

# EFL News of the Week

March 19, 2009

## The Bridge Students' Audit Class Experience – Spring 2009

### Introduction by Anna Gray

Studying at an American university can be quite challenging for international students. Even when one applies to an American university, “faculty and staff [already]... want to know who you are, where you came from, and what makes you unique and special” (Smithee, Greenblatt, & Eland, 2004, p. 9). In other words, because the principle of diversity is essential to the U.S. educational system, international students have to do their best to bring something new and unique to a university's community.

About 624,000 international students are currently studying at U.S. universities (Institute of International Education, 2009); most of them face difficulties and challenges when they just start to study in the U.S. As the U.S. educational system might be very different from what international students experienced in their home countries, it usually takes a great deal of effort on behalf of international students to adjust to the study process at a U.S. university. Also, international students might experience culture shock because American culture is different from culture in their own countries. In addition, international students might have difficulties studying in English as it is challenging to study in a foreign language.

During the first eight weeks of the Spring Semester 2009, nine students from the Academic Bridge class, the highest level of the EFL Program at Georgetown University, audited regular university classes at Georgetown and experienced what it is like to be a student in a regular U.S. classroom. Most of us found our audit classes challenging, often requiring hard work, but very interesting, useful, and informative. After a brief overview of the classes we audited, we discuss challenges, hardships, and new experiences we gained in our audit classes by exploring general student behavior in these classes, the professor-student relationship, note-taking issues, and interaction with classmates in the audit class. We end with a comparison between EFL classes and regular university classes.



### Overview of Audit Classes by Randah Alhothali

The nine Bridge students attended a vast variety of Georgetown University classes. Two of the Bridge students, Musab Al-Saud and Emma Dossongui, audited the *Introduction to Sociology* class, which met Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday afternoons. In this class, students learned about the examination of the basic processes that shape social life. Two other Bridge students, Anna Gray and Jinho Hwang, attended a class on *International Trade*, in which they learned about the theory and practice of international trade. This class met on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons.

The other five Bridge students audited regular university classes on their own. Randah Al-Hothali was a student in *The Principles of Marketing* class, where she was introduced to the different aspects of marketing and how these aspects influence the people's behavior. Maria Lopez audited *Social Inequality*, where she

learned about the basic concepts of sociology and how to apply them to the specific study of the inequalities in the social world. Gabriel Preciado attended *Introduction to Philosophy*, which examined interesting concerns about reality as they arise in a historical context. Finally, Andres Humbert audited *Biology of Drugs and People*; this class taught him some biology aspects and their effects on people with some attention to the political, economic, and environmental factors associated with drug use. These four classes also met on Tuesdays and Thursdays in the afternoon.

### General Behavior by Musab Al-Saud



College students' behavior is an essential factor in creating a healthy environment in classrooms. Based on our observation of regular university classes, we can draw the conclusion that American college students behave informally in classrooms; nonetheless, they are focused on their academic tasks, and they are very helpful. Their casual behavior showed itself in many ways. For example, some students used their cell phones for instant text messaging during class (A. Gray, personal communication, March 4, 2009); others were checking their Facebook profiles and were browsing music websites. In addition, some students were eating and drinking during class (A. Humbert, personal communication, March 4, 2009). These examples illustrate the informality of students in classrooms. The students' informal behavior can be explained by their desire to enjoy and get educated simultaneously; for example, most of the students were taking notes during the lectures; moreover, they were participating effectively in class discussions (R. Alhothali, personal communication, March 4, 2009). Students' attendance is another example of how students were focused; most of the students attended all lectures, and the number of absences was

very small (E. Kone, personal communication, March 4, 2009). Finally, based on our experience, American students were very friendly; for example, when Musab Al Saud asked a student to explain to him some information from a lecture, the student's response was detailed and long; furthermore, he was willing to meet later to answer any questions. In conclusion, American students are hardworking students who are trying their best to meet the course requirements and get the highest grades; on the other hand, they behave, talk and dress informally; based on our experience, the professor is concerned only about their academic performance.



