That morning, my mom picked me up very early from 6th grade because the little filly had finally been born after 11 long months of waiting. For me, it meant 11 birthday candles blown out, each one with the same wish: a horse of my own to raise and love.



September 17, 2019

A Legacy of Love

I decided to name her Tormenta, after the mare my mom had when she was young. Seeing her, I felt a love that had traveled through generations. We have grown up together, step by step.

2020



2025



The Challenge of Distance and Training

At two years old, she began her training and had to leave home for a while. Watching her get into the trailer was like taking a daughter to her first day of school. I kept visiting her constantly, just to be near her.



November 2, 2021



His First Horseshoe

The Dreamed Moment

On August 20, 2022, we had our very first ride together. It wasn't just riding; it was moving as one for the first time. Every step felt like the culmination of years of waiting and care.



August 20, 2022

Loyalty

Not everything has been easy. Tormenta has struggled with skin allergies since she was young. I was always the one giving her injections, bathing her, and treating her wounds. It was always the two of us, facing everything together.



Now I am far away, studying at the ELI and chasing my dreams, but my heart feels heavy. It hurts not to be there to care for her with my own hands. She's not just my horse; she's my family and a piece of my soul. I miss you, my Tormenta. ♡



Vanessa Hinostrroza Rivera

GM 20/30

My Life with Pukencio

Pukencio is my long hair chihuahua, he grew up in Ocala Florida since 2011, so I figure out that probably he is 15 or 6 years old. I call him Pukencio only to make up his original name (Cujo) like Stephen Mingo book. He is my old baby. We spend a great time together here in Gainesville.

His personality is very particular. He is funny and loves dancing to Spanish music, but we just



found out that he is kind of mean. He doesn't like strangers and sometimes he doesn't like me either. He probably doesn't realize that he weighs 20 pounds and with the same size as a bunny, my family always look out when they take out Pukencio because he tried to fight a raccoon twice. Pukencio looks at himself as a superhero when he has the same danger of a squirrel.

When I first met Cujo I thought that he probably wanted to kill me because he always followed me trying to look up if I'm friend or enemy. But nowadays we get up and wake up together , we

dancing together and I always cheer up when he use the pads at home .so every time that I pick him up or when we get out of bed , I know that it is going to be a nice day and it doesn't matter that he can be grumpy sometimes, I will always have my old baby that can protect me from the raccoons.

Carla Guedj

GM 20/30

My Morning and School Day

I wake up at 6:30 a.m. and I get up quickly. I turn off my alarm and put on my clothes. Then I go to the kitchen and make my coffee. First, I wash and sit down to eat breakfast. After that, I tidy up the kitchen. Before leaving the house, I pick up my bag and head out. I get on the bus to go to school and later I get off near my school. When school starts, I sit down and listen to my teacher, but the chair breaks and I fall down. After class, I go back home and take off my shoes. Then I do my homework, but my dog jumps on me and tries to eat my homework. At night, I finally wind down and fall asleep.

Jiyeon Bae

RW 40

Lucky Opportunity in the ELI

In my country, South Korea, most people are from the same ethnic background. But after coming to the ELI, I was able to meet friends from many different countries. So I can get to know many cultural stuffs. For example, I had only heard about cultural traditions like Ramadan in books, but I saw some friends actually observing it and that made me feel real.

Also, I was worried about what if everyone else is much better at English than me. But I realized that we are all still learning, and that made me feel more comfortable. Since all students are from a variety of countries, we can help each other because we are all studying together.

I really liked activities in the ELI too. I can get to know other class's students and I can use English in daily life. In class, there aren't many chances to have conversations, but during activities, I get to talk a lot more. It made me feel like I was getting into English faster.

I also liked all the teachers in the ELI. They all answered my questions kindly, so I never felt hesitant to ask.

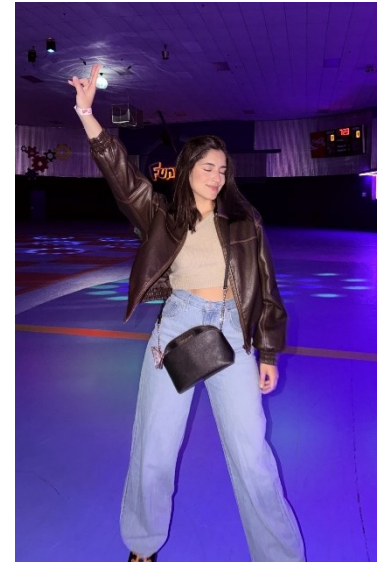
I really appreciated that. I feel happy to have the opportunity to study at the ELI.

Marian Coppola**GM 20/30**

When I first got in to Gainesville, everything felt new and a little scary. I had to figure out how to use the buses, to get on the right one for to go to the UF and attend my classes. Every morning, I get up very early, turn on the lights and turn off my alarm before I get ready to go out. It is a little difficult for me, but I always arrive on time to ELI.

In my English course, the teachers always teach us new things, and I try not to give up when I feel it is difficult. I often look up new words and learn many other interesting things. I have found out more about the language and the culture of this place. Between and after classes, I usually hang out with my classmates in the dining table area, where we sit down to talk, eat, and have a fun time.

Studying here also helps me cheer up on days when I feel a little sad because I miss my country or my family. It is a good place where I am living incredible experiences.

