



# MEI NEWS

ISSUE 5 • SPRING 2015

## THE FRONT PAGE

Spring is a magical time of the year. The bitter cold of winter is behind us; new life flourishes all around us, and we look forward to a summer filled with sunshine and laughter.

Here at MEI, we look back at the passing semester, say goodbye to our recent graduates, and hello to those students coming to join us this summer.

We're also saying goodbye to one of the English teachers that many of you know and love - our own Mrs. Nina Liakos. Mrs. Liakos retired this year, and those of you who have had her as a teacher know how much she has contributed to MEI. We will miss her, but we wish her well in the future.

In this issue, our feature story focuses on service learning, a great way to improve your English. This issue's Vocabulary Corner offers insights into not just building your vocabulary, but building your word power.

Our Alumni Spotlight features Júlia Guazzelli Pezzali from Brazil, who studied at MEI and is now taking classes in Animal Science at the university. And this issue's student poem is from Dr. Lake's class, titled "What bugs me the most?".

We hope you enjoy this newsletter. To all our alumni from last semester - good luck! And to our new students coming in this semester - have a great summer!

Your Friends at MEI

If you have photos of you and your MEI classmates at MEI events or traveling together that you would like to submit to the newsletter, send them to [ask-mei@umd.edu](mailto:ask-mei@umd.edu) with the word "photos" in the subject line.

Visit us at [mei.umd.edu](http://mei.umd.edu) or on Facebook at [facebook.com/meiusa](https://facebook.com/meiusa)



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# FEATURE STORY

## GIVING BACK: VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES IN THE D.C. AREA

BY JULIE LAKE, Ph. D.

### WHAT IS VOLUNTEER WORK?

Alice Walker, a famous novelist and peace activist, is famous for saying, "Activism is my rent for living on the planet" ([https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/7380.Alice\\_Walker](https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/7380.Alice_Walker)). What do you think this quote means? Think about it for a moment.

In my opinion, Walker is telling us that it is our duty to make the world a better place. How can we do this? One way to improve our world is to volunteer for causes that we care about, such as ending homelessness or protecting the planet from environmental destruction.

Do you know what volunteer work is and why many Americans do it? When you volunteer, you agree to work without being paid for your work. Many people volunteer because they are passionate about solving a problem that they see in their community. Leonardo DiCaprio, a film actor, is a fitting example of this. DiCaprio is very concerned about environmental issues, and he has been working to protect the planet since 2000 in various ways. Some ways he works to combat environmental destruction include serving on many boards of environmental organizations, hosting Earth Day celebrations, and helping start The Leonardo DiCaprio Fund at California Community Foundation that helps educate people about different environmental problems. DiCaprio is just one example of volunteerism in the United States (U.S.).

### WHY SHOULD MEI STUDENTS VOLUNTEER?

You might be asking yourself why you should volunteer. The question is: Can volunteering benefit you personally? As English language learners, not only does volunteer work benefit your community, but it also can help you improve your language skills. When you volunteer, you interact with many different people, which can help improve your listening and speaking skills. Do you ever find yourself wondering what is culturally appropriate in different social situations? Volunteering can also help you improve your cultural competence.<sup>1</sup> In addition, it is common to feel a great sense of satisfaction after volunteering.

Now that you are hopefully convinced about the advantages of volunteering, let us look at different volunteer opportunities in the D.C./Maryland Area.



Rasha, Khaoula, Xun, and Khaled with staff member, and new friend, from D.C. Central Kitchen.

<sup>1</sup> Cultural competence is knowing how to act in your host country according to their cultural norms. For example, when Americans ask you *How are you?*, they are just saying hello and do not want to know all the details of how you are. The common response is *Fine, and you?*

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## WHAT VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES ARE AVAILABLE AT UMD?

There are many volunteer opportunities at the University of Maryland. You can look into OrgSync, where you can find organizations that have a smaller focus. For example, the Blue Drop Initiative (BDI) works with at-risk<sup>1</sup> middle school and high school children through peer mentoring. Check out their website ([http://orgsync.umd.edu/browse\\_student\\_organizations](http://orgsync.umd.edu/browse_student_organizations)), under “Browse Student Organizations”, and “Advocacy/Service.”

