

AROUND THE WORLD AND BACK

Instructor draws from international experience to teach adult English learners

By Jacob Peterson

After completing her general education at San Joaquin Delta College, Amber Wolak planned to go to law school after graduating from UCLA. But a lengthy stint in the Peace Corps and her experiences living abroad changed those plans.

“They sent me to Mauritania, West Africa, and I taught English for two years,” Wolak recalls. “I really loved that experience and also realized how difficult it is when you’re thrown into a living situation where you don’t speak the language and you need to rely on other people.”

When her time in Africa was over she taught English in China for another year before returning home and completing her master’s in English, and she began teaching at Delta College in 2013. Since then has been integral in developing new approaches to teaching English as a second language (ESL) within the San Joaquin Adult Education Consortium, having started a bridge class with fellow consortium member Stockton School for Adults.

“We’re now in the third semester of offering it at Stockton School for Adults,” Wolak says. “And that’s a Delta College course that we bring to the students.”

Cynthia Segura, originally from Mexico, says she joined the bridge class because it helped her transition to the college.

“This class, ESL 82 bridge, helped me with my daily activities,” Segura remembers. “I improved my English, so now I feel comfortable talking or answering calls, or asking for some things in any place.”

Segura says she was initially scared of taking college courses, but after taking the bridge course she felt far more confident in her ability to do so. She is now in her third semester of studying business and entrepreneurship at Delta College.

Through the bridge courses, students not only take the ESL offerings at the adult school but also get to experience a college-level ESL course. On top of edu-



Amber Wolak taught English in West Africa and China before returning to teach ESL at San Joaquin Delta College—where she herself completed her general education. Photo by Bea Ahbeck

cating new English learners, Wolak says she also tries to provide them with a path towards future careers as well.

“I have them write essays and do research on future careers and future pathways, so they can actually use that information as they figure out what they want to do moving forward,” Wolak says.

Working with the consortium also means making sure the course offerings of Delta College and the other consortium member schools compliment each other. Wolak says part of doing this meant cutting the college’s lowest level ESL courses and referring students to the adult schools instead.

“Delta College now has four semester levels of ESL so that there’s a seamless transition when they max out at the adult school,” Wolak said. “Then they’re ready to enter at our lowest level at Delta College.”

As difficult as coordinating with other schools and programs alongside teaching her own courses can be, Wolak knows from her own experiences how important it is to make the effort for new English learners.

“I moved to China without knowing any language as well,” she says, “so I think that helps me be patient with my students because I know that feeling.”



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For more information about English as a second language and other adult learning programs in the area, visit the San Joaquin Adult Education Consortium’s website at sjadulthood.org

CAREER CONNECTIONS

Education liaison works to evaluate needs of and build relationships with industry partner

By Jacob Peterson

Christopher Rodarte was an experienced warehouse worker who'd held jobs at Amazon and UPS before a medical issue forced him to stop working in 2019. As he prepared to reenter the workforce nearly five years later, he knew he needed to sharpen his skill set and bolster his resume with recent accomplishments to counter his stint of unemployment.

This led Rodarte to enroll in a forklift certification course at the Manteca Education & Training Center, one the Logistics Industrial Maintenance and Manufacturing (LIMM) Pathway courses offered at the school. After completing the program, he was able to find a new job at Costco.

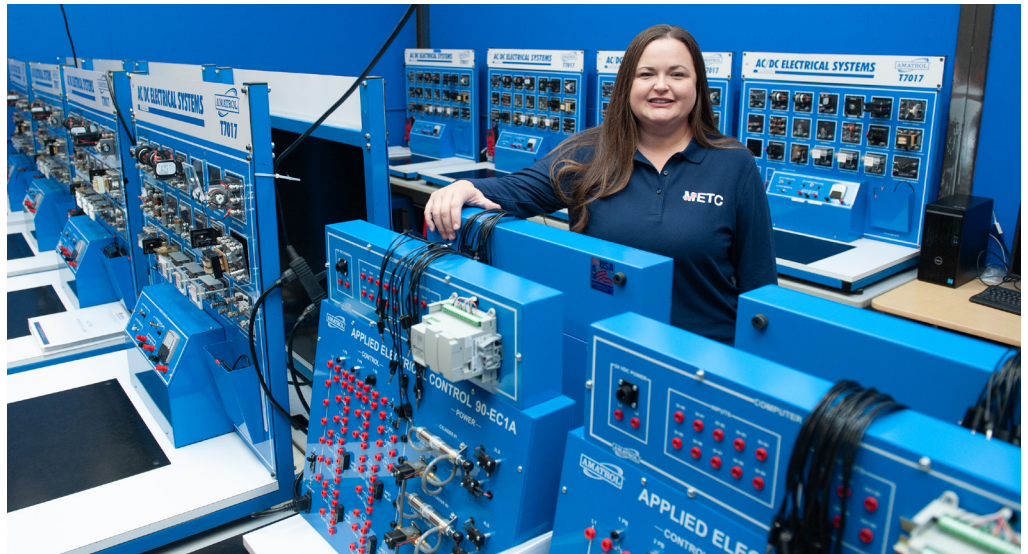
"I believe they wouldn't have even called me in in the first place if I didn't have that class," Rodarte says. "I think it showed that I really had initiative."