**Mona Alharbi****GM 20/30****Phrasal Verbs Story**

I wake up early in the morning at 4:30 a.m. and make breakfast. I make lunch boxes for my children. At 5:00 a.m., I wake up my children and turn off the AC because the morning is very cold. My children take off their pajamas and put on school clothes. They sit down on the chairs in the dining room and eat breakfast. My children get on the bus and go to school. After that, I put the dishes in the dishwasher and turn it on. I throw away the trash. I prepare for ELI, get in the car, and go to ELI.

Eunsu (Chloe) Kang

RW40

My Perfect Experience in Gainesville So Far

Life in Gainesville has been perfect so far. In class, all my teachers are so kind. They listen to my thoughts carefully. It helped me adapt to the class. Living in Gainesville is also good. But the different temperature gaps between morning and night make it hard for me to survive. On top of that, the AC is always working inside, so I should bring my spare clothes everyday just in case. Meeting new people is also good. I think that needs a lot of energy. So, it was kind of hard, but I'm getting comfortable now! Learning about new cultures and English makes me feel alive because I can feel the better version of myself, like speaking English well or being comfortable hanging out with my friends. I'm so happy all of these situations happened to me. Life in Gainesville is much more satisfying than I thought!

Marian Coppola Di Placido

RW 40

My Life in Gainesville

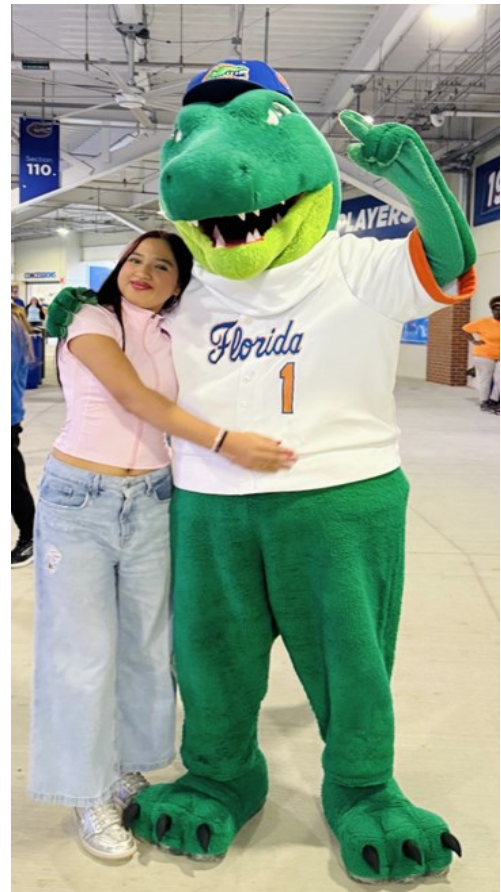
When I arrived in Gainesville, I felt a mix of excitement and nervousness because everything was new for me, from the language to the lifestyle. At the beginning, it was a little difficult to adapt, but with time, I started to feel more normal. Taking this English course has helped me a lot to improve my English. With these few months, I can see my progress, and I speak and understand the language better. Also, living here gives me the chance to know new people, new places, and traditions, which is a great experience because I have the chance to know new cultures.

Dasha Vasquez

RW 40

New Country, New Friends, New Me

Honestly, starting to live in another country on my own without my family and learning to be independent was, and still is, a big challenge for me. Feeling lonely and not having anyone else at home is very sad, however, my stay in Gainesville has been great. I like the city because it's small although the only downside is that there aren't many malls. But everything else is nice, and the people are very friendly. As for my English studies, I've made a lot of friends, and little by little, I'm becoming more comfortable speaking, and I feel like my English is improving every week. The culture shock was pretty intense for me, things like how they throw parties, the different clubs at the university, their traditions, and so much more. Now I feel really happy because I'm improving my English and meeting a lot of great people.



Byeongkwan Jeon

RW 40

UF Graduate School Student Life in the ELI Program

I love Gainesville life. I love Gainesville's nature and peaceful mood. However, I'm so sad because I cannot fully focus on the ELI program. I agree that I failed to make good balance between my UF degree life and the ELI's program. Every morning by 8:00am, the bus is always full. Therefore, I need to leave home at 7:40am. However, in the morning, I always fail to wake up early because I usually go to bed at 2:30am. I tried to go to bed by at least 1:00am, but if I failed to go to early at least 2 or 3 days, I started to wake up late again. Fortunately, the ELI program is very nice. It is always helpful for me. I reduced speaking delay by a lot, and I also learned a lot of things such as reading and writing. Therefore, I sometimes thought that I regret not doing it during the last summer semester. The ELI coordinator was concerned I am a UF graduate school student because I cannot make enough time for the ELI. Now, I feel that is true. The ELI activities also are very helpful for me. I got a chance to talk with native Americans. Furthermore, sometimes I can get a chance to experience American culture.

Dasha Vasquez Sandi

GM 20/30

The Mysterious Phone Call

One night, Akyra was about to turn off her phone when it suddenly rang up. When she picked up the phone, no one spoke. Confused, she tried to hang up, but the call didn't end. A strange voice finally came on and told her to go out of her house and look for a red box near the street. Curious, Akyra quickly put on her jacket and ran out. When she came across the box, she slowly opened it up. Inside, she found out there was another phone with a note that said: "If you want to find out the secret, don't give up" Suddenly, the phone lit up, and a map popped up on the screen. Akyra smiled and decided to set off on a new adventure.

