

Imagine sifting through pages upon pages of information about different schools. Never mind the arduous process of finding a graduate program that best fits your needs, deciding whether or not to undergo such an endeavour is even more stressful. On top of that, imagine trying to make the choice to either attend classes on site or via Internet! These were decisions that Jennifer and I had to make. Considering we both live and work overseas, naturally we wanted a program that was both highly respected and easily accessible; a program that was capable of giving us something both practical and theoretical; a medium through which to improve our skills as EFL instructors; a tool that could be used to expand our current teaching repertoire. Shenandoah University's Master in Education (TESOL) Program met those very needs. As a result, Jennifer and I would like to share our experiences in the S.U. [Master of Science in Education \(TESOL Concentration\)](#) with other students.

### **Jennifer Fons**

Before coming to France in 2002 to work as an English assistant in a high school, I graduated from the University of Maryland College Park with a bachelor's degree in French language and literature and a bachelor's degree in foreign language education. Then, after four years of teaching English in various educational settings in the Nice (city in France) area, I felt that it was time to continue my education in order to become a more competent language teacher. Since my husband and I decided to stay in France, I began looking for information on the Internet about completing a Master's degree online. While I found a plethora of information concerning programs in England and Australia, I chose to pursue online studies at Shenandoah University for various practical reasons.

First of all, I was searching for an online Master's program in Education that would allow me to study while continuing to teach. Watching the lectures on DVD at any time of the day and participating in class discussions via internet posts are two features that were particularly attractive to me. Shenandoah University's program offers me the flexibility I need to balance studies and an ever-changing work schedule. Secondly, this Master's degree is recognized by the Board of Education in many states. In fact, the course requirements are the same for the on-site and the distance learning program.

Not only does the context of distance education meet my needs, but the program itself corresponds to my interests. In the TESOL Master's program, there are classes about language program and curriculum development and second language acquisition, two areas which I wish to explore more in depth. In addition, there are three observation components where students can get first-hand experience in classrooms with different learning objectives and publics. But the most rewarding part of the program for me has been the ability to put into practice what I am studying. The TESOL Master's program allows me to improve my students' language learning experience while I pursue my professional development.

As for the future, I hope that a Master's degree in Education with a concentration in TESOL will be a stepping stone to other professional opportunities. I would like to be part of an EFL program at a university in France or even be an ESL teacher in a high

school in the United States. Teaching abroad has opened my eyes to the importance that learning English represents. Whether teaching in a public school or working in an adult education program, I am looking forward to applying what I learn in the Shenandoah University program to help students meet real-world challenges.

### **Rafael Sabio**

In August of 2004, my wife and I moved to South Korea to teach English as a foreign language. Having only a minor in Education (I graduated from the University of Florida with a bachelor's in hospitality management and a minor in education); I felt it was important for me to further my knowledge in pedagogy. On the hunt, I began to look at the different universities in the United States that offered distance learning courses. That's when I stumbled upon Shenandoah University. After spending quite a bit of time learning about S.U., I decided to further enquire about the Master in Education (TESOL concentration) by emailing a few professors from the program. Much to my pleasure, the faculty promptly responded to my inquiries; I was flabbergasted. Never had I received such one-on-one attention from professors (at UF, you would almost always deal with teaching assistants, even if it was just a question about the program); never had professors shown that much interest in me. Having been satisfied with their responses, I decided to apply to the program.

Almost a year later, I am in the latter part of my degree program. In other words, I am about to complete the coursework section of my degree and begin working on my portfolio (the last portion of the program needing to be completed in order to graduate). Thus far, it has been a wonderful experience.

When I first started the program, I was a little nervous as graduate work requires much more time and effort than an undergraduate program. However, after a few weeks, I quickly became comfortable with the workload and with what was being asked of me. This was due largely in part to the flexibility the program offers its students and the amount of help that is available if one so needs it.

The M.A.TESOL program gives an exorbitant amount of time to complete the coursework (reference <http://www.su.edu/sas/tesol/conven.html> for more details). A lot of people, such as me, do not have the time to attend a university full-time as many of us have other responsibilities. Moreover, concerns regarding lack of materials are allayed by the amount of resources available for assistance (e.g. access to the S.U. library online, the professors, the extremely detailed syllabi, etc.). Therefore, any worries about time constraints or whether or not help would be provided are quickly forgotten. All in all, after the first few weeks of my enrolling in the program, I knew I had made the right choice.

Additionally, the required textbooks are wonderful resources that can be used again and again. I cannot tell you the countless times I have referenced them for a class I was teaching, for other projects I had to complete, or for arguments which required supportive

information. I really feel that the professors outdid themselves picking such practical and informative textbooks.

Finally, upon graduating with a Master's degree in education (TESOL concentration), I plan to look for a position at a community college (or any academic institution for that matter) teaching English as a second language. Also, if the option were to become available for me to continue on to a doctorate program, I may very well take that opportunity. Basically, that chapter of my life is filled with possible outcomes that are yet to be written. Only time will tell.

Suffice it is to say that I am content with the investment I have made; the graduate TESOL program at S.U. has really come through for me. As a result, I am much more equipped to teach English as foreign language than I ever was. I would whole-heartedly recommend this graduate program to anyone interested in continuing on with their teaching education.

In closing, we recommend to anyone interested in continuing on with their education (in ESL or EFL pedagogy) to check out S.U.'s graduate TESOL program. Take it from two students currently in the program; you will not be disappointed. Although, if you are still somewhat sceptical, contact the graduate department and find out yourself. Below is the contact information:

- ✓ Dr. Lizabeth England (associate professor and director), [lenglan2@su.edu](mailto:lenglan2@su.edu), 540-678-4301
- ✓ office coordinator, 540-545-7391
- ✓ Dr. Brenda Murphy (associate professor), [bmurphy@su.edu](mailto:bmurphy@su.edu) 540-545-7391

### **About the Authors**

**Jennifer Fons** - Has been a Service Manager and English teacher at a private language school in the south of France for three years. When she is not working or studying, Jennifer enjoys photography, reading, and bike riding.

**Rafael Sabio** - Rafael Sabio has been a graduate student of education (TESOL concentration) at Shenandoah University since August of 2006. He has been teaching EFL to students in Wonju, Gangwon Province in South Korea for three years. In his spare time, he enjoys writing, weight lifting, and spending time with his wife.