The organization that has the most opportunities on campus is the Organization for Leadership & Community-Service Learning (LCSL). I talked with Alice Bishop, the Program Administrative Specialist for LCSL. She recommended that interested students look at their website ([http://thestamp.umd.edu/leadership\\_community\\_service-learning](http://thestamp.umd.edu/leadership_community_service-learning)). If students have any questions about volunteer opportunities, email Alice Bishop directly ([ambishop@umd.edu](mailto:ambishop@umd.edu)). Some service opportunities include:

- **The TERP Service Day** - LCSL connects students with various non-profit organizations in the Maryland area on few Saturdays throughout the semester. The last TERP day is Saturday, May 2, 2015. There are several scheduled for the Fall 2015 as well.
- **Maryland Leadership Conference** - students can attend a weekend conference to learn about leadership skills (usually sometime in October). This is first-come, first served, so submit an application early in the fall.
- **Alternative Break Programs** - students can attend 7-10 day trips locally or out-of-state during spring break; each trip addresses a specific issue (e.g., education, human trafficking). Think about this next year if you are on campus!

Check out all these great volunteer opportunities at your fingertips! Get involved in your University of Maryland community!

## CLASS FIELD TRIP: D.C. CENTRAL KITCHEN

Besides there being several volunteer opportunities on campus, there are equally as many volunteer opportunities in the D.C. Metropolitan area. I wanted to share a service learning experience that my 004 class had this past February.

The day before Valentine’s Day, my 004 class took a field trip to D.C. Central Kitchen, a soup kitchen in Washington, D.C. where staff members and volunteers prepare over 5,000 meals a day for different organizations in the D.C. area. We had just studied about homelessness in the U.S. and the students’ countries, so it was the perfect opportunity to see a solution to ending homelessness first hand.

If you look on D.C. Central Kitchen’s website (<http://www.dccentralkitchen.org/>), their motto is, “Combatting Hunger, Creating Opportunities.” This was definitely the case for us, for we had the opportunity to experience something new! We helped with the morning preparation shift, by cutting vegetables, mixing salads, making main courses, and even baking. It was a very cold day,

<sup>2</sup> At-risk children are “at risk” for having trouble as adults, with possible emotional, behavioral, or academic problems.

and the 004 class bravely went into D.C. without knowing what to expect. It certainly was an eye-opening day for the class, showing the students the American cultural value of volunteerism and giving them an opportunity to get to know diverse people from all around the D.C. area.

Not only was the trip memorable, but we all got to wear some pretty funny outfits, which you can see in the pictures below.



Maher cutting onions like a pro!



David and Barnett getting ready for the orientation.



Khaled and Rasha mixing coleslaw.



Glenn Knapp chopping broccoli.



The whole class after the morning shift.

## QUOTES FROM THE STUDENTS

The students wrote about their experience after the field trip. Here are some of their own words:

“I think it really was a perfect opportunity for me to feel the love from the society when I saw people working very hard making food for those people they do not know. In the future, I will participate in events like this again, and I hope homelessness will improve and be solved very soon.” - David Ma (from China)

“When I went to D.C. Central Kitchen, I experienced many new things. One of the most important things that I've learned in D.C. Central Kitchen is how to work on a team. I realized that in order to accomplish anything, we need to work together to help each other; otherwise, it's going to be like one hand clapping.” - Rasha Alghamdi (from Saudi Arabia)

“An extraordinary day! That is how I will remember the day I spent at D.C. Central Kitchen preparing food for poor people I do not know and they do not know me either. But I felt like I was doing it with my family. So thank you, D.C. Central Kitchen for the most amazing Valentine's Day I have ever had.” - Khaoula Ramah (from Morocco)

“What I learned is that working in a soup kitchen is not an easy job. You have to be serious about the work because the food is for other people. Another thing is that everyone has his/her own story and never judge anyone without thinking.” - Xun Yang (from China)

“People who were there were happy to have us working with them. I was just cutting onions. While I was cutting onions, I realized that one volunteer can make a difference. They were just onions, but onions are the first step to make 5000 meals.” - Maher Al Musallam (from Saudi Arabia)

“I felt achy for about 2 days after working on the carrots. However, I feel that this was a valuable experience for me that made me feel the enthusiasm of the volunteers. They do this on their own accord...I need to learn this characteristic and be a selfless person.” - Barnett Yuan (from China)

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

I hope you consider volunteering, either on campus or in the D.C. Metropolitan area. It is a great opportunity to get to know more about the U.S. and give back to your new community.

# THE MEI VOCABULARY CORNER

Every issue, we look at a specific topic connected to English grammar or vocabulary.  
In this issue and the next, we look more closely at how to increase your vocabulary.

If you have a question you would like us to address in a future column, send it to us at [ask-mei@umd.edu](mailto:ask-mei@umd.edu).