Yunkyung Oh

RW 60

How I Saved the World with \$20 Billion

Four months ago, I was sitting in RW class when a mysterious stranger approached me with a chance to save the world. Today, I finally feel like I saved the world. When I started as a consultant, I had a \$20 billion plan for air pollution. Some people said I was an outlier because my idea was so big, but I didn't care. I just didn't want to sit helplessly while people got sick from dirty air.

First, I spent \$10 billion on "Green-Poly" project. I hired a squad of scientists from the UF. They worked with grit to make a new material that doesn't make smoke when burned. But research is not enough. I spent \$6 billion of that money to build 10 big factories in the US and Asia. I made a deal with Amazon and Coca-Cola. I told them the government would pay 30% of their costs if they use this material. Now, clean packaging is everywhere. It is a ubiquity, not just a peculiar experiment.

Second, I used \$8 billion to fix the factory smoke problem. I chose the 500 biggest factories in the country that produce the most CO₂. I didn't want to make an arbitrary choice, so I used satellite data to find them. I gave each factory \$16 million to buy a "Titanium Filter." This filter cleans 95% of the chemicals from the smoke. I told the owners they must finish installing these by June 2026. We couldn't just shrug our shoulders at the pollution anymore. Now, the sky above the industrial zones is clear, and we left a good legacy for our descendants.

Lastly, I made a new rule for city buildings, which cost \$0 from the budget. Every building owner must plant more than 10 trees for every 1,000 square feet of their building. If they don't have enough ground, they must plant a garden on the roof. I asked each government to hire more than 10,000 inspectors to check every building in New York and Beijing. This was a lofty goal, but it worked. I used the remaining \$2 billion to give free seeds and soil to these owners. Now, our cities look like small forests. People are not merely living in concrete. They are living with nature.

It was a long journey, but eventually, we got a triumph. I stumbled upon this chance to change the world, and I am so happy now.

Luciana Dabdoub**GM 20/30**

Last Saturday I was bored at home when my friend Tasha called me. However, I wanted to sleep, so I said that I would call back later. A few hours later, when I called her back, she said that tonight we have a party with many friends. She said that she could pick me up in a few minutes to hang out with our friends, so I got up quickly and started to change my outfit. I turned up the music to cheer me up and be in mood.

30 minutes later she picked me up with more friends. She was with Mariana, Vanezia and Granola. I got in the taxi, and they turned up the volume of the music.

The party wasn't happy, so we decided to cheer up the party by doing a workout in the middle of the party. The party became better, but we were a little tired, so Mariana and Tasha decided to go out the party and sleep. Then we wanted to go home, but Mariana didn't wake up, so one boy offered to us to leave us at home, so we accepted, because this boy is the boyfriend of Mariana. He had to pick up off the floor and then left her in his car with us. We had to lift her to the home and took off her shoes and put her on the sofa and put away her things.

On the morning of the next day, she woke up happy and confused. She didn't know why she was sleeping on the sofa, but she was happy because we did a workout.

The most interesting part of this story is that it was my dream a few nights ago.

Gabriela Lucia Pozos Royz

RW 50

The Big Idea: Why am I so forgetful?

The article “The Big Idea: Why am I so forgetful?” by Charan Ranganath explains his idea about why a failing memory might be a good thing for our brains. At first, he mentions that we are designed to forget because if our brains kept all the memories or experiences that we have, we would not be able to find or remember the important information, and we would just recollect more and more things that we don’t really need. After that, he answers the question: what is the point of remembering at all if we don’t need everything? He explains an ability called “episodic memory,” which is like “mental time travel,” in other words, the feelings in that memory. When we remember something, our brains experience those past feelings and the context of that moment. However, when we get older, our episodic memory also changes, and sometimes our “mental travel” is not exact, but at that point, new episodic memories are less important than the wisdom from all the past memories in our lives.

Memory

Our brains can store a countless amount of information, and memory is an essential part of our daily lives, but not everyone experiences it in the same way. For example, personally, I feel that I have a bad memory. I often forget things that happened recently, and this makes me feel frustrated and worried. However, after reading some articles, I started to believe that having a “bad memory” does not always mean something is wrong. In this essay, I would like to explain some things that I recently learned about memory.

One reason I completely agree with the author is that remembering every single detail is not good for our brains, because it could make it difficult to find important information. If we are designed to forget, it is because it helps us organize our information. A few months ago, I read a

very good example: our brains are like computers. We keep a lot of information, but if a computer keeps every detail for years and years, eventually it would not be able to work like before. Something similar could happen to our brains. If we kept everything that ever happened to us, we would not be able to have new memories, new experiences, and new feelings.

Sometimes, I hate my brain. I hate the feeling when someone asks me about a memory and the only thing I can say is “I don’t remember.” But there is also something that I love about my memory. I don’t know if it is the same for everyone who has a “bad memory,” but personally, I often feel things as if it was the first time. For example, I know that the hamburger from yesterday is not the first hamburger in my life, but it felt like it was. I enjoy things like it was the first time, maybe because I don’t remember the feelings from similar experiences.

