

# A variety of classes lets adult learners try a new tongue

BY JENNIFER STREISAND  
PHOTOS PROVIDED



## A language smorgasbord

**G**reater Lafayette is a very good place to be to learn a new language as an adult. Proximity to Purdue University and facilities such as the International Center of West Lafayette really enhance the variety of languages offered and the options of how to study them.

The International Center of West Lafayette, located on Russell Street in the heart of the Purdue campus, is an ideal place for an adult to learn a new language because the classes are strictly for personal enrichment, and no college credit is offered, says Sarah Fehrman, director of the center. Although the building is located on the Purdue campus, there is no direct affiliation with the university, Fehrman notes. However, its mission of being a gathering place for the diverse

Beth Lageveen works with beginning-level students in a casual setting at Purdue Village.



residents of Greater Lafayette, is a good fit for a university campus.

"Learning a language still takes plenty of hard work, but I do think there are many resources now that we did not have in the past, and it is certainly much more useful knowing languages because we are far more likely to actually encounter people from the culture and language that we study," Fehrman says.

It's likely that the language you want to study is offered at the International Center; in the spring 2014 semester alone, it offered classes in Russian, Turkish, Chinese, Spanish, French, Arabic and Korean. For an adult who wants to learn a language, but perhaps not at the pace of a rigorous college course, the International Center welcomes all who are ready to learn.

"It would just be like if you were taking a class at a community center or the YMCA," says Fehrman. "There are no grades or credits." The classes generally meet once a week for an hour and a half and are taught by native speakers of that language.

Language classes at the International Center are truly interna-

tional: not all of the students in the classes will be native English speakers.

"We really do have a wide variety of people. For example, in the Korean class, there are Americans, Chinese and Japanese, and they all have learning Korean in common. It is an incredible mix of ages, backgrounds and nationalities," she explains.

To find out what languages are being offered at the center, visit its website: [www.intlctr.org](http://www.intlctr.org). There you can register to take a class, which costs \$80 a semester and includes course materials. You also can register at the center itself, located at 523 Russell Street in West Lafayette.

The School of Languages and Cultures at Purdue offers instruction in 12 languages, according to its website, [www.cla.purdue.edu/slc/main](http://www.cla.purdue.edu/slc/main). The school has undergraduate, master's and Ph.D. programs, but it is possible to take a language class without being in a degree program. To find out more about language instruction in the school, the

public is invited to attend the School of Languages and Cultures "Coffee and Tea Conversation Hours," in Room 131, Stanley Coulter Hall.

"I would encourage people to attend the coffee hours, ➤➤



Beth Lageveen stands with an intermediate student who recently earned a certificate.



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“A language class should be a safe and comfortable place to make mistakes and improve.”

BETH LAGEVEEN  
Language Instructor

Beth Lageveen works with students from all over the world during classes at Purdue Village.



which each language has, once a week, as a good way to reinforce language learning,” says French professor Allen Wood in the School of Languages and Cultures.

Check the school’s website for a semester-by-semester schedule of these conversation hours on campus.

It is, in fact, the large number of international students and faculty that makes Greater Lafayette such a good place to learn a new language. In the spring 2014 semester, Purdue reported an enrollment of more than 8,700 international students, and more than 1,100 faculty. Many of these students and faculty have adult family members who need additional instruction in English, and so they too, are learning a new language.

Several places in Greater Lafayette offer English language instruction. Purdue offers an English-language instruction program for adults who live in the university’s residences around campus. The program is called ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages), and comes under the auspices of Purdue’s Housing and Food Services program.

Instructor Beth Lageveen teaches English to students from all over the world in an inviting and warm classroom setting at the Purdue Village Community Center.

There is a lot of laughter and banter in the room.

“I was a math teacher in Romania, and I know that teaching is not easy, and it is important that students enjoy

what they are studying,” says student Timea Darvas.

Students in the program sit in large and small semi-circles and practice everything from pronunciation to grammar and syntax, and storytelling. For example, Lageveen shows them how to pronounce “soup,” by pursing and jutting out her lips in an exaggerated way. Lageveen writes an idiom of the day on the board to explain how words and phrases can have multiple meanings.

Conversation is also an important part of the ESOL program.

“There is a speed talk class that meets once a month, and that experience helps me to talk in English,” says student Seongha Park of Korea.

“When you listen, you learn the pronunciation,” says student Mabel Munoz



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Students work on everything from pronunciation to grammar to storytelling in Beth Lageveen's classes.

of Colombia.

You can learn language by studying alone, but taking classes adds more dimensions and depth to the learning process.

"I have opportunities to speak English with the classes," says ESOL student Kubra Kayman of Turkey.

Another way to study a language is through a faith community. This setting allows for a type of fellowship that may make learning a new language less intimidating.

A small group of adult members of Temple Israel of West Lafayette meet twice a month to study Hebrew, the language of the Hebrew Bible or the Old Testament. The class began three years ago with a study of the Hebrew alphabet, and it is now reading and saying prayers in Hebrew.

"Adults are making the time and the effort to learn this as adults, and people are finding that it is deepening their own connection to Judaism," says Rabbi

Audrey Pollack, who teaches the class. The group was formerly taught by Kathie Dior — author of "The Twisted Doors" language books with audio that teach French, Spanish and English as a second language/English as a foreign language — and by Karen Fanwick, who was recently ordained as a rabbi.

Another place to study Biblical Hebrew, which does not require affiliation with a synagogue, is in the Purdue School of Languages and Cultures. The course is taught by Rev. Stuart Robertson and is open to any student or adult in the community who is interested in learning the Old Testament in its original language.

"My class is always a terrific mix of students from Jewish, Christian or non-religious backgrounds," Robertson says. "Most of my students do not intend to use the Hebrew as part of their career," he notes. They take the class for personal enrichment.

If you are interested in studying the

New Testament in its original language, there is a place for that, too. Faith Presbyterian Church in West Lafayette has a class in New Testament Greek, which meets Sunday mornings at 11 a.m. after worship, says instructor Jurgen Honig. The class is open to anyone interested in learning New Testament Greek.

"I decided to learn the language on my own so I could read the New Testament in its original formulation," Honig says. He was then able to get others in the congregation interested.

Greater Lafayette really is its own global community and offers as many options as one can hope for to learn a language. However, the teachers say it is ultimately what the student does that will determine the progress of learning.

"I think for learning any language, it is practice, practice, practice and not be afraid to make mistakes," says Wood.

Lageveen says, "A language class should be a safe and comfortable place to make mistakes and improve."