

Voices from the Field: TESOL Career Pathways

In this collection of essays, ten Hawaii Pacific University's TESOL alumni reflect on their career pathways and what factors have led them to their current positions in the field. As English language teachers, administrators, and teachers of other languages in many corners of the world—from Hawaii and mainland United States to South America, Asia, and the Middle East—their careers are truly diverse and exciting. In these essays, they have opened up and shared stories of struggles, insecurities, dilemmas, perseverance, compassion, open-mindedness, and success. We hope these stories can offer encouragement, insights, and inspiration for other TESOL practitioners.

The essays in this collection are:

Through All Obstacles, by Déjà Monét Driver, Lead English Teacher, CL Haksuk, South Korea

Going for It, by Samar Kassim, Lecturer, Kyushu Sangyo University, Fukuoka, Japan

Posing with the Magic Within, by Bella Congdon, High School English Language Development teacher, Mid-Pacific Institute, Honolulu

Doors That Opened Up, by Helen Arcos, Lecturer of English, Foundations Department at Higher Colleges of Technology, Ruwais, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates

A Teacher and Traveler's Journeys, by Robert Eric Henderson, English Teacher, Colegio Britanico de Cartagena in Cartagena, Colombia

Keeping Yourself in the TESOL Loop, by Tyson P. de Moura Umberger, Lecturer and Fellow, Global Teaching Institute, Tokyo International University, Kawagoe, Saitama, Japan

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Adjusting the Lesson Plan of My Life, by Kri Howland, Global Seminars Advisor, University of California, San Diego

An Elemental Truth, by Lajlim Yang, Director of International Programs and Workforce Development, University of California, Santa Cruz Extension

Through All Obstacles

Déjà Monét Driver

CL Haksuk, South Korea

In a few days, I turn 23 years old. It has been five months since I graduated with my Bachelor's of Arts in TESOL, and it has been three months since I started living in Korea and teaching English at a private school. Am I writing this to brag? Not exactly. My hope is for you to see that as a BA TESOL student, the world is yours.

Even with the best of intentions, getting a job teaching a language to foreigners takes a lot of patience and hope. How did I land a job in just two months? It took a lot of diligence. One third of it was knowing what papers I needed to teach in Korea. Another was getting those papers and applying to jobs that interested me. The final third was interviewing and making the big move to Korea.

Searching for jobs online was easier than I expected. I had missed English Program in Korea's recruiting period for HPU, but it turned out there were more chances than I expected. There were no magic words used. I just simply searched "teach English in Korea" on Google, and a multitude of results appeared. There are a few good websites out there that have job listings which allow job-seekers to look at an array of jobs all in one place. From there, I narrowed down location, age group, and starting time.

I thought I had it in the bag once I narrowed down what jobs I wanted to apply to, but lo and behold, that was just the beginning for me. I started watching vlogs, YouTube videos, and reading blogs on what life in Korea is like for foreigners as well as what required paperwork was needed to get hired. And there was A LOT of paperwork I needed in order to even be considered for some jobs. Recruiting companies websites were useful for finding what papers I needed, and the vlogs were great to see what living in Korea would really be like.

Next came the interviews. I guess you could say interview inquiries came flooding in. Sometimes I had up to two or even three interviews a week with potential schools. I got asked questions such as "How is living to Hawaii?" to "What is your teaching philosophy?" Once I nailed a few interviews, I felt more confident that I could teach.

After that, gathering the paperwork was the last and hardest step. I scoured for information through local resources, sending numerous emails and calling many places trying to figure out how to obtain the paperwork I needed. And I mean paperwork. For the E-2 visa alone, I needed to submit an apostilled FBI background check, an apostilled certificate of completion, an official health check, and an employment contract. It was a tiresome, expensive process that took about two months.



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Now that I'm in Korea, things are easier, and I am working my dream job. When I look back on it, it would have been so much easier to have a guide, and that's what this essay is for: I hope my story can help you when it's your turn to apply for a job overseas.

And finally: Thanks to the TESOL professors and students for their support during the years. We did it!