In the article, he explains episodic memory, and that is why I relate it to my experiences. If our brains need to remember feelings and context to recreate a memory, that might be why I feel things like it is the first time. I don’t know if this is completely true, but I like to believe it because I enjoy feeling everything like the first time.

Another thing that I learned about episodic memory is that it affects our learning, but it does not always mean something bad. If we forget what we learn, it is completely fine. When people learn something for a second time, they can do it better than before. Because of this, our learning keeps improving every time we learn something again. In my experience, one of the most difficult things right now is learning a new language. Sometimes I forget things that I already know, but it also helps me because I learn it again and understand it better than before.

In conclusion, I have a love-hate relationship with my memory, but now I understand that it is not a bad thing or a sign that something is wrong. We are designed to forget, to improve over time, and to enjoy experiences as if they were the first time.

Vanessa Hinostroza Rivera

GM 20/30

My Easter Weekend

I spent my Easter weekend with my family in Crystal River, at my uncle's house. We spent the day next to the ocean trying to get some tan, talking and trying to **figure out** a plan for my best friend's 28th birthday in the Florida Keys this next June, and I was so glad to spend time with my family after a long time, talking about our future goals and getting lounging of good times.

In the middle of the day we started with some drinks and snacks, and when the sun comes down we **find out** that the house had a new canoe of course the kids were the first in try it on, everyone starts to **cheer them on** and taking photos and my old cousin Tayler try to bring his little nephew in the canoe, he **give up** in a second from that decision because the canoe can flip on the water and he is not a very good swimmer probably a matinee can swim better than him. So, we **put off** that idea and the guys continue with the trip.

My youngest cousins **catch up** quickly the level of my older cousin and they carry on with the trip, they don't went to far away because they need to come back before dinner time, and I'm glad for that because just after they went to the water we start to see a fishes in the ocean close to us that only means, the perfect time FOR FISHING !

Until of the day, im spend a great day with my family and im always glad the short or long time that we can have adventures together.



Fahad Sumait

RW 40

My Time in Gainesville

My time in Gainesville, Florida has been a very valuable experience for me. Studying at the ELI has helped me improve my English skills a lot. In my classes, I practice speaking, listening, reading, and writing everyday. At first, it was difficult to understand everything, but now I feel more confident when I speak.

Living in Gainesville is also interesting because it is a calm and student friendly city. I have met many new people from different countries, and this helped me learn about new cultures.

In addition, my teachers are very supportive and always encourage me to participate in class. I also learned how to manage my time and become more independent. Outside of school, I explore the city, try new food, and enjoy my time with friends.

Overall, this experience has helped me grow both academically and personally. I believe my English has improved a lot, and I feel more prepared for my future studies.

Yuli Arenas

Reading/Writing 60

March 27, 2026

A Deep Change

When the government offered 20 billion dollars to save the world, I thought that the main challenge would be designing the perfect plan, but the true challenge was deciding where to begin. For several days, I was trying to figure out how to start, surrounded by reports, graphics, and brilliant proposals about different world problems and solutions, such as clean energy to

reduce climate change, vaccination systems to prevent future pandemics, and artificial intelligence to optimize food production and reduce poverty. Each option had the potential to save millions of lives. Each one seemed urgent and indisputable, but at the same time, those options felt incomplete.

One night, while I was dreaming about a better world, I remember an image that I saw years ago: a little girl walking in the sun with a bucket filled with water, almost bigger than her own body. She did not play, nor run. For a long time, every day, her responsibility was not to learning, dream, or discover the world, her responsibility was to get water. That image unveiled to me that saving the world is not only about solving the largest problems. It is about understanding which problems are essential, have the potential to solve other problems, multiply benefits, and skew them to a better path. Sometimes they are silent and invisible problems, but crucial, for instance, water. Water is not only a resource, it is also a daily experience and if it is not there, it is an absence.

In different parts of the world, water defines people's destiny, especially women's. Women hold the weight of the shortage, donating their bodies, their time, and their opportunities for personal growth. Women are those who walk kilometers to get the vital liquid for their family, instead of going to school, and facing danger to get something that should be a basic right. At that moment, I understood that water is not merely a natural resource, but it is time, health, dignity, and future. I made a decision: I would not invest \$20 billion in the most advanced technology or recognized solutions; I would invest in something simpler but loftier: bring water to where it had never reached before, and allow women to lead this change.

The plan started in small communities, building wells, water-collection systems, and providing accessible water-purification technology. But the more significant thing was not the infrastructure; it was the trust. At the beginning, there were doubts and criticisms: Why water? Why women? Why not something more ambitious? But the change started to speak by itself. Women who had never been heard began to be trained as leaders, technicians, and water managers in their territories. For the first time, those women were not only receiving help but

making decisions and being protagonists, showing great pluck to contribute to their families and community development. The girls did not have to walk any more for hours to get water, and they came back to school. Also, illnesses decreased; child mortality and morbidity declined; and families had more time together and stability. In this way, communities started to change.

Years later, I came back to one of these places and stumbled upon a young woman explaining how the water system works in her community. She spoke confidently and with knowledge. Suddenly, someone said: “She was a one girl who walked for water.” Then, I understood that we did not solve the world, but we had changed something deep. When a woman stops carrying water and starts carrying possibilities, and when millions of women change their history, the entire world starts to change with them, generation to generation. Finally, saving the world was not about choosing the most complex solution; it was about choosing the most essential part of life: Water.