Helping students transition from the classroom to a job requires building relationships with industry partners. A key player in building these relations is Miranda Silveira, an adult education liaison who works with both the Manteca center and the San Joaquin Adult Education Consortium (SJAEC), a group of educational institutions dedicated to supporting the educational and economic success of adult learners in the region. Silveira acts as a main point of contact between the schools and industry partners with a focus on helping students.

She also helps SJAEC students achieve success by connecting them with services like the workforce development program San Joaquin County WorkNet, which offers a range of services to help individuals prepare for and find employment while also supporting local employers with recruitment and training needs.

"I want to help students get funded through either WorkNet or another funding source if they need funding for classes, and to maintain and nurture the relationships that we've made in the community," Silveira says.

A key part of her job is learning the needs of various local industries and us-



Adult Education Liaison Miranda Silveira helps establish and maintain relationships with businesses to ensure career training courses meet local labor needs and helps students overcome barriers to ensure their employability. Photo by Bea Ahbeck

ing that information to tailor the LIMM Pathway programs to prepare students for the workforce. An example Silveira gives is how they changed the forklift classes that Rodarte benefited from, which were originally only two days.

"That's not enough time for a well-trained candidate," Silveira says. "So we, in talking to the industry, have figured out that we should do a 17-day program."

The extended training goes over various aspects of safety, OSHA regulations and lessons on how to use different types of forklifts. Silveira says these conversations have continued to further improve the course.

Other LIMM Pathway courses cover welding and electricity fundamentals. Silveira says there is a big need for people with these skills in local industry.

"If something breaks they can fabricate, they can create something," Silveira says. "They can weld something back together and do some light electrical work without having to call in a specific repairman."

Silveira says industry partners help by not only giving information on what gaps need to be filled, but by providing material and other support for the courses. She notes CBC Steel Buildings as an important partner in this regard.

"They supply our school with their scrap metal, which help keep our class costs

down," Silveira says. "That's been a really good relationship for us."

These partnerships can also translate to employment opportunities, she says, with many students later being hired by the various partners.

"They'll email me every now and then and ask for a list of recent graduates," Silveira says. "Or if I have somebody that is specifically interested in that, then I just send their name over."

Silveira says she enjoys the work.

"I like the industry side of things, learning about industry and figuring out how to tailor that to our classes and how to prepare students for the workforce," Silveira says. "They're pretty eager to hire our graduates."



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To learn more about the programs at the Manteca Education & Training Center, visit metc.mantecausd.net/programs. To learn about more adult education opportunities in the area, visit the San Joaquin Adult Education Consortium's website at sjadulced.org.

“TALK, LISTEN, ACT AND DREAM”

Student sharpens English language skills—in the classroom and at the Tracy Adult School ESL Café—on her way back to nursing career

By Jacob Peterson

After living in the U.S. for nearly a decade, Sang Mi Ahn is back on the path to continuing the nursing career she left behind in Korea, with the help of the Tracy Adult School.

The 46-year-old Sang arrived in the U.S. with her husband for the latter’s job in 2016 before settling in Tracy in 2018. She worked as a nurse in Korea for four years, but her initial lack of English skills proved an obstacle to continuing her career in the states.

“I really loved my job, but my English wasn’t enough to work here,” Sang says.

Sang says she was also spurred to improve her English after a bad experience when she first moved here. She remembers a cashier refusing to help her at a store because of her English.

“Don’t talk to me, I don’t understand your English,” she shouted at me,” Sang says. “So I was pretty frightened and pretty nervous.”

Sang began her English learning journey in 2021, and chose English as a second language classes at the Tracy Adult School for a practical reason—proximity. As a mother of three, she needed a school close to home so she could be there for her children.