Deja Monet Driver graduated with a BA TESOL degree from Hawaii Pacific University in May, 2018. She is currently a Lead English teacher at CL Haksuk, South Korea.

Going For It

Samar Kassim

Kyushu Sangyo University, Fukuoka, Japan

'I messed up!' I thought to myself as I stared at the computer screen at my dead-end job four years ago. I had wanted to work in an international field but had chosen a university that wasn't situated in an environment to provide the opportunity I wanted. That was lesson number one. If I wanted to go back to school, I knew my job search would start there. I needed to be sure to pick a school that would have internships, practicums and connections with not only the local community but also parts of the international community. That's what brought me to Hawaii Pacific University (HPU).

I knew I wanted to work abroad in the future in Japan or South Korea after finishing my MA in TESOL. Unfortunately, from my research, I learned that the more desirable jobs in these countries were given to people who were currently residing in those countries. That's why I decided to spend the last semester of my MA studying abroad in Japan. It gave me a chance to network with many teachers already working there and complete my practicums in a Japanese junior high school and university. The chance to network with graduate students who were already teachers in the field was invaluable to my job hunt. I never believed anything could come of networking, but I was wrong. Lesson number two!

Through networking, I was able to get my first teaching job as an assistant language teacher (ALT) at a private high school in Japan. As an entry level teaching job, this was a great job and learning experience. However, I soon realized I wouldn't be able to grow as a teacher unless I could run, plan and manage my own classroom. That left me with only one option in Japan if I wanted to teach alone—university teaching. I was still an inexperienced teacher in my first year of teaching but wanted to get into university teaching ASAP. I started looking into teacher development opportunities and teacher organizations such as JALT to join. I realized that to advance my career I would need to continue working on my professional development. That was the third lesson of my job hunting. I applied to many universities and was rejected by all except one. They saw that I was not as experienced as others but that I was looking to learn, trying to conduct research and engaging in academic associations by writing book/textbook reviews.



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That was how I got my full-time job as a university lecturer a year after graduating from my MA program. Many people told me I was young and rushing it and that I should just take it easy for now. Personally, I wanted the creative freedom to teach using different styles and see what fits best for my students and me. I also wanted to conduct research. All of which are difficult if you aren't teaching your own classes. I will continue not to take it easy going forward, and I encourage others to figure out what they really want to do and go for it regardless of what others may say!

Samar Kassim graduated from the MA TESOL Program at Hawaii Pacific University in 2017. She is currently a Lecturer at Kyushu Sangyo University, Fukuoka, Japan.

Posing with the Magic Within

Bella Congdon

Mid-Pacific Institute, Honolulu

Sitting in my classroom at Mid-Pacific Institute, where I work as a full-time ESL teacher, and trying to remember my journey from an HPU TESOL graduate student till now still seems a bit unreal. In fact, I still have those out-of-body experiences sometimes when I'm in a meeting with folks I work with at Mid-Pacific. "I am one of them now. Really? Wow, should probably say something smart now. Just look cool." How did I go from there to here? It is going to be one of those "hard work pays off at the end" type of stories, plus a tweak of magic and a splash of patience if you ask me. Stop reading if you didn't believe in fairy tales growing up.

Being a type-A person, I always managed to finish my work on time, if not well. Bottomline was, I wanted to be in control and feel prepared. Fast-forward to one year into my graduate school, my type-A personality started to nag about how securing a job as early as my O.P.T. (Optional Practical Training) allowed was crucial. I spent two good afternoons writing a good cover letter and updating my resume. It was well worth it. I still use them. I then relied on my innate FBI searching skills and found the key people to send my resume to at every possible ESL language institute. Some never bothered to email me back (grrr...). Others emailed me back just to tell me that they were not hiring but that they would save my resume for the future. Yet others actually emailed me back for an interview. Being on Dr. Cook's email list, which regularly informed me of ESL job opportunities, also helped tremendously. I landed a few jobs that way. My first job was working for Hawaii English Language Program (HELP), where I met great mentors, enjoyed lots of learning experiences, developed a lot of original materials, and made acquaintances with my wonderful boss, who later became the minister of my wedding ceremony and a lifelong friend. This opened a lot of doors for me, since I now had some teaching experiences in Hawaii on my resume. I started working for almost any major ESL institute you can think of in Honolulu. By the time my O. P. T was over, I had quite an impressive resume.

