American Language Institute to celebrate 35 years with picnic

By Cathy Zimmer : September 18th, 2012

UT’s American Language Institute will celebrate 35 years of offering intensive English language instruction to non-native speakers from around the world and in the community who wish to begin academic study or who need to learn English for personal or professional reasons.

Students in the American Language Institute’s English Outdoors, an experiential education program tailored for those learning the language, posed for a photo while visiting the Grand Canyon in March.

“The American Language Institute was founded in 1977 and had an initial 27 students. Compare this to 200 students today representing such culturally diverse places as the People’s Republic of China, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Thailand,” said Alexander Wrege, interim director of the institute.

The American Language Institute will celebrate its 35th anniversary with a picnic scheduled for Friday, Sept. 21, from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. in front of the Snyder Memorial Building. The campus community is welcome to attend the picnic, which will feature hot dogs and hamburgers.
At noon, a few representatives from the center and a student will share remarks about their experiences with the American Language Institute.

The faculty at the institute are very experienced and highly motivated to assist their students on their educational journey, Wrege said.

“Most of our faculty members have taught overseas, including China, Japan, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Egypt, Germany, France and other countries around the world,” he said.

The faculty members, he noted, bring global experience and a global perspective to the classroom.

“More than 6,400 students have successfully completed their study of the English language at the institute and have gone on to The University of Toledo to prepare for their future careers,” Wrege said. “Our alumni include ambassadors, government leaders, and experts in the arts and letters in their respective home countries. In some cases, three generations of students from the same family have received their English instruction at the institute.”

The American Language Institute is an intensive English program. The curriculum consists of 20 hours of classroom instruction each week along with two to three hours of language lab per week.

There are five levels of lessons, and students receive instruction in reading, writing, listening and speaking skills. Additional courses include American Culture, Current Events, American Pop Culture and Reading Short Fiction, as well as a special course for international teaching assistants to help them prepare for working in U.S. university classrooms.

“The American Language Institute is known nationally for its innovative program, and is one of the few intensive English programs that offer language instruction to individuals without even basic English skills,” Wrege said. “Fifty percent of students at the institute meet the University’s language requirement within one semester of beginning their language study, and 74 percent of students meet the requirements within three terms or one and one-half semesters. The faculty and staff at the institute consider this to be an immense success and a vote of confidence in our very student-centered and multidisciplinary approach to instruction.”

The institute is part of the Center for International Studies and Programs, which supports internationalization efforts at The University of Toledo by creating links among students, faculty, staff, visiting scholars and the community that foster cross-cultural understanding and appreciation. The center encourages global citizenship through innovative educational, cultural and service-learning programming, and through student and scholar exchanges.

“The experience of working with the American Language Institute students is most rewarding. We see the students flourish in their new environment as they master the English language, make new friendships with domestic students, and take advantage of the unique programming opportunities such as Conversation Partners and English Outdoors, an experiential education program tailored toward language learners,” Wrege said. “They are truly exploring their world and to be a part of it is wonderful.”