## LET'S BUILD OUR WORD POWER

Many people would agree that one of the most important keys to academic success is having a large vocabulary. However, there is more to lexical proficiency than simply knowing a lot of words. You also need to know a lot of information about the words that you know. Let's look at some examples:

### Collocations

**common word: waste (v)**

**less common word: squander (v)**

So, you may know that "squander" is a synonym of the verb "waste". But what words can you use together with squander? In other words, what words make collocations with squander?

#### ■ squander + opportunity

Robert and Sarah squandered an opportunity to buy a new house at a very low price. They waited too long to make an offer, and then somebody else got the house.

#### ■ squander + time

Instead of preparing for his final exams, Javier squandered his time for the last few days of the semester by relaxing at the beach.

#### ■ squander + resources

Because there is a limited supply of fossil fuels such as oil and natural gas, we must be careful not to squander these precious resources.

### Context

The words wound and injure have basically the same meaning: "to cause injuries or bodily harm to". So, are the two words interchangeable? In other words, can you always substitute one word for another? The answer is no, you can't. This is because wound and injure, while having the same meaning, are used in different contexts. Look at these examples:

- Dozens of soldiers were killed, and hundreds more were **wounded** during the battle.
- The police officer was **wounded** when the criminal he was chasing turned around and shot him.
- Walter Reed hospital treats many **wounded** soldiers who return from war zones.
- Researchers discovered a zebra lying in the grass; it seemed to have been **wounded** by a lion, but it was still alive.

- 
- Aid organizations set up temporary hospitals in the city to help those who had been **injured** in the earthquake.
  - US Air flight 6237 lost engine power after takeoff and made a crash landing in the Hudson River. Luckily nobody died, but twenty-eight people on board were **injured**.

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## THE MEI VOCABULARY CORNER *(continued)*

- Construction workers are required to wear hard hats to reduce their risk of getting **injured** on the job.
- Robert Griffin III, the star player of the Washington Redskins football team, was badly **injured** during the last game of the 2012 season.

### Do you see a pattern?

**wound** is usually used when talking about soldiers & war, police activity, and animals.

**injure** is usually used when talking about natural disasters, accidents, and sports.

## Words & Grammar

The word **conceivably** means “possibly” or “within the realm of possibility”.

Here are a few examples:

- If I save enough money, I could **conceivably** go on a trip to Europe this summer.
- The construction team could **conceivably** finish the building by the end of this year.
- With her good high school grades and high SAT scores, Katherine could **conceivably** get accepted to an Ivy League school like Harvard.
- If they play well enough, the Maryland football team might **conceivably** win the game on Saturday.
- If global warming continues at its current pace, the city of Miami may **conceivably** be under water 100 years from now.

Again, do you see a pattern? The word **conceivably** is very often preceded by the modal auxiliary **could**. The modal auxiliaries **might** and **may** are also frequently used in front of **conceivably**.

# FACULTY SPOTLIGHT

NINA LIAKOS

Mrs. Nina Liakos has been teaching at MEI longer than any other faculty member, but is retiring this spring.

**Q:** When did you first start working at MEI?

**A:** I began teaching EFL in and around Paris, France in 1972. I returned to the U.S. in 1973 and worked for the World Bank and the Congress for almost a year before I returned to teaching in the fall of 1974 at ELS in Washington, DC. From there I went to the American Language Academy, where I stayed seven years; it was during that time that I went back to school to get my Masters in applied linguistics. I started working at MEI (which had opened in 1980) in August, 1981.

**Q:** How did you come to MEI?

**A:** I had been interested in working at the University of Maryland for several years, but there was no English program for international students there until 1980. When it started, there were only the director, Les Palmer, and two teachers. I applied the following year, and was hired along with five other teachers. That was the year that the Intensive English Program was begun.

**Q:** How did you first become an English teacher?

**A:** I was living in Paris, where I had spent my senior year in college studying Russian. Since it was my senior year abroad rather than the more usual junior year abroad, I didn't need to return when the year was up to finish college. Instead, I decided I wanted to stay longer in Paris. I needed a job to support myself, so I took a short course on teaching English and landed my first job, teaching elementary and middle school students at a private bilingual school.

**Q:** What languages have you studied?

**A:** I studied Spanish for 12 years in school, beginning when I was in the first grade. I took 4 years of French in high school (plus one year in college), and majored in Russian in college. I also took several semesters of German in college and learned a little Serbo-Croatian when I visited Croatia in the 70s. Finally, I studied Greek in night school and in the FOLA program at UMD in the 1980s.