I went back to Taiwan after I finished my O. P. T. and found a University Lecturer position the same way I got my first job in Hawaii. I worked there for a year and decided to quit to become a writer. I didn't know what I wanted to write about, but being a published EFL textbook author was on my bucket list, so risks were taken. I once again used my most dependable skills to find every publisher possible, came up with a proposal, and published two books.



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When I came back to Hawaii for my husband, who was then my fiancé, I was extra motivated because of his love and support. It was definitely one of the most creative periods in my life. I did a lot of EFL materials developing work for Taiwan. After we got married, I started working for many ESL institutes again. With nearly zero full-time ESL positions in sight, it was pretty frustrating. I constantly felt like I could give and do so much more, but I could only keep on going, stay proud of myself, and believe in what I do.

I have asked nearly all the students I have taught to watch a TED Talk called *Your Body Language Shapes Who You Are* by Amy Cuddy. The trick that is shared in the video is that if you power pose for two minutes before any stressful evaluative situation, such as presentations, interviews or simply asking a person out, you tend to feel more confident and thus do better in those situations. I would always ask my students to do power posing for two minutes before their presentations. It worked for some and didn't work for others. I didn't care and kept on preaching. Fast-forward to the day I had my interview with Mid Pacific Institute. I was placed in a room before they asked me to go in for the interview. When I was in the room, I looked around and felt my jittery stomach. I started power posing for about 5 minutes until they called me in for the interview. The interview went well and I got the job. The chair of the department later on told me that after I left the room, the principal said: "I like her confidence." Ladies and gentlemen, power posing WORKS!

I want to finish by taking you to the back stage of my story. The journey was not always bubbly and glorious, but without the challenges, I wouldn't be where I am at now, so have faith. In the course of my journey, I managed to shamelessly ask the professors in the MA TESOL program for recommendation letters hundreds of times. Without them, I wouldn't even have gotten the interviews. They have my eternal gratitude, and I will pass the favor forward. Have faith and work wonders.

Bella Congdon is a High-School English Language Development teacher at Mid-Pacific Institute, Honolulu. Before her current position, she worked at Hawaii English Language Program, New Intensive Courses in English (NICE) Program, Pili Program at 'Iolani School, ELS Honolulu, Leeward Community College, Hawaii Tokai International College, Tung-Hai University. She is the author of *Fantastic and Enjoyable 愛玩客的旅遊英文*. Taipei: Best Publishing Ltd. and *Follow 30 Blockbusters to Make Your Travel Dream a Reality 30 場票房電影實現你的旅遊英文夢*. Taipei: Best Publishing Ltd.

Doors that Opened Up

Helen Arcos

Higher Colleges of Technology, United Arab Emirates

Completing the MA TESOL program has opened many doors for me, and in essence, it has opened up the world. I am now entering my fourth year as a lecturer at a university in the emirate of Abu Dhabi in the UAE. So, how did I get here?

To begin, this is a life that would have otherwise been unimaginable had I not taken a leap of faith and left my home country of Peru in 2012 to study in the MA TESOL program at HPU. I had a comfortable position at a private school in my hometown, but I wanted more. So, I looked up the program, applied, got the visa – and voilà! I arrived.

As fate would have it, in the MA TESOL program, I met my husband. At the end of our first year, our daughter was born. Upon completion of the program, we wanted to stay in Hawai'i. It was our home, our little paradise on earth. Unfortunately for us, we were burdened by student debt and in need of a larger-than-studio-sized apartment to accommodate our little family, so we had to say goodbye.

My husband, an American, was offered a position as an English teacher at an international school in Abu Dhabi. Hence, we traded the lush green island life of açai bowls and fresh poké for baklava and Arabic tea with endless sand in the desert.