### **Professor-Student Relationship** by Gabriel Preciado

Most Bridge students had a very good relationship with the professors from their audit class. Student interactions with professor could be divided into three subpoints: how accessible was the professor to students; how difficult was it to understand the professor; and what type of interaction did professors have with students during class. Most of the Bridge students said that they could contact their professor through the professor's office hours. Gabriel Preciado, who attended *Introduction to Philosophy*, said that he went to his professor's office many times, and she was more than pleased to answer any question he had (personal communication, March 4, 2009). On the other hand, Andres Humbert said that his professor



did not have office hours. Andres contacted his professor through e-mail, and he also noted that his professor always answered quickly any time he had a question (personal communication, March 5, 2009). Musab Alsaud and Emma Kone said that their professor, at the beginning, was very hard to understand because he spoke rapidly, but they got used to it and he was easier to understand the more they listened to him. They also noted that the professor used common words that are used in English slang, even though some were considered bad words, but the students never felt that it was wrong. They also mentioned that students asked questions whenever they wanted, and the professor always answered (personal communication, March 4, 2009). Most Bridge students attended discussion based classes in which the professor explained something and then asked the students questions to see if the students had understood what the professor had explained. Andres Humbert said that in his class students

worked in groups; the professor usually gave a short explanation, and then the students worked in their groups, but the professor was always there to answer any questions the students had. In conclusion, Bridge students noticed that the relationship between professors and students tended to be quite good and that it was very easy to contact the professor if students had any questions. Students also noticed that professors were always glad to answer any questions students might have had.

### **Taking Notes** by Emma Kone

The concept of taking notes varied from one audit class to another: taking notes was important for some audit classes, was not important for others, and was easy in general. Taking notes was very important in most classes. For example, in *International Trade*, taking notes was essential to pass tests. Indeed, to perform well on exams, notes taken in class were necessary since the professor gave information that was usually not in books (J. Hwang, personal communication, March 6, 2009). Just as in Jinho Hwang's class, in Musab AlSaud's audit class (*Introduction to Sociology*), taking notes was also important: the professor gave examples and added more explanations (M. AlSaud, personal communication, March 6, 2009). On the other hand, there were other classes in which students were not required to take notes. In *Biology* or *Philosophy*, passing tests was not based on notes taken in class since students could refer to textbooks and Blackboard for the lecture (A. Humbert and G. Preciado, personal communication, March 6, 2009). Although for some students taking notes was required, obtaining these notes was sometimes difficult. Emma Kone explained that following the lecture in *Sociology* was not easy at first because the professor spoke very fast; in contrast, in *Social Inequality* it was easy to take notes (M. Lopez, personal communication, March 6, 2009). Students generally used their notebook during the lecture, but we also noticed that more and more students used their laptops to take notes (O. Bongo and R. Althothali, personal communication, March 6, 2009). However, according to the Bridge students, before using laptops like American students, international students should be able to catch lecture information very quickly, be fast in typing on the computer, and be aware that lectures are not always well-structured. In short, while some students were not required to take notes during classes whose lectures were posted on Blackboard, for others taking notes on their notebooks or laptops was important to pass tests.



### **Interaction with American Students** by Andres Humert and Maria Lopez

Most of the Bridge students did not interact very often with American students in their audit classes because of three main reasons: American students were very busy before and after class, Bridge students were very shy when talking to American students, and Bridge students did not often find reasons to interact with others. First, American students often ate, read, or talked on their phones before class. They seemed very busy, so Bridge students could not talk to them easily. For example, Jinho Hwang never interacted with other students because they were always talking on their phones or finishing reading tasks before their classes, and he avoided interrupting them (personal communication, March 5, 2009). Similarly, Maria



Lopez, who attended *Social Stratification and Inequality*, did not interact with her classmates after class because they were always in a hurry to attend another class (personal communication, March 5, 2009). Second, most of the Bridge students were too shy to interact with American students because of their English difficulties. Emma Kone, Onaida Bongo, and Maria Lopez found it very hard to interact with their classmates because they did not know how to keep a conversation going, and also because they were afraid they would not understand what American students were saying (personal communication, March 4, 2009). Third, some Bridge students, like Musab Alsaud, did not find a reason to interact with classmates in audit classes since he did not have questions about his class (personal communication, March 5, 2009). Most other Bridge students