“I don’t have a lot of time to study because my kids are young,” Sang says. “I have to be back home before 2 p.m. and I cannot drive to a faraway place.”

Though she chose the school for convenience, she says she’s happy with the results so far. Sang notes one of the benefits of the classes is the friendly environment they foster.

“They are very friendly and they always support us,” Sang said. “It is a very, very comfortable place to me because they give enough time to speak and they give us enough time to think.”



Sang Mi Ahn says Tracy Adult School’s ESL Café class—in which students work at an on-campus cafe and earn their food handlers certifications—helped her become more confident with her language skills. Photo by Bea Ahbeck

As a student at the Tracy Adult School, Sang has also taken its ESL Café course, which has students earn their food handlers certifications while working at a café on campus. Having completed the course in 2022, Sang says the experience made her more confident about English and optimistic about continuing her nursing career.

“They asked questions and encouraged long conversations so that students in the café could speak more in English,” Sang says. “As I developed cooperation and quick communication, I gradually became more confident in English.”

In addition to completing intermediate, advanced and café ESL courses, Sang has also taken citizenship test preparation courses offered by the school. She praises her teachers for helping her make her way

back to her original path and encouraging her to explore new directions.

“All the teachers help us grow by making us talk, listen, act, and dream,” Sang says.



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If you would like more information about ESL and other programs offered at the Tracy Adult School, go to tracyadult.tracy.k12.ca.us/. To learn about more adult education opportunities in the area, visit the San Joaquin Adult Education Consortium’s website at sjadulted.org.

HEALTHCARE OPPORTUNITIES ABOUND

The Lodi Adult School offers several pathways to a medical career, with more in the works

By Jacob Peterson

As part of a unified effort to address the ever growing need for healthcare professionals, the Lodi Adult School works to provide ample opportunities for students looking to enter the field.

Julie Jansen, the school's principal, says it is the career technical education (CTE) center of the Lodi Unified School District. As such, Lodi Adult School offers a variety of classes and programs to its students.

One student to take courses at the Lodi Adult School is 47-year-old Chhonda Roy. Originally from Bangladesh, Roy came to the U.S. in 2020 and was directed to the adult school by her daughter and sister.

"I was a teacher back home so I was pretty confident in my English," Roy says. "But as you can understand I was nervous, I'm not really a talker but more of a listener."

After taking some initial English classes to sharpen her skills, Roy says one of her teachers encouraged her to pursue some of the allied health classes at the school. Roy found herself enjoying the courses, and currently works as a medical assistant at a clinic in Stockton.

"I'm grateful to that teacher and I'm grateful to the Lodi school for their encouragement," Roy says. "I'm very happy to take these classes and if I get more opportunities then I'd like to take them."

There are also plans to expand and offer more courses for aspiring healthcare professionals. Jansen says part of this expansion comes from her work with the Advisory Board for Healthcare Partners Northern San Joaquin Valley—an employer driven Health Care Sector Partnership.

"That's multi-region now, so we are partnering with them," Jansen says. "We are looking at providing CPR classes for those incumbent workers in our community."

Community healthcare workers is another area Jansen says the school wants to look at and is confident there will be more to come as planning progresses.

"Adults are also able to take those CTE classes with our high school students," Jansen says. "We have lots of different programs that we offer our community here



Lodi Adult School Principal Julie Jansen says her school is the career technical education (CTE) center of the Lodi Unified School District for both high school and adult students. Photo by Bea Ahbeck

and we're continuing to grow."

Key programs she noted are those aimed at potential healthcare professionals, with Jansen pointing to the dental assisting program as an example.

"We actually have a large amount of adults in that program right now and those adults are students who are preparing for the dental assisting field," Jansen says. "They are certified when they leave here to work in a dental office, and then they also receive their X-ray certification."

Certification is provided in a separate course on dental radiation safety. The 80-hour course is approved by the California Dental Board and includes practice on manikins and actual patients.

Jansen says the program also has an externship component, with many students hired right after the 10-month program ends.

Another program for aspiring healthcare professionals is the medical assisting program. Jansen says there is a 10-month course for K12 students and an accelerated 19-week nighttime program for adults.

Other options include a certified nursing assistant program and an emergency medical response (EMR) course. The former program prepares students to successfully complete certification to work as a nursing

assistant in California while the latter focuses on teaching the necessary EMR skills and how emergency medical technicians respond to critical situations.