For the first year, I stayed home. Life was easy. My routine consisted of trips to the beach, playdates with my daughter, hanging out with other stay-at-home wives. I was happy. But opportunity for greater things came knocking. My husband had a friend who worked at the university just a block from our home. It was the door that I had been hoping would open, the opportunity that does not happen often.

I emailed my CV, crossed my fingers, prayed, and bothered my husband a bit to do a practice interview with me. Shortly after, I got the call. They scheduled an interview. I was very nervous as this was going to be my first teaching job outside of my home country Peru. I did some volunteer teaching while living in Hawaii and also some tutoring, but this was a real job – at a real university. I was thankful we filled half a suitcase with our university texts from HPU and lugged them with us. I spent time researching what difficulties Arab students face when they learn English, and what techniques work better for them. I remembered our MA TESOL classmates from Saudi Arabia and Iran and the experiences they shared about learning English back home. I also reviewed my capstone portfolio.



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When I arrived to the interview, I felt confident. Anxious, but confident. Then, I was told I was going to be interviewed by a panel – and not just my potential future boss. Even worse, the interview was going to be recorded to be viewed by HR on another campus. Some interviewers were there in the room while others were connected via a Skype-like program called “Zoom.” Confidence level plummeted. I thought to myself, I am a non-native, non-Arab, non-Muslim woman applying for a position that I imagined was probably held by someone with at least one of the above checked.

The little green light on the camera was on. There were people staring at me with awkward but genuine smiles. A guy on a computer screen fumbled with something in the background.

The first question came, and the ice was broken. I breathed - and answered. It was okay. Then, I found a way to keep my anxiety in check. I recalled the mini-lessons that were recorded while studying in the MA TESOL program. So, I imagined it was just another class with Dr. Klein, and my confidence inched forward a bit.

As the interview went on, I realized that not only could I answer their questions, I had good responses. I completely forgot about the camera. HPU prepared me well. There were many questions related to Grammar, and I recalled sitting in Dr. Cook’s class and all of those homework assignments. It was the same for all the questions. Reading? Yeah, I had a class with Jean. Arab culture? Sociolinguistics with Dr. Klein. Assessments? Assessments. I learned more about assessments with Dr. Hanh than I imagined there was to actually know. Then, the last question came, and it was over.

Shortly after, I received a letter containing an official offer of employment for an adjunct position. A year later, I was extended a new contract but this time as a full-time lecturer. All in all, being part of the MA TESOL program didn’t just help me answer questions during the interview. It prepared me for it intellectually and got me through it emotionally. I can look back now and say, “Yes, I did it.”

Helen Arcos graduated with an MA in TESOL from Hawaii Pacific University in 2014. She is currently a Lecturer of English at the Foundations Department at Higher Colleges of Technology, Ruwais, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.

A Teacher and Traveler's Journeys

Robert Eric Henderson

Colegio Britanico de Cartagena in Cartagena, Colombia

Before I left Hawai'i Pacific University, I had already gone to Colombia after having hosted several Colombian couch-surfers. For those of you who don't know, couch-surfers are travelers of the online community Couchsurfing.org, who rely on each other for free places to stay during their travels. My Colombian couch-surfing friends introduced me to their country and advised me where to go there. Along the way, I made many friends with whom I have kept in touch. I had always thought of teaching in Latin America, but I was unsure where I should teach. However, after my trip to Colombia, I knew.

That spring I graduated from HPU and headed towards Cartagena, Colombia, where a friend whom I had met on my last trip lived. This friend introduced me to several people, and those people introduced me to people working at international schools and those working in a government volunteer program in public schools. I always get a little smile when I think about how only knowing just a few people from my time in Hawaii led to all of this.

Despite these advantages, what I soon learned was disheartening as it is to any freshly graduated alum. I did not have enough teaching experience. I was about to pack up my bags from Cartagena and head to another city when I got a call from one of the private schools that had formerly turned me down due to my lack of experience. I was ecstatic. Then, they told me I would be teaching second and third graders. I calmed down. Is this what I wanted? No. However, it was an opportunity too good to let pass. They had no other applicants, and I was lucky enough to know someone working at the school who vouched for me. Sometimes getting a job is a matter of knowing the right person.