GM 40 students wrote pieces inspired by the piece Ice Age, by Edgar Müller.

<https://www.boredpanda.com/5-most-talented-3d-sidewalk-chalk-artists/>

Fahad Sumait

GM 40

In this picture, there is a lake and cloudy sky. A man is standing near a drawing that looks like a deep hole. The drawing, which is on the ground, is very realistic. People who see it may feel surprised.

The man who is standing near the drawing looks careful. The drawing that the artist made is very creative. It looks real and it can trick the eyes. Looking at it makes people feel excited. In the future, artists will create more drawings like this. People will enjoy taking pictures with them.

It is fun to see art which can trick the eyes. This kind of art is interesting for everyone.

Samha Alasmari

GM 40

A Dangerous but Beautiful Place

When I first saw this picture, I felt surprised and interested. It shows a man near a huge crack in the ice, which looks very deep and dangerous. The place is cold, quiet, and beautiful. The ice is bright blue, and the sky is dark, so the picture has a strong feeling.

At first, I thought the man was walking on normal ice, but then I saw the large opening. He was standing very close to it while he was looking down. Maybe he went there to explore the area and to learn something new. The crack that reaches the ice looks scary. It reminds me of brave people whom others respect because they do difficult things.

This picture has made me think about nature and danger. The man has been looking into the ice for some time, and maybe he has been wondering what is below. One day, he will probably tell other people about this place. Looking at this image makes me want to see a place like this, but I know I would be afraid.

Maria Luiza Proetti Lintomen

GM 40

Dreaming of the Sea

The artist in the picture created a deep hole on the ground, but my eyes go to the sea in the background. The ocean, which looks so far away in this photo, is a place to remember my happy days. Living far from the coast is difficult because the water is part of who I am.

In Brazil, I spent many mornings in my Hawaiian canoe. I've been feeling a lot of "saudade" since I moved away from the beach. This sport, which connects me to nature, is what I miss the most. The waves that I used to paddle are now only in my memories. Missing the salt and the sun is a feeling that I carry every day.

One day, I will return to the ocean to paddle again. I'm going to find my balance in the water once more. I know a person whom I used to paddle with, and we still talk about the sea. Even if I am far now, the horizon in this photo reminds me that the sea is waiting for me.

Byeongkwan Jeon and Yeonwoo Shin (Lian)**GM 40**

Our eyesight is not perfect. Sometimes we get confused about what we see. Therefore, many artists have been using this phenomenon in their work. In the world, there is much interesting 3D street art.

This artwork shows crevasse of glacier on the main street. This street which was covered in graffiti makes people confused. When the photo was taken, he was working on the artwork. Many passengers stop to watch this artwork. Residents love this artwork which artist drew on the street. Sometimes, artists whom residents love fix his work. Until now, people have come to this place to watch this artwork.

I tried to visit this place, but I didn't have enough time. Therefore, I couldn't see this work. I still regret not watching this work. I will visit this place next month. Because many people that saw this work complimented this street.

Silvano Tandela**GM 40**

When I first went to a beach this year, I was hoping it would be one normal day, but I wasn't, because I have never been to that beach, which was St. Augustine. My whole experience there was amazing, that's why I'm pretty sure I'm going to go there again. I am not a beach person, but I really enjoy swimming there, because the weather was really hot, and on the other hand the water was cold, basically perfect for swimming. After spending a day there now, I'm looking forward to going back there and starting a new journey exploring Florida, which is one of the most beautiful states in the USA, but before I need to talk to Tony, who is my driver.

Lucia Pozos and Tiffany Salazar

GM 40

The most important thing about meeting someone is when you start to share different points of views connected with different life history, location, experience, and even things that you like. We all have the capacity to create our own world in our heads, a place where we can be ourselves without fear of judgment, but at the end of the day the real meaning of this creation is shared with somebody else.

Perception has been the way to produce discussion between society: religion, food, rights, politics, and family. However, today we have been using perception to generate conversation and respect, connecting people to our different worlds, at the end we can create together a way to improve the real one. Wars and conflicts start with different points in the perception of reality, without a space to talk through to figure it out, the world is choosing the other way.

Avoiding talking is not the solution when you have a disagreement, we must use it like a push to make a conversation or a relationship. The beauty of divisions is the way that it could be the idea that creates a union, how empathy develops when you understand your neighbour and with little steps a community is created. Noticing is one of the best ways to love someone, proving that other ideas, the other worlds are important and valuable. If you open your perception, you will have an open galaxy of perceptions.

Gabriel Marin Hernandez and Giannella Salvatierra Rodriguez**GM 40**

When I was young, I used to paint a lot at school. I got inspired by an artist called Juana Pistachio. Painting is a very difficult creative skill that I developed during my childhood. In the future, I would like to become an artist who is recognized by people.

Being an artist nowadays is very controversial because of AI generated paintings. On the one hand, AI art has been becoming more popular due to business purposes. AI can create a painting in just a couple of minutes. For example, last year an AI generated painting was sold for 4.3 million dollars, which made many people in the art industry upset. Most companies do not see the value of traditional artwork.

In conclusion, painting is a difficult skill to practice, and only a few people can make a living from it. Painting can express any type of imagination you have, such as recreating a mountain, an airplane, or abstract objects. In my opinion, people can find different meanings in a painting.