interacted only with their audit class classmates when the Bridge students missed a class or when they did not understand something, but, as Jinho Hwang, Maria Lopez, Emma Kone-Dossongui, and Onaida Bongo said, interacting with American students did not happen very often (personal communication, March 6, 2009). For Andres Humbert, interaction with American students was different from that of most other Bridge students. He had to work in teams very often, and the main class project was done in groups, so it was mandatory to interact with his team periodically (personal communication, March 4, 2009). In conclusion, Bridge students did not talk to their classmates in their audit classes because they did not want to interrupt their classmates before and after class, Bridge students did not feel confident talking to American students, and they did not find topics to keep up a conversation with regular Georgetown students. However, there were some exceptions. Anna Gray and Randah Althothali consider themselves very talkative and friendly. They interacted very easily with their classmates and were very open to having conversations with American students. They found American students to be very friendly and kind (personal communication, March 4, 2009).

### **Differences between an EFL Class and a Regular University Class** by Randa Althothali, Anna Gray, Gabriel Preciado

While an EFL class and a regular university class are similar in some ways, they are also very different in the following aspects: regular university classes are much bigger, it is harder for international students to participate in them, and more information is given. First, regular university classes are much bigger than EFL classes. While there are usually 10-15 students in an EFL class, there can be 40-100 students in a regular university class. The biggest class was *International Relations* (100+ students), and the smallest were *Introduction to Biology of Drugs and People* and *Social Inequality* (40+ students). In contrast, a size of the Academic Bridge class is 10 students. Another difference between a regular university class and an EFL class is that it is usually harder to participate in a regular university class. While experts say that "student participation is a very important part of the U.S. classroom" (Smithee, et al., 2004, p. 14) and that "[i]n the classroom, students are expected to share their knowledge and to express their perspectives, even when those perspectives differ from those of the instructor" (Smithee, et al., 2004, p. 20), they notice that "U.S. students [are] hesitant to discuss or argue openly with each other or the instructor, or to freely discuss controversial topics" (Smithee, et al., 2004, p. 15). In other words, while students in a regular university class are expected to participate in class, students often have problems discussing topics with each other and with professors because students often shy to do it. Some of the Academic Bridge students (Emma Kone, Jinho Hwang, Maria Lopez, Musab Al Saud, Onaida Bongo) stated that students in a regular university class participated less than students in an EFL class, and that it was harder for some of them to participate in their audit class (personal communication, March 8, 2009). The reasons for difficulties with participation were quite different: shyness, fear of making mistakes, or difficulties in speaking fast enough. It is obvious that students whose first language is not English might have difficulties speaking in class. Finally, in a regular university class, large amounts of information are given, and the content of the information is very different from that in an



EFL class. Academic Bridge students, especially Andres Humbert, Emma Kone, Gabriel Preciado, and Jinho Hwang, stated that a different kind of English was used in their regular university classes (more special terms and their definitions), teachers spoke faster, and students had to work harder at absorbing the information they received (personal communication, March 8, 2009). Though "the U.S. classroom style depends on the professor's style, as well as the field of study" (Smithee, et al., 2004, p. 12), most of the EFL students observed a combination of the learner-centered and the teacher-centered approaches in their audit classes. Such combined learner-centered and teacher-centered approach applied in the most of the audit classes Academic Bridge students attended allowed students to gain some important learning strategies.



While attending regular university classes, the Academic Bridge students learned a few important strategies: reading large amounts of information, taking better notes, and getting to know and understand their audit classes' subject matter. First, there are large amounts of readings that students in a regular university class are supposed to do daily (especially noted by Andres Humbert and Musab Al Saud, personal communication, March 8, 2009). Having a lot to read taught EFL students to manage their time (Andres Humbert) and be more responsible preparing for mid-term exams (Anna Gray and Musab Al Saud). Second, EFL students learned how to take notes faster and in a better way, writing down only the most necessary

information; over time, note-taking became easier (A. Gray, M. Lopez, O. Bongo, and R. Al Hothali, personal communication, March 8, 2009). Only in the *Introduction to Biology of Drugs and People* class, note-taking was not very important because the professor posted notes on BlackBoard. Finally, the Academic Bridge students, while attending different audit classes, learned about the subjects their audit classes were dedicated to. All students in a regular university class were expected to have a textbook, sometimes multiple textbooks, along with the notes they were taking. Using the textbooks, students were prepared to participate in class and, when the time came, to take mid-terms and final exams. Textbook chapters, when read in advance, also helped students to better comprehend the lectures. As a result of attending a regular university class, students also received an idea about how a regular U.S. university class is taught; this was especially noted by Maria Lopez, Gabriel Preciado, and Randah Al Hothali (personal communication, March 8, 2009).

