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Mastering English as a Second Language Comes With ‘A Village’ of Support

BY DR. CLAUDIA SCHRADER

When Alejandro Caballero, 20, came to the United States in September 2022 from Panama to attend college and play baseball, he had the passion and ability to do well in higher education although his ability to speak English was limited. A day after his arrival, Alejandro, who now resides in Brooklyn, enrolled at Kingsborough Community College's English as a Second Language (ESL) program. In a year's time, Alejandro matriculated and is majoring in business administration and playing ball at KCC. He expects to graduate in 2025 and transfer to a senior college/university where he will continue his studies and play baseball for one of the CUNY colleges.

Students participating in ESL programs are usually newcomers to the United States and non-native English speakers. Their personal reasons for coming to the U.S. vary from seeking a better education, to relocating for work opportunities, to fleeing the dangers of war or genocide in their native country. And many are “Dreamers” brought here as children by their parents. ESL students – like all other college students – want to be able to provide for themselves and their families.

With a college degree, they could earn significantly more than those without a higher education degree.

The beginning stages of the college experience, from the application process to registration for classes, can be challenging for some native-born English speakers, so it's not surprising some ESL students feel overwhelmed as they try to go through the process as an English learner. KCC offers ESL programs through the Office of Continuing Education, including full-time intensive ESL immersion programs. In addition to the CUNY Language Immersion Program (CLIP) that caters to students who have been accepted to a CUNY college, the Kingsborough English Language Institute (KELI) provides full-time academic preparation for all students, including F-1 visa holders. KELI is an intensive, theme-based program that enables English Language Learners to improve their oral and written English, and to develop the necessary skills to prepare for college. The theme- and project-based learning encourages students to explore aspects of American culture, and to develop critical thinking, and organizational and computer-based research skills that will be used in college or employment. KELI Program



From left, Alejandro Caballero and Kingsborough Community College President Claudia Schrader. Through the English as a Second Language program at KCC, Alejandro has begun his college journey, majoring in business administration and playing college baseball.

Photo credit: Kingsborough Community College

benefits include: Customized class placement; 25 hours per week of intensive study; field trips and class activities; certificate of attendance; TOEFL preparation at higher levels.

“My experience as an English Second Language student was a challenge because when I arrived to the

program, I didn't know how to communicate with the people who did not know how to speak English. I tried to communicate through signs with my classmates which was so funny because they did the same with me. Sometimes, I felt like I was never going to learn English but with the perseverance and help of my family at home my English improved,” Alejandro said.

I find Alejandro's grasp of the English language much more fluid today than it was the first day we met. In addition to being a member of “The Wave” baseball team, he has social interests in joining the Latino and Caribbean clubs on campus.

“The difference between being an ESL student and a college student is that before I only used to go to one classroom, and now that I am in college I have to go to other classrooms and when you walk in the hallways to get to your class you see your new friends,” he said.

His advice, to students who are entering the ESL program is: “No matter how much everything seems confusing and you don't understand anything, don't stop trying, you will learn with perseverance and there is nothing better than learning with the teachers of this beautiful pro-

gram. As an international student I am very satisfied with my experience at Kingsborough. The professors and faculty and the President of Kingsborough Community College all want me to succeed and I feel good if I can make them proud.”

Dr. Claudia V. Schrader is the president of Kingsborough Community College, which was founded in 1963 as part of the City University of New York (CUNY). Kingsborough stands steadfast in its mission of providing both liberal arts and career education, promoting student learning and development, as well as strengthening and serving its diverse community. Situated on a 70-acre campus in the Manhattan Beach community, its tranquil seaside location is a perfect setting for reflective academic pursuits, yet the College's active engagement in the community provides students with exciting opportunities to become productive participants in a growing and vital borough. To learn more about Kingsborough English Language Institute (KELI) ESL program, visit the web at <https://www.kbcc.cuny.edu/ceesl.html>. You can also contact the ESL Program Office at (718) 368-4870; email ESL_KELI@kbcc.cuny.edu; or visit the Virtual Office: Zoom meeting ID: 857 4347 7610 (passcode: 667012).