The Lodi Adult School benefits from state funding for English Language Learner (ELL) healthcare education, and is the fiscal lead for that grant in partnership with the Stockton School for Adults and the Tracy Adult School. The schools are part of the San Joaquin Adult Education Consortium, a partnership of educational institutions dedicated to supporting the educational and economic success of adult learners in the San Joaquin Delta Community College District service area."



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For more information about healthcare career training and other programs at Lodi Adult School, visit adulthood.lodiUSD.net/. To learn about more adult education opportunities in the area, visit the San Joaquin Adult Education Consortium's website at sjadulthood.org.

FILLING THE GAPS

Delta College works to fill workforce development needs in San Joaquin County

By Jacob Peterson

The San Joaquin Adult Education Consortium (SJAEC) and San Joaquin Delta College are taking important steps to ensure the students can not only afford an education, but also transition to the workforce with the help of the San Joaquin County WorkNet and DARTE (Directing Adults on the Right TrAC for Employment).

WorkNet is a service which provides employment and training opportunities for those looking for work in the county. Heather Maloy, the program manager for the (SJAEC), says the service is integrated into a student's first weeks with the program.

"They're introduced to a WorkNet case manager and all the support services they offer," Maloy says. "Then the DARTE program comes in and that's when they do the application workshop to Delta College."

The DARTE Program is an important part of San Joaquin Delta College's partnerships with local adult schools through the consortium. This program allows students to complete transfer level English and math courses while they are in the process of completing their high school diplomas at the adult schools

"DARTE essentially was developed because when we were doing these transition-like activities there was nothing, no place for our students to really call a home base," Maloy says. "So we provided this structure of the DARTE program where it's this first year experience set of classes. They're free, open educational resources."

One student to make use of the program is Janet Cuevas Del Rio, who's learned about the program while looking to both continue her education and find a part time job. She says the DARTE program was vital to her being able to accomplish these goals.

"I don't know if I would have been able to do it without the program," Del Rio says. "It was instant support. I needed a laptop? Boom, there it was. Internet? They worked to help me get it."

Del Rio says the DARTE Program helped her find full-time work, as well as internship opportunities.

Maloy says that for students who are specifically looking for training programs, the



CTE program manager at San Joaquin Delta College Michelle Castanon. Photo by Bea Ahbeck

school makes sure to connect them to WorkNet services. Maloy says one of the school's goals is to make sure students are aware of these services when they're making the transition from adult school to the college.

This effort towards workforce development isn't limited to services like DARTE or WorkNet, either. Michelle Castanon, a career technical education (CTE) program manager for San Joaquin Delta College, estimates that 78% of the courses on campus are related to career training.

"They are certificate programs where students can finish anywhere between one semester leading to two years," Castanon says. "A lot of them are going to be more of the short term, so that way they can get directly to work."

Castanon also works as the manager for the campus's Workforce Development Center, which she says has a focus on making sure students are able to get into well-paying, high-demand jobs. She says part of doing this successfully is making sure people knew the full breadth of opportunities available.

"When people think of CTE, they do think of vocational programs, the welding, the electrical, the machine shop," Castanon says. "However, they don't realize that there are non-traditional roles in that aspect."

Some of these non-traditional roles include early childhood education, law enforcement and even stagecraft.

"These are where the students are really getting the opportunities for an education levels higher than a high school diploma, but that do not necessarily require a bachelor's degree," Castanon says.

Castanon notes that there are also specific areas where employees are more in demand than others. One gap she says they are focused on is logistics, industrial maintenance and manufacturing, or LIMM.

"They are becoming the new workforce at that entry level phase to be able to support the businesses that are coming through, especially with San Joaquin County," Castanon says. "We have all of the facilities there that need some type of technically trained individuals to support them in that maintenance field."



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To learn more about how the San Joaquin Adult Education Consortium and San Joaquin Delta College can help you meet your job-training and educational goals, visit <https://www.deltacollege.edu/campus-offices/instruction-and-planning/career-technical-education-and-workforce-development/dsaea> and sjadulthood.org/.

BACK IN THE USA

Young student who was born in the United States but raised in Mexico gets boost from ESL classes at Lincoln Unified Adult School

By Jacob Peterson

Johana Cruz was born in Oakland, but her family moved to Mexico when she was just 4 years old. They returned to the United States last year when she was 17 years old and—though she knew some English from movies and music—she realized she'd need to improve her language skills. She learned about English as a second language (ESL) classes at Lincoln Unified Adult School from a cousin, and decided it was a good place to begin her educational journey.