In short, EFL classes differ from regular classes in three different ways: the size of the class, the student's participation in class, and the amount of knowledge the students often receive. While attending regular university classes, students in the Academic Bridge class gained new learning strategies by reading more, taking more notes, and predicting the topic they are studying.

### **Conclusion** by Maria Lopez

In conclusion, our audit experience was full of difficulties for us to handle, but taught us important facts about the typical American classroom. The audit classes, compared to EFL classes, were different in terms of students' general behavior, interaction with other students, and note taking. Most of us are planning to study at some point in the future in the United States. Auditing classes at Georgetown University allowed us to gain important knowledge about the culture of an American classroom and the aspects essential to be successful. It was challenging and required effort, but the knowledge we gained will work for us as a guide for our studies in the U.S. As a result of this experience, we will feel more comfortable in an American classroom when we enter a study program in the United States.

### **References**

- Dechter, G. (2007, January 28). Class war. *Baltimore Sun*, pp 5F – 6F.
- Smithee, M. , Greenblatt, S.L., & Eland, A. (2004). U.S. classroom culture. Washington D.C.: NAFSA.
- Institute of International Education. (2009). *Open Doors*. Retrieved March 9, 2009, from <http://opendoors.iienetwork.org/?p=131533> .

### **My most challenging academic endeavor** by NamSook Woo

My experiences at Georgetown University will be the most memorable challenge of my life. I am a visiting scholar from Korea studying English at Georgetown University, and I am facing a lot of new challenges now. Some of these challenges include being a student of EFL again instead of being a professor, learning about the university culture of America, and finishing successfully two projects, which are the reason why I am in the U.S.

I am a university professor in Korea, but I am also an EFL student in the Academic Bridge Class, and I am now struggling to improve my English skills required for my projects. Every morning, I leave home at 7 a.m. to take a ride on a shuttle to the metro station. I have a lot of stress because I am assigned a lot of homework every day. But when I think about the EFL course, I am very happy since I can eventually be a good English speaker.

I have had many experiences since I arrived at Georgetown. Taking two classes gives students plenty of tasks to do, and there are many experienced faculty members with great teaching skills. Open discussion and active participation is also highly encouraged. If I could learn and introduce such systems to Korea, it will be very helpful for improving my own teaching skills.

My major is the History of Political Thought in the Modern Korean Era. My goals as a visiting scholar while I am here at Georgetown University involve doing research on the impact of western political thought, such as American Social Darwinism, on the formation of a modern Korean society. My other project is to focus on the communication between Yu Gil-Jun, who was a Korean politician, and Edward Morse, an American biologist, who transmitted Darwinism to Japan. Yu Gil-Jun was a student of Edward Morse in Japan and America. These two novel subjects have never been studied in depth. I would like to finish this research successfully by the beginning of 2010 and publish my work in an academic journal.

I hope that you will wish me good luck to become a good English speaker through the EFL program, to obtain great teaching skills from the class culture at Georgetown University, and to finish my research projects that have never been studied anywhere else before.



## More News of the Week

**Interact DC:** The Academic Bridge students invite you to attend their panel discussion!  
**Friday, March 20, ICC 115 at 11:15 a.m.**

Students in the Academic Bridge class have been attending regular Georgetown University classes this semester. On Friday, March 20, they will share their observations of American classes, American professors, and American students. They'll focus on the organization of the class, interactions between professor and students, classroom discussions, and assignments that professors give. They'll also discuss differences between EFL and regular university classes and give suggestions on how to survive and thrive in an academic setting! **If you plan to study further in the U.S. or have friends at home with questions about U.S. university classes, this is a great chance for you!**

**EFL Pronunciation Workshops: Special Schedule Monday, March 23**



**Monday, March 23, 2009: All are welcome.**  
**No Pronunciation Workshops** on Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday, March 24 - 26.

Please come back the following week,  
 Monday, March 30 through Thursday, April 2.