I have been at the same school ever since. Has it always been ideal? No, it hasn't, but considering my experience and my current career stage, it's good for me. The good and the bad experiences, especially the bad, have laid the groundwork for the reality of my international teaching position. The connections I have built and the new opportunities made by working at this school have led to even more valuable experiences.

For example, my headmaster helped me enroll in the international Postgraduate Certificate in Education (iPGCE) program at Nottingham University in England while I worked at the school. This in turn will be a pathway for a master's degree in education at the same university.



Henderson, R. E. (2018). A teacher and traveler's journeys. *TESOL Working Paper Series, 16*, 119-120.
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At the iPGCE program face-to-face meeting in Bogota, I was able to network with other teachers in various international schools in Colombia. I learned so much from collaborating, sharing our experiences, and making contacts, all of which might one day open up further work opportunities at international schools.

This is where my journey is now. Taking chances, I was uncertain at times, but it paid off. Although my journey has not been perfect, I have enjoyed overcoming character-building adversity. These things are not just good for me as a person but also for my future employment and, more importantly, my future students.

Robert Eric Henderson graduated with a BA in TESOL from Hawaii Pacific University in 2016. At the time of writing of this essay, he was an English teacher at Colegio Britanico de Cartagena in Cartagena, Colombia. He plans to return to Hawaii Pacific University for an MA in TESOL.

Keeping Yourself in the TESOL Loop

Tyson P. de Moura Umberger

Tokyo International University, Japan

Heading into my last semester of the MA TESOL program, I was focused on passing the capstone and completing the student teaching component of the practicum. By this point in my life, I had only volunteered as a high school French teacher for an elementary after-school program, tutored Spanish to neighbors, and worked as a conversation partner during my undergrad years. So, I essentially had zero teaching experience. However, I benefited from the insight and support of a professor who encouraged me to apply around Honolulu so that I could work and complete my student teaching practicum at the same time.

I realized that if I were placed in a student teaching position, I would be teaching for credit and could only list the experience on my CV as student teaching. This would have been adequate, but I wanted an edge against the competition awaiting me after graduation. I was lucky enough to snatch an opening at EF- International Language Schools. This was great because it gave me real teaching experience in the field while doubling as my practicum.

Shortly before completing my capstone, the regional director of EF offered me a full-time position with benefits, but the offer was contingent on staying at the institution after my graduation and teaching during the busy summer. I accepted the offer, worked as diligently as possible through the rest of the spring and into the summer, and received the promotion by the fall of that year. I took lesson planning, student evaluations, and observations seriously, and I expressed my willingness to work hard. If you volunteer early on in your career, show your eagerness to take on any challenge and to try new things. It pays off.

This was my first full-time teaching position, and looking back on my career, I realize that the hardest part is getting your first full-time position. I stayed in touch with my MA mentor and alma mater and stayed on the job feeds and email lists of openings even when I wasn't looking. What I have found is that there aren't always openings available when you want to get a new position. However, if you keep an eye out year-round, e.g., by staying on the email lists of positions, you get to know when they open and how early to apply, and you start to see the job patterns of different areas of the world.



Umberger, T. P. M. (2018). Keeping yourself in the TESOL loop. *TESOL Working Paper Series*, 16, 121-122.

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Next, I was accepted for a teaching position through a program called REACH through the Center for Intercultural and Multilingual Advocacy at Kansas State University. It was a one-year contract teaching full time at a new university in Ecuador. I found this through TESOL.org and Dave's ESL Cafe jobs listings. It's smart to get your work to pay for membership to associations so that when you do need to find work later, you can receive push notification emails of openings.

When the program came to an end a year later, I moved to Brazil and had the hardest time finding work. I applied everywhere I could find and researched online, but I realized that some places still use word of mouth. I then heard of an immersion school through some friends I had met. I looked them up and applied. I soon was teaching one-on-one private lessons in person and via video chat. However, several months later, I received an email asking to set up an interview for a job at that immersion school. It was part-time and didn't pay much, but I made a lot of connections through that job. I was able to make a full-time schedule by using my part-time job as a hub for finding students to teach privately.

