

# OCC immerses foreign-born into English language, culture

By TIM RICHARD  
STAFF WRITER

Oakland has leaped with both feet into the international economy. Eight percent (87,000) of county residents are foreign-born. Many work for the 250 Japanese companies with outlets here; many of those workers have brought their spouses and children.

An at Oakland Community College's five campuses, 450 people are taking a set of courses called "English as a Second Language" or ESL. "We went from 80 to 450 in just three years," said Kathy Emmenecker, ESL outreach coordinator.

"This is one we need to grow about," said George Keith, president of OCC's Orchard Ridge Campus in Farmington Hills. "This is one of those 'new' programs intended by our millage promotion (the property tax hike approved by voters in 1995)."

"We have the largest ESL program in the state. Michigan State University is second largest with around 300," said Keith.

"And ours is the only program for academic credit in the state."

added Emmenecker. "It offers humanities credits. It's not remedial. It's a learning experience."

The county's industrial development binge since the 1980s has contributed to ESL's growth. In time, Emmenecker believes, ESL will become part of Oakland's magnet in attracting international firms.

## Mix of nations

Natives of Iraq are 30 percent of the foreign-born enrollment on the Orchard Ridge Campus, but others come from former Soviet nations (14 percent), India (16 percent), East Asia (15 percent) and Lebanon.

In the western county, the Highland Lakes Campus and its allied health programs see Filipinos (33 percent) and a mixture of western Europeans, Soviets and East Asians.

At the Southfield and Royal Oak campuses, former Soviet subjects are at 30 percent and Indians 21 percent. At Auburn Hills, western Europeans at 21 percent are followed by Indians at 19 percent and by East Asians from Philippines, Korea, Hong Kong and Laos.

## For example:

Fabian Lavorato came from Argentina four months ago and wants to earn a degree in international business. "I've been working 10 years in international transportation, but trying to get a degree in my country is hard," he said. A counselor at the University of California at Berkeley advised him to start at a community college and produced a list of five or six. Lavorato picked OCC.

Igor Zinabchenko came from Latvia where he worked in the import-export business. He has a bachelor's degree and is preparing to take the Graduate Management Admissions Test for a school offering the master of business administration degree — hopefully the elite University of Michigan. "I will probably continue in international business and finance," he said.

## Going to business

These students come to OCC's campuses. The college also goes to corporations.

"Companies would like their employees to develop greater oral fluency, to learn the lan-

guage with the culture," said Emmenecker. "We just started contract training where we go to the company and offer services at very, very reasonable rates."

Foreign-born students come in two basic sizes: poor immigrants who need a job and professional people who may know textbook English but need to learn American idioms, customs and what Emmenecker calls "the language of diplomacy and tact."

"We just got a 'school-to-work' grant for a pilot program — the OCC ESL Project. We'll create courses which integrate ESL into three technical programs: CAD (computer-aided design), machine tool technology and computer information systems."

"Some students come here and say 'I just want to learn English.' By the second semester, their confidence level rises. They start getting ambitious and take other academic programs."

A foreign-born student may start with KTEEP, the Michigan Test of English Language Proficiency, to see if he or she needs the ESL program. ESL consists of 10 courses in three groups:

■ 101-102, English conversa-

tion, making presentations in academic disciplines. ■ 141-142 and 241-242, listening and communicating, with emphasis on academic vocabularies, how to follow main ideas, take notes and outline.

■ 151-152 and 251-252, academic writing, use of libraries and computers.

"We have two full-time faculty," said Polly Meyers Bachrouche, director of OCC's International Center on the Orchard Ridge Campus. "Sue Wilkinson at Orchard Ridge has a master's in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages). Sherri Weisbaum, at Royal Oak-Southfield, taught Spanish and learned the methodology."

"The program is largely staffed by adjunct faculty. Many have Peace Corps background. Many have taught in Korea and Japan. Others went abroad as tourists, found they could teach, and got the MA in TESOL at home."

Bachrouche grew up in Grand Rapids looking at blonde heads in the Christian Reformed Church and "became obsessed with anything different. In a

class of 20, I like to see 15 different nationalities," said Emmenecker, who earned her TESOL degree from MSU.

Teaching English as a second language is far different from teaching a foreign language, Emmenecker said, because you don't study textbook language.

"You're immersed in the culture. You have to develop listening skills," she said. The teacher must be more conscious of the structure, the colloquial expressions, the need to use English in business and not just how to order coffee and a hotel room.

"In October, the Jordanian government is coming to Cobo Hall (in Detroit). Investors and exporters will all be here to establish business and trade relationships."

"Jordan is looking to increase the number of two-year scholarships to the United States — and here we are."

The pair will answer queries and speak to civic groups. Bachrouche, director of the International Center, can be reached at (248) 615-3417. Emmenecker, outreach coordinator, is at (248) 471-7790.

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