**\*Reminder:** There will be **NO** College Application Workshop next week. The final session on **Completing the Application Process** will be Wednesday, April 1<sup>st</sup>.

### The Final Access DC Events of the Semester- Sign up now!



#### George Washington's Mount Vernon

Visit the plantation home of George Washington, the first President of the United States of America. The estate is located on the banks of the Potomac River near Alexandria, Virginia. We will tour the Mansion house and more than a dozen outbuildings including the slave quarters and kitchen, stroll the surrounding gardens, and explore a four-acre working farm. Don't miss this opportunity to see the most popular historic estate in the United States. To join us, **sign up with Katie in ICC 481 by Friday, March 27<sup>th</sup>.** **Space is limited so sign up soon.**

**Date:** Saturday, April 4<sup>th</sup>  
**Meeting Place:** GUTS Bus stop in front of Darnall Hall  
**Meeting Time:** 9:45 a.m.  
**Cost:** \$20



#### Potomac River Boat Cruise

Take a break before the end of the semester to enjoy the warm spring weather and the company of friends. Join us for a boat cruise down the Potomac River and see some spectacular views of Washington.

**Date:** Monday, April 6<sup>th</sup>  
**Place:** The Washington Harbour (Georgetown - 31st & K Street, N.W.)  
**Time:** The boat departs at 5:00 p.m.  
**Cost:** \$10  
 To reserve your spot, **sign up with Katie in ICC 481. Again, space is limited so be sure to sign up.**

**Coffee Hour Returns-** Tuesday, March 24<sup>th</sup>  
 ICC 450, 3:15- 4:15

### More Events Happening in the EFL Program and Around Campus

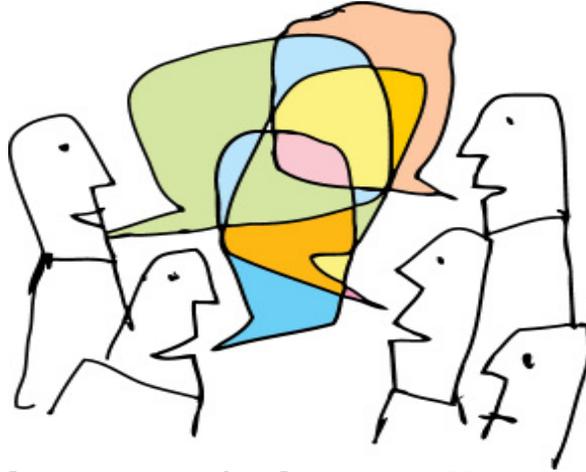
#### Visit the Arlington County Jail

The Low Intermediate students will have a field-trip to the Arlington County Jail on Wednesday, March 25 at 7:30. There are 5 spaces available for other students. Sign up in the EFL Office by Friday, March 20, at 3:30 p.m. if you want to go.

#### Jekyll and Hyde: A Thrilling Musical Tale

Special Previews: March 21 at 800pm (\$5), March 22 at 4:00pm (\$5)  
 March 25-28 at 8:00pm (\$8), March 29 at 4:00pm (\$8)  
**Where:** Poulton Hall Stage 3  
 Come to Katie's desk in ICC 481 for more information.

## **Classroom Interaction Study -Volunteers needed!**



**Are you an ESL learner who speaks Spanish as your native language?** You are invited to participate in a study **about classroom interaction**.

**Explanation of the Study:** We will be looking at the kind of language you use in an interactive speaking activity. There will be approximately 40 participants in this study. As a participant in this study, you will be asked to complete some writing, listening and speaking activities with the researcher to assess your level of English. Then you will complete a speaking activity. Finally we will offer two written activities to assess your level of English at the end of the study. A tape recorder will be used to record what you say during the speaking activities. All the tasks will take approximately three hours over approximately one week period.

### **How will I be compensated?**

There is no compensation for participation in the study. Participants will gain exposure to ESL teaching techniques through a few sessions, so it is a great way to practice your English with native speakers.

**How to Participate in the Study:** If you are interested, please contact Julie Lake at [jbl34@georgetown.edu](mailto:jbl34@georgetown.edu). Participating in this study is strictly voluntary. If at any point you change your mind and no longer want to participate, you are free to discontinue your participation.