Once I got married and was looking for a place to settle down, I emailed my old director for a reference letter. He wrote me a wonderful letter, but to my pleasant surprise, he mentioned he was hiring at the same university where I taught in the REACH program. After discussing it a bit, I sent him my application and my teaching philosophy among other materials. Soon, we were off to Ecuador again, this time on a work visa rather than a cultural exchange visa. So, sometimes work finds you unexpectedly from places you had forgotten about or wouldn't have imagined.

Two years later and I am now a lecturer and fellow at a university in Tokyo, Japan. I have been able to keep in touch with colleagues, professors, and old bosses as well as stay on job feeds and email groups. Another position besides private one-on-one lessons that I have held on and off has been that of a certified online exam rater and scorer. This has provided me with a little extra income at times when necessary and bought me time while in between positions or on the job hunt. This all pays off and becomes easier the more you work in the field and learn its ins and outs. No matter whether you get lucky or stay in the loop year-round like me, as long as you are persistent and stay positive, you will see that your next adventure is out there. You've just got to be ready.

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Being Open-Minded

Aya Terazawa

Hawaii Pacific University

I have been teaching Japanese and occasionally also Spanish at Hawai'i Pacific University (HPU) for three years. Before I taught here, I was an MA and BA TESOL student. In fact, I was not a TESOL major when I started HPU and was instead a nursing major. I never thought I would be teaching languages someday.

While I was a BA student, I studied Spanish simply because I love to learn languages, and as a result, I received a minor in Spanish. During my BA program studies, my Spanish professor asked me if I could help her students who had been having a hard time learning Spanish. I then started tutoring students as a volunteer at the Center for Academic Success (CAS) at HPU. I quickly found out that students' learning styles are different. So, I made various kinds of games, short quizzes, and other activities. At CAS, there are also language tutors for HPU students who want to practice speaking a foreign language. While I was tutoring at CAS, I was able to get to know the staff, and one day they asked me if I was interested in working as a Spanish and Japanese tutor there. So, I tutored students in Spanish and Japanese speaking at CAS. In fact, I still volunteer Spanish tutoring to students who need help.

When I was about to finish my MA TESOL program studies, the same Spanish professor asked me if I was interested in teaching Japanese at HPU. The Assistant Dean at that time came to my Capstone presentation, and she asked a couple of questions during the presentation. I was also able to talk with her after my capstone presentation. Afterward, I sent my resume to HPU, and I met the Assistant Dean again for my interview. Since she knew I minored in and tutored Spanish at HPU, I was able to teach Spanish and Japanese in my first semester as a faculty member at HPU.

At the same time, I also received a job offer for an English teacher at ELS Honolulu. When I was an MA TESOL student, a good friend of mine was working at ELS, and she asked me if I was interested in teaching there. She talked to the director about me, and I sent the director my resume. Since my friend was working there and I sometimes visited her office, I was able to meet and talk with the director before I officially met her for my interview. By the time I had an interview, I knew the director well, and the interview was very enjoyable. I taught at ELS in the morning, and I taught at HPU in the afternoon. During my first semester after graduation, I taught all three languages. That was pretty tough, but it was such an enriching experience.



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I love languages and really enjoy teaching right now. This is such a great career for me. I found my way to this career simply by showing my interest and passion, taking initiative, and being open-minded about where the path might take me.

Aya Terazawa is currently a Japanese language instructor at Hawaii Pacific University.

Teaching Chinese with a TESOL Degree

Suchun Liu

Defense Language Institute, California

Before coming to Hawaii Pacific University (HPU), I already had two years of teaching experience at the college level in my country, but I knew in order to find a teaching position in the United States, I had to build my resume here. It was not easy finding a teaching position as a foreign TESOL student, but I felt I had a lot to offer to immigrants learning English because I also had to learn English as a second language. So, I applied for an adjunct teaching position at the adult school nearby and was hired!

