

# Second-Language Skills

## Teaching UNH employees English

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Tuesday, October 8, 2019

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Solimar Collado '18G was 11 years old when she learned [English](#). She's self-taught. After graduating from the University of Puerto Rico at Mayaguez, Collado used those skills to teach ESL classes to adults. Now she's doing the same for a select group of UNH housekeepers. And she's doing it for free.

Collado came to UNH to get her master's degree. At one time, her father had worked in New Hampshire as a chef, so she was familiar with the northern state. After receiving her degree in English literature in 2018, Collado was offered the job of hall manager of Adams Tower West. Not long after, she met Patty Rooney, HR representative for housing, among other departments.

**“When I was studying for my master’s, I was thinking that I wanted to be a teacher, and this gave me the chance to interact with students in a different way.”**

Rooney knew that there were several Spanish-speaking employees at UNH who were interested in bettering their English skills. When she found out that Collado was fluent in both Spanish and English, she approached her with an idea.

“As the HR partner for several diverse employment groups, providing resources for interested staff to learn conversational English has been a goal for some time,” Rooney says. “From the feedback we’ve received, enhancing their English-speaking ability is seen as a way to improve communication with colleagues and confidently engage with students living on campus.”

For Collado, who has a passion for English and working with students, it is an opportunity to do something she loves and test out a possible career.

“When I was studying for my master’s, I was thinking that I wanted to be a teacher, and this gave me the chance to interact with students in a different way,” she says.

With support from Kathy Irla-Chesney, housing director, and Victoria Perkins, assistant housing director, Collado worked with Rooney to create the program based on her past experience teaching adults in Puerto Rico. The pilot program caps the number of students at seven, but there is already a waiting list for next semester that includes dining services employees.



SOLIMAR COLLADO '18G (STANDING, RIGHT) WITH HOUSEKEEPING STUDENTS IN HER FREE ENGLISH CLASS.

The group meets in the Babcock Hall lounge every Thursday at 2:30 p.m. — just after the housekeepers workday ends. Classes and the materials Collado put together are free. The focus is on conversational English with an emphasis on basic verbs.

“I’m trying to nail down verbs like ‘to be.’ It’s one of the hardest verbs to teach. If they don’t get that, they’ll have a hard time,” Collado says. “And then there’s structure, grammar, pronunciation; I use a little drawing that shows where their tongue is supposed to be so they can hear the different sounds. Basically your mouth is your instrument, and the way you move it can make any sound.”

Because she was paying as she went, it took Collado five years to get her undergraduate degree, which is also in English literature. She took a lot of linguistic courses that she says help her when it comes to teaching English. At the end of the semester, she wants to poll the group to see if her classes have been helpful.

“The students are so willing to learn; it’s really fun,” Collado says. “But I want to make sure I’m doing all I can to help them.”

Adds Rooney, “We are fortunate that Soli has the skills and past experience to create and implement this program for our team. The feedback from the participants so far has been very positive.”

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