**Q:** Can you share a favorite memory or two from your time at MEI/UMD?

**A:** There are so many memories that it's impossible to pick out just one. I've taught many wonderful students and had many wonderful colleagues through the years. I've enjoyed many field trips with the IEP (Annapolis, Baltimore, Harper's Ferry, the Newseum...) and with my classes



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## FACULTY SPOTLIGHT *(continued)*

(the National Gallery, the Tidal Basin at cherry blossom time...). I've enjoyed watching students from hot countries experience their first snowfall. I always enjoyed guiding 001 students from next to no English to being able to have a true conversation in English, and I loved teaching 004C students about African American history and then taking them to see Frederick Douglass' home, Cedar Hill, where they really realized that the author of *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* was truly a real person who lived here.

**Q:** What are some of the biggest changes you've seen at MEI/UMD during your time here?

**A:** I've seen a lot of changes, first in MEI's location. We started out in Preinkert Field House (I used to take aerobics classes in the gym there and hope none of my students came by!), then moved to Taliaferro Hall, then to Holzapfel Hall and finally to Cole. In each of the first three buildings, I had two offices, so I had to pack up all my things and move seven times. And while MEI was moving from building to building, the University of Maryland was building, building, building. Some of the buildings which were constructed while I worked at MEI are Van Munching (home of the Business School and School of Public Affairs), Susquehanna, the newer section of the Computer and Space Sciences Building, the Kim Building (School of Engineering), Knight Hall (Journalism), the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center, and the Xfinity Center (formerly the Comcast Center. While I've been at UMD, the university has had five Presidents/Chancellors: Robert Gluckstern, John B. Slaughter, William "Brit" Kirwan, Dan Mote, and Wallace Loh. I've served three MEI directors: Les Palmer, Marsha Sprague, and Elizabeth Driver. In terms of MEI's curriculum, I've seen many changes in what was taught (American culture, American literature, writing term papers) and how skills were combined or not (for example, there used to be separate classes for listening, oral communication, reading, and writing). I oversaw a major self-study undertaken as part of MEI's application for accreditation under CEA in 2007-2009. Accreditation has been responsible for a lot of changes in how MEI keeps its records and how transparent it is to prospective and current students, sponsors, staff, and faculty.

**Q:** What advice or thoughts would you like to leave MEI students with?

**A:** Students who have been in my classes will not be surprised when I advise them to read a lot because it helps improve all aspects of their English. I would also like to remind them never to use a form of be before a simple verb, -s form, or past form!

**Q:** What are you looking forward to doing in your retirement?

**A:** I am looking forward to sleeping later, reading more, spending more time out of doors, watching more movies and TV, going to more plays and concerts, seeing friends more often, and spending more time with my husband and daughter.

**Q:** Final interesting / little known fact to share about yourself?

**A:** My husband was once my student! We met in an English class that I was substituting in. We discovered that we were neighbors and then became friends. About two years later, we started dating, and we got married in 1984.

Congratulations on Your Retirement!!! You will be missed at MEI!



# ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT



## JÚLIA GUAZZELLI PEZZALI

**Country:** Brazil

**When you left MEI:** Fall 2014

**Where you are now and what you are doing:**

I am currently studying at the University of Maryland as a non-degree student. I am taking junior- and senior-level classes in Animal Science, my major at my host university.

**How you benefitted from MEI / how it is helping you in what they are doing now:**

Although I studied just one semester at MEI, it was essential to drastically improve my English skills and prepare me for the university. Without taking MEI classes, I would not be prepared to write papers and do presentations that are required for my university classes. I encourage everyone who needs to improve their English skills to an academic level to study at MEI, an institute with excellent professors and a great environment.

# STUDENT POEM

KHAOULA RAMAH

UMEI 004: READING AND WRITING | 2/18/2015 | DR. JULIE LAKE

*This was a response to the prompt: what bugs me? She wrote a poem using parallel structure.*

What bugs me the most?

They tell us that life is a road.

You start it with your first scream

and you finish it when you have died.

We laugh, cry, love and dream.

But everything disappears in the end

What should we do to keep our gleam?

Be smart, loving or just good?

We just go and with us vanishes our name.

I cannot be forgotten and die like I have never lived.

I breathe, eat and drink. I even have a favourite team

What should I leave behind?

A child, a book or money to my world of esteem?

Prayers, hard work and love for my God?

I give up. There is nothing I can do to make true my dream.

So I angrily, madly and powerfully decide

to stay alive and that's my final claim.

**WHAT'S UP  
AT MEI**

## UPCOMING DATES AND EVENTS

June 8 IEP Intake Testing and Orientation for new students

June 9 First day of summer classes at MEI

July 4 Independence Day

July 24 Final Ceremony

August 27 IEP Intake Testing

August 28 IEP Intake

August 31 First day of Fall classes

# THE BACK PAGE