After graduating from HPU, I relocated to the Midwest. Luckily, I had a part-time job. Still, I never gave up looking for a teaching job. The fact that English is my second language made it hard to compete with native English speakers for TESOL positions at colleges. So, what were my advantages? Every college in the United States has many immigrant students. I could teach from their perspective, especially in courses that may not be as popular among native English-speaking teachers. I applied for an adjunct position to teach English grammar at the local college and was hired.

Having my foot in the door of the local college system also gave me another opportunity to teach Chinese in the local college's extension program. I had never taught Chinese before, but I accepted the challenge. My experience teaching Chinese led me to find another contracted job teaching Chinese at the Berlitz Language Center. These two Chinese teaching jobs made me realize that I might be more marketable teaching Chinese than English in the United States. I started to look around and found an opening for a Chinese instructor position at the Defense Language Institute in Monterey, California. I got my first full-time position in the United States after several interviews and language tests!

Knowing what I am lacking in is always my driving force. I knew that even though I am a native speaker of Chinese, I needed to work on my Chinese language knowledge immediately after taking this job. My school fortunately provides a lot of opportunities for professional development to faculty. Working in a team-teaching environment also helps me learn from others. After several years as a teacher, I applied and was accepted for a team leader position. I was able to lead a class of 10 students and later a class of 18 students. This position gave me a lot of opportunities to try out my own ideas, learn from my mistakes, and continue to improve them.



Liu, S. (2018). Teaching Chinese with a TESOL degree. *TESOL Working Paper Series*, 16, 125-126.
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Later, under the encouragement of my chair, I applied for the department chair position. This was a job that I would have never thought to apply for or thought I was capable of doing, but I was hired! Serving as a chair provided me with a whole new perspective on teaching. I was able to spend increasingly more time on curriculum design and teacher training during the past 6 years. Although I am no longer in the department chair position, that experience has enriched my teaching in many ways and continues to open more doors for me to explore.

Every job I did helped to pave the way for the next. I never set out a detailed plan for my career. I constantly prepared myself for the next challenge by learning from each experience. And I have been very fortunate to have my chair as my mentor and to coach me along the way.

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Adjusting the Lesson Plan of My Life

Kri Howland

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No one would exactly laugh when I used to say I wanted to find a job that would pay for me to travel the world. The reactions were always more of a scoff, occasionally accompanied by an eye-roll, or a nonchalant, “Yeah, wouldn’t that be nice,” kind of response. To them--my peers, my neighbors, my family--I was just another dreamer in a small town full of dreamers until one day I would finally wake up and face reality like everyone else.

Looking back, it’s almost profound: I think my ambition to travel has forced me to face reality in ways that staying in my small, albeit wonderful, hometown could never have done. I took the first big step toward realizing this fervent goal of mine by moving 5,000 miles from Massachusetts to Hawaii for college. I took another step when I left the country for the first time to study abroad in Japan for a year, another step when I fit in an additional semester abroad in England, another step when I applied for the M.A. TESOL program, another step when I started to work in the Study Abroad Office as a Graduate Assistant... Fair warning: if you want to chase your dreams, you’re going to be taking quite a lot of, oftentimes uncomfortable but usually very fulfilling, steps.

I’ve come to learn that most Study Abroad Offices have two basic requirements: a Master’s Degree and personal study abroad experience. There are exceptions, of course: some advisors I’ve worked with never went to graduate school, and some have traveled extensively but didn’t participate in an official study abroad program. But if you’re already making headway on the first, you may want to consider partaking in the latter. I still reference my degree and my study abroad experiences almost daily at work, and it is on this foundation that I will continue to grow my career in International Education.

As a Graduate Assistant, I forced myself to keep asking for more and more responsibilities to gain as much experience as possible in the limited appointment I’d been granted. This worked out even better than I’d hoped when my Director was able to prove to the school that another full-time staff position was needed and encouraged me to apply. That was how I obtained my first full-time job post-graduation: expressing my desire to improve, asking for challenging assignments, contributing to the goals of the office in a meaningful way, and advocating for myself. I find that those objectives continue to aid me to this day.