Haifeng Cao**RW 60****I Would Use \$20 Billion for International Aid**

If a government gave me \$20 billion to help the world, I would use the money for international aid. I would not spend all of it on only one country or one program. Instead of this, I would use it in a lot of important areas, like clean water, food, health care, and education. I believe international aid should help people solve the basic problems and build a better life level.

The first solution that I would push is spending a quarter of the \$20B on clean water and sanitation. In many countries with serious poverty, people do not have safe and enough water to

drink. They may get sick because the water is dirty. People also spend many hours every day carrying water from far places. If we build wells, water systems, and toilets, people can live healthier lives amid difficult conditions. Children can also spend more time in school instead of helping their families get water.

Moreover, it's not enough just for helping water resources. So, I would use a quarter of the \$20B to improve food production. In some countries, farmers work very hard, but they still cannot grow enough food because of bad weather, poor soil, or a lack of tools. International aid can help by giving farmers better seeds, simple machines, and training. It can also help build roads and storage buildings, so food can be moved and protected more easily. This can reduce hunger and help families earn more money.

Another important improvement, after solving water and food problems, people need to receive education and take care of health. Therefore, I would give a quarter of the \$20B in health care and education. Many people in developing countries cannot see a doctor when they are sick, and many children cannot go to school because their families are too poor. I would support hospitals, medicine, schools, and teacher resources. When people are healthy and educated, they have more chances to improve their own lives and help their communities. This support can leave a positive legacy for future generations.

Finally, I would keep a quarter of the \$20B for emergency aid. Natural disasters, wars, and big diseases can happen at any time. In some places, these problems are a common occurrence. When these problems happen, countries need quick help. Emergency aid can save many lives in a short time.

In conclusion, I would use \$20 billion for international aid by focusing on water, food, health care, education, and emergency support. I think the best aid is not merely about giving money. It is about giving people hope, safety, and a chance for a better future.

Maria Luiza Proetti Esteves Lintomen

GM 40 & RW 50

A Special Time in Gainesville

Living and studying in Gainesville has been a very importante experience for me. When I first arrived, I felt excited but also a little nervous. Everything was new for me, the language, the culture, and my daily life. Even with these challenges, I knew this experience would help me grow.

I came to Gainesville because of my husband. He started his master's degree here, and this opportunity opened doors for him to get a job. During this time, we also had the chance to live closer to my mother and my 10-year-old sister who live in Orlando. I brought my two dogs with me, and being here was extremely importante for our Family (me, my huysband, and our pets).



Me and my dogs on Lake Alice

Studying at the English Language Institute (ELI) has helped me a lot. The classes are interesting, and the teachers are very kind and supportive. They Always encourage us to speak, even When we make mistakes. Because of that, I feel more comfortable speaking English now, and I am more confident than before.

One of the best parts of living in Gainesville has been the people I met. I met wonderful people here who made me feel welcome and supported. These friendships made my experience much more special and helped me feel at home. I also love the nature in Gainesville. I have always loved animals, especially wild animals, and here I can see them more often. Seeing

birds, gators, turtles, and other animals in my daily life makes me feel close to nature, and inspired me to think about studying Biology, either here in the U.S. or back in my country, Brazil. This connection with the environment has been very meaningful for me.

Of course, living in a new country is not always easy. Sometimes I miss my home, my family, my friends, and sometimes English is still difficult for me. But these challenges helped me become stronger and more independent.

In conclusion, my time in Gainesville and at ELI has been more than just learning English. It has helped me grow as a person, make new friends, and Discover new things about myself. Even though I am excited for this new chapter in New York, I know I will really miss Gainesville and everything I experienced here.

Veronica Marinelli

RW60

\$20 Billion for Self-Sufficient Global Communities

If a government hired me as a consultant to decide how to use \$20 billion to save the world, I would start by focusing on the challenges that define everyday life for billions of people. My plan would center on three main goals: ending poverty, expanding access to education and healthcare, and combating climate change. These goals aren't arbitrary; they come from real, urgent needs that shape both our present and our future.

The funding would be distributed across international projects designed to build sustainable, self-sufficient communities. For example, a significant portion would support renewable energy initiatives like solar and wind power, making sure that clean power becomes a global ubiquity, not a privilege. Another major investment would target healthcare, such as free vaccination programs, training more local medical workers and modernized clinics in developing regions.

This plan isn't merely about giving money; it's about helping people build stronger, self-sufficient societies that can subsequently support themselves.

It would also be important for influential leaders and organizations to support these projects through their patronage. Their support would not only provide money but also inspire others to join and show real grit in fighting global problems. For example, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has experience funding global health and vaccination programs in low-income countries (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2022). This type of foundation campaigns could work with the World Health Organization and local governments to make sure vaccines and basic care reach remote areas.

Education is also very important. I would create a new group called the "Global Future Education Foundation". This group would help poor countries build schools, train teachers, and bring computers and internet to classrooms. Famous leaders like Barack Obama from the United States and Malala Yousafzai from Pakistan could be public sponsors who speak for this foundation and ask countries to support it, even amid political and economic challenges. In this way, respected world leaders from different regions would work together so more children can go to school and have a better future.