"I decided to start adult school because I wanted to learn English more," Cruz, now 18, said. "I also couldn't start college yet because I wasn't a resident of California."

Cruz says she hopes improving her skills with the language will enable her to pursue a career in the healthcare industry. She credits her cousin with more than just telling her about ESL classes at the school, but for helping her with enrollment and following through with her classes.

"I entered very confused, without understanding almost anything," Cruz remembers. "So she was a big help for me."

Cruz says taking the courses has helped her feel a lot more confident in her overall communication skills.

"Thanks to classes and practice, I'm able to do many things so simply that before I couldn't," Cruz says, "like ordering food, going shopping or going to the gym and asking for help."

Cruz spoke highly of the program, saying her teacher not only helped with her communication skills, but also with helping her figure out what she wanted to do in the future.

"She told me about the [San Joaquin Delta] College and how to apply because I wanted to go to college the next semester," Cruz remembers. "She was very helpful in finding opportunities."

Both San Joaquin Delta College and Lincoln Unified Adult School are mem-



Johana Cruz intends to pursue a career in the medical field after sharpening her English skills at Lincoln Unified Adult School. Photo courtesy of Johana Cruz

bers of the San Joaquin Adult Education Consortium, a partnership of adult education providers aimed at improving adult education in the region by coordinating resources, programs, and services to help adult learners achieve career, academic, and personal success.

Cruz also says the classroom setting was very supportive of her and the other students, making it easier to learn without feeling overly self-conscious.

"The adult school helped me a lot to trust myself and learn from my mistakes," Cruz says. "With my teacher and my classmates, communicating with them was easy for me."

Cruz currently plans to go to college and study for a career as a nursing assistant, confident her new English skills will help her along the way. She says she definitely recommends others in a similar situation seek out ESL programs like those offered

at the Lincoln Unified Adult School.

"This program helped me with a better understanding of the English language," Cruz says. "And now that I know more than before and I feel proud about it."



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For more information about English as a second language and other programs at Lincoln Unified Adult School, visit lincolnadultschool.lusd.net/. To learn about more adult education opportunities in the area, visit the San Joaquin Adult Education Consortium's website at sjadulthood.org.

THINKING OF THE FUTURE

Improved English skills opens door for Afghan student

By Jacob Peterson

When Noman Hamahang and his family arrived in the United States last year as refugees from Afghanistan, he realized that they'd need to improve their English skills to live full and productive lives in their new home.

"Our main purpose was to learn the basics of English for communication," Hamahang said. "It's the common things we should do for people who we don't know how to communicate with."

Hamahang was connected with the Lincoln Unified Adult School through his family's caseworker. He said this caseworker was incredibly helpful in getting him registered at the school.

"He informed us about the adult school and gave us information about it," Hamahang said. "It was so hard for the first time, we couldn't speak any English."

Lincoln Unified Adult School is a member of the San Joaquin Adult Education Consortium, a partnership of adult education providers aimed at improving adult education in the region by coordinating resources, programs, and services to help adult learners achieve success.

Hamahang says that learning a new language was difficult at first, but he knew he had to persevere, as without being able to communicate he and his family wouldn't be able to do basic things like go grocery shopping or speaking with a doctor.

"The country that you are living in, it is so important to learn the language," Hamahang said. "That's very important, I think."

Hamahang notes that one thing that has made learning the language easier was his teachers, whose patience with students he praised.

"In my opinion, I think other instructors should be friendly and patient like my instructors" Hamahang says. "It's because of that that students are able to learn the language."

The importance of learning how to communicate is something Hamahang says



Noman Hamahang found help to improve his English skills at Lincoln Unified Adult School. Photo by Bea Ahbeck

his teachers at the Lincoln Unified Adult School impressed upon him. He remembers one teacher pointing out how beneficial sharpening his English skills would be in the future.

"I discussed my [future] career with my instructor," Hamahang said. "She said, 'You have to learn first, once language isn't so hard you can easily find a good job.'"

Hamahang says his teacher also made sure he was aware that his educational journey didn't have to stop once he was confident in his English skills. He said the prospect of continuing in to higher education in the future is something he's given serious thought.

"Going to a university is something that has definitely become one of my goals," Hamahang said. "I'm just looking to pick a field that best suits my own personality."

Hamahang says he is thankful for his time at the Lincoln Unified Adult School. He has become far more confident in his English skills and recommends others

who struggle with language barriers do the same.

"Now it's easy to talk with people," Hamahang says. "I suggest for everyone if they don't know the language to join the adult school."



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