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Once I felt I'd gotten a handle on the general operations and requirements related to my position in the Study Abroad Office, I began delving into more specialized areas. For example, I became an Alternative Responsible Officer (ARO) for incoming international exchange students and issued DS20-19 visa documents. I worked with the Japanese Consulate in Honolulu to arrange and co-lead a government-sponsored trip to Japan for twenty three HPU students. I participated on interview committees for various positions to get a feel for what hiring managers were looking for. I did a recruitment cycle in South East Asia for International Admissions. I joined a faculty-led program to Cambodia. Experimenting with what you want to do in life doesn't have to end with your time in college, and if I hadn't continued advocating for myself (with an extremely supportive Director guiding me), I'm not sure where I would be now although I know I likely wouldn't be enjoying it nearly as much.

It was during this time of experimentation at the workplace that I came to focus on faculty-led and group programming. It involves my love of teaching, group dynamics, study abroad, self-reflection, access for students of diverse backgrounds, structure balanced with (often necessary) spontaneity, and academics. Once I realized this, I let my network of colleagues I'd acquired know what type of position I was looking for, and an open job for a faculty-led coordinator at University of California San Diego was suggested. I applied, emphasizing that my TESOL M.A. experiences aided my understanding of teaching techniques and faculty collaboration, and moved to San Diego upon their offer. Within a few months, I was able to obtain a promotion to a higher position within the same branch of the office.

I'm not sure what my future will hold or where I will "end up," but I am confident that as long as I continue to reflect on my goals and adjust the lesson plan of my life where appropriate, I'll always be able to pursue the dreams of that small town girl from Massachusetts.

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An Elemental Truth

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How would I describe my career path? A journey.

Through this journey, however, I have encountered all sorts of characters who helped me develop my current modus operandi, “Don’t stand in your own way because plenty of people will do it for you.”

I’ve been told, “But Lajlim, I just don’t really see you as an administrator” when I expressed interest in administration.

I’ve been told, “You’re not the right fit and you just don’t have enough experience” more than once.

I’ve thought to myself, “Maybe I didn’t graduate from the right university or perhaps I should have studied this instead of that” a dozen of times.

I would often think, “I shouldn’t apply because I only meet about 60% of the requirements.”

Worst of all, I have a habit of internalizing the above and being my own worst critic, perpetuating insecurities and the notion that I’m not good enough.

In the face of obstacles, I often have had to imagine myself in a position and a place that excited me to reinforce the idea that I am worthy. More importantly, though, I have discovered on my journey one elemental truth—the importance of mentorship.

Each step of the way, I have received encouragement, support, and guidance from various mentors—mentors who I still call on for help, both professionally and personally. Indeed, mentorship has really been the key to my success. Moreover, mentorship shouldn’t end after a certain age or after a certain milestone. Mentorship should be for a lifetime. So how do you recognize and seek mentorship? It’s not as difficult as you may think. They come as friends, as teachers, as colleagues, and as supervisors.

A mentor is inspirational in some way, shape, or form, having qualities and skills that you admire and want to emulate. Moreover, you can take an apprenticeship under their wing, either officially as you would in a master’s degree program, or unofficially as you might in a work or social environment.



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I owe my career and its contributions to a select few mentors. For me personally, all my greatest mentors have been women, persons of color, or queer individuals. For that, I am thankful.

These are the people who told me:

“I really enjoyed observing your class.”

“Your advising of that student gave me goose bumps.”

“You’re a natural at administration.”

“This is how you tie your degree and experience to the job you want.”

“You said you meet 60% of the requirements? Apply!”

“We’d hate to lose you but you need to do this.”

“Minorities often doubt themselves, their talents, and their value...don’t be one of them”.

Now a learned and experienced individual, I hope to provide the benefits of mentorship to others. I hope I can be inspirational to a few and return the favors that were handed to me.

Lajlim Yang is Director of International Programs and Workforce Development at the University of California, Santa Cruz Extension. Prior to his current position, he has held numerous roles in different capacities. He has held senior leadership roles in various public and private sectors developing curriculum, international programs, and adult education programs. He has had more than 10 years of experience teaching English, literacy, writing composition, and test-prep to students of all levels and backgrounds. In addition, he is currently enrolled in an Ed.D. program studying Higher Education Administration.