To avoid bias or corruption, an independent organization would watch how the money is used and share this information clearly with everyone, ensuring no group can perpetrate misuse or favoritism. Managing a project of this scale would be overwhelming, but it would be worth it because it could lead to healthier communities, better education, and a cleaner planet.

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Ildemar Salazar

Learning English at 43: An Advantage, Not a Limitation

When I first arrived at the University of Florida English Language Institute, I thought my biggest challenge would be learning a new language. However, over time, I realized something more important: studying English at 43 is not a disadvantage, but a great opportunity.

In the classroom, most of my classmates are much younger than me. They are just starting their journeys, while I already have a professional career and a family. Instead of being a problem, this difference has become a strength. My experience helps me understand situations better, share real examples, and participate with a clear purpose.

One of the most valuable parts of this experience is that I continue managing my responsibilities while studying. I still take care of my job, and at the same time, I am a father of two young children. Balancing everything has helped me become more disciplined and focused. Every day is a challenge, but also an opportunity to grow.

The most important thing is that I am enjoying the process. I have learned that a language is not only about grammar or vocabulary, it is about opening new doors. It helps me communicate better, connect with people from different cultures, and grow as a person. Little by little, I feel more confident. I participate more, understand more, and I am less afraid of making mistakes.

I have also learned that progress depends on attitude, not age. Every small step matters. Every conversation, every mistake, and every effort is part of the journey. With consistency, results come.

Today, I see this experience as more than just an English course. It is an investment in my personal and professional growth. Learning English at 43 is not late it is the right time. Because when you have a clear goal and strong motivation, you can achieve anything.

Abdulrahman Murshid

RW 60

Prompt: A government hires you as a consultant to determine how best to use \$20 billion to save the world. What is your plan?

If I were given \$20 billion to save the world, I would not spend the money in an arbitrary way. Instead, I would create a perfect plan to help both people and the Earth. I would focus on solving problems that affect us today, such as climate change, global health, and education.

First of all, I would invest a large part of the money in climate change. Climate change is an overwhelming problem that affects everyone. This investment would help create cities powered by clean energy and skies that are no longer polluted. I would also build solar panels in poor areas that have never had continuous electricity. Moreover, I would plant millions of trees to help the environment and reduce the effects of climate change.

Second, I would invest in helping people who live in poverty. In many parts of the world, families, children, and older people do not have access to affordable healthcare. What is even worse is that some of them might not have access at all, which is very sad. On top of that, some areas do not have clean water or basic medicine. I would build hospitals and send doctors and nurses to these areas. Additionally, I would offer free vaccines and clean water systems. These simple changes would save millions of lives and give people hope.

Lastly, I would put a big part of the money into education because it is the key to a better future, and everyone should have the opportunity to access free education. I strongly believe that education should be free, so I would make this change even if it were in only one part of the world. In addition, I believe that the world should be a place where success is based on merit, not on wealth or connections. I would build schools, provide free study supplies, and offer technology such as computers.

Silvano Tandela

My Journey at the ELI

My journey at the English Language Institute (Fall 25 & Spring 26) has been nothing short of transformative a story of growth, courage, and discovery that I will carry with me for the rest of my life.

I come from Angola, where Portuguese has always been the language of my everyday life. For years, it shaped how I expressed myself, how I connected with others, and how I understood the world. Stepping into the United States and into a completely English-speaking environment was both exciting and intimidating. At first, every conversation felt like a challenge, every sentence a test of confidence. But deep inside, I knew I was not just learning a language, I was building a bridge to my dreams.

From the very first days at the ELI, I realized that this experience would go far beyond textbooks and grammar rules. Over the course of two semesters, I immersed myself in an environment that demanded effort but rewarded persistence. Slowly but surely, I began to see progress. Words became sentences, sentences became conversations, and conversations became confidence. Today, I can proudly say that I feel prepared to move forward toward my goals in the United States finishing my university education and beginning a professional journey with clarity and determination.

However, what truly made this experience unforgettable was not only the academic growth, but the human connections. At the ELI, I discovered a new world filled with diverse cultures, perspectives, and stories. I met incredible people from different parts of the globe, each one bringing unique experiences that expanded my understanding of life. These interactions taught me how to communicate beyond language, how to listen deeply, and how to connect with

people despite differences. I leave this experience more open-minded, more adaptable, and more prepared to thrive in a global environment.

The cultural activities played a fundamental role in my development. They allowed me to learn English in the most natural and enjoyable way through laughter, interaction, and real-life experiences. I lived many “firsts” during this journey. I learned how to play volleyball, explored new games, and engaged in activities that pushed me out of my comfort zone. Among the most memorable moments were the trips to Clearwater Beach and St. Augustine. Both experiences were unforgettable, not only for their beauty but for the shared joy and connection they created among students. In those moments, learning felt effortless; language became a tool for living, not just studying.

Inside the classroom, I was equally inspired. I had such great teachers who I am grateful for, because they did more than teach me subjects, they taught me my lessons, history and culture. I will always remember proudly all my professors: Lynne Clark- GM30-40, Todd Allen RW 40-50, Olga Moody LS30 & Maya Shastri LS40.

The lessons with the Language Assistants (LAs) (Rose & Ellijah/ Paola & Shawn) were dynamic, engaging, and incredibly practical. They provided us with vocabulary and real-world expressions that I continue to use in my daily life. More than that, they created an environment where making mistakes was part of the process—an environment where growth was inevitable.

One of the greatest honors during my time at the ELI was receiving a scholarship that allowed me to continue for an additional semester. That moment represented more than financial support—it symbolized recognition, opportunity, and the beginning of my achievements in the United States. It is a milestone I will always remember as my first major accomplishment on this journey.

Another defining experience was my participation in the Florida International Leadership Conference (FILC). During the entire weekend, I engaged in activities focused on leadership, teamwork, and self-discovery. It was an intense and inspiring experience that challenged me to grow beyond my limits. One of the highlights was competing in the Elevator Pitch competition. Standing in front of a large audience and presenting in English for the first time was both nerve-racking and exhilarating. Yet, in that moment, I realized how far I had come. What once felt impossible had become reality. That experience strengthened my confidence and marked a turning point in my personal and professional development.

As I conclude my journey at the ELI, I do so with a renewed vision of the world, a stronger sense of purpose, and a deeper sense of gratitude. I arrived as a Portuguese speaker with a dream, and I leave as a bilingual individual ready to embrace new challenges. More than learning English, I learned how to believe in myself, how to adapt, and how to grow through every experience.

This is not the end of my journey it is the beginning of a new chapter. And as I move forward, I carry with me every lesson, every memory, and every connection that made this experience truly UNFORGETTABLE.

Scutaru Vasile

RW60

“How to spend \$19B without breaking the planet (or your brain)”

Did you ever ask yourself what would you do with twenty billion dollars in your life? Well, you don't have to because I am a multi-billionaire now and I am going to tell you, my story. First of all, I thought about buying a private island, unlimited food, drinks, and getting my squad to join. It sounded like a good plan, except, I received the money from the government (yikes...) and they expected me of all people to save our dear world. It takes one look at my bank account and my spending to understand that I AM NOT the best person for that. But whatever, their mistake,

not mine. Imagine the pressure I have right now, writing this story for you and thinking how I will fail and end up in jail, probably, or, maybe on a far, far island.

Okay, time to get serious. Our world is suffering and I have the chance to fix that. What to do in the first place with all that money? I think this is easy even for you: let's get rid of all the phones in the world... Before you throw rocks and tomatoes at me, let me explain: THIS IS A JOKE!

We face a bigger problem and of course I am talking about mass consumption and waste. Now, when I provided you with the example from above about buying an island, unlimited food and drinks, that is just a consequence of having a lot of money and a trick by my mind that led me to buy something in excess. My mind encouraged me to purchase more than I actually needed (extra food, clothes, gadgets) resulting in waste of goods that is affecting our world right now.

Mass consumption increases production. With increased production, we have more disposal and subsequently, higher consumption directly results in higher levels of waste around the world. In theory we have a lot more problems that I stumbled upon searching for a solution, for example, overbuying, short product lifespans, packaging waste, disposable culture and food waste. It is time to deploy my plan and wholeheartedly start this project. Having a limited budget of only \$ 19 billions (one is going for my mental health, do not judge me) we cannot focus on all of the problems, but rather an important one. The most promising one to fix is going to be food waste. According to the United States Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA, 2020), about one-third of all food in the U.S. is never eaten, and food waste is the largest material sent to landfills in the country and in the world. An estimated 30-40 % of the U.S. food supply is wasted, equal to 133 billion pounds of food. Now it is time to introduce you where the money will help. The concept of *circular economy*. Circular economy directly addresses this problem of wasting food. Instead of take, make and dispose model we currently use, circular economy minimizes the waste and extend the life of our resources. With around a dozen of billions, we can develop systems and strategies that will help applying this concept. Solving the problem in a short time is impossible but with a good start it could lead to a bright future by 2050 already. This concept will create also programs like *food recovery* that will redirect the surplus of food to those in need.

Another one could possibly be *composting and organic recycling* to return nutrients to the soil instead of landfills. *Redesigning the supply chains* is also important in order to reduce overproduction and spoilage. Did I forget something? No, no, all good. We can end it here and I can go to look for an island to buy on Facebook marketplace, you can find good stuff there.

Alright, alright you caught me again, \$ 9 billion left. Just to be fair to our planet, \$ 4 billion will go to reforestation and ecosystem restoration. A large-scale tree planting and forest conservation project along with protecting the wetlands, mangroves, and grasslands to enhance biodiversity and carbon sequestration will make our planet happy, I think (well deserved).

Other \$ 2 billion will go to Renewable Energy project. Investing in solar, wind, and battery storage projects will reduce the dependence on fossil fuels. In the same category, I would fund the research of next-gen clean energy technologies like green hydrogen. I hope, maybe this will help with my electrical bill a little, no kidding, did you see the bill for February? (Florida can scare me sometimes).

\$1 billion that is left, of course, is going to the ELI teachers, who are helping us and are very patient when needed. The last \$1 billion is going to the ELI students of course, that will motivate everybody to come up with more ideas like mine, heh. This is a great plan; I think my forebearers would be proud of me.

In conclusion, the world we love is saved, teachers are happy, students are motivated to study and wait a second, $10 + 4 + 4 + 1 + 1 =$ not 19. This is what I meant that I am bad with numbers, too late to change something now. No money left for me.... Let me go and reheat my noodles (cries in silence). Thank me later.



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