

Claire Darmstadter

Hey everybody, I am so lucky to be joined today by Kristin Dalby, Assistant Director at the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Language Institute. Thanks for taking a couple minutes to chat with me.

Kristin Dalby

My pleasure. Thanks for having me.

Claire Darmstadter

Yeah, so there's so much you do. And it's a little bit difficult to pick a place to start. But can you just give us a really general overview of your linguistic and educational background and kind of how you ended up in your current position at UW?

Kristin Dalby

Sure, I can, I can tell you my educational linguistic background. So I got a bachelor's degree from UW Madison in French and anthropology, but the French plays the role here. During that time, I studied abroad for an academic year in Aix-en-Provence, France. And that sort of launched me on a path where I ended up living and working abroad for 15 years. I ended up getting a TESOL certificate in the late 90s. And I ended up going down the path of being an English as a second, or foreign language teacher. And I did that for over 20 years, I ended up going out and getting a master's degree in applied linguistics and TESOL. And I worked in a variety of countries teaching ESL or EFL, depending where I was to tertiary level students, either in private language schools, or at universities. I've taught in let's see the Czech Republic, New Zealand, and South Korea and here at UW-Madison. I came back to the states in 2013 and ended up working in UW Madison's ESL program. And my position there was a lecturer, senior lecturer, instructor, whatever. Then, to get to where I am currently, about a year ago, I transitioned out of teaching, and started at the language institute where I'm the assistant director. And my role here, I wear two hats. One is the coordinator of the second language acquisition program, which is quite administrative. And then the second role is for outreach. And outreach is quite broad, it can be k-12, I'm responsible for youth programming to make sure that any youth programming that the language institute is involved in is compliant, and following all the procedures that the Office of Youth Protection and Compliance has. But also outreach can be, you know, campus outreach, and it can be community outreach, as well. So I'm involved with WAFLT, and you know, the UW Madison's languages initiative, and other ways. And we're trying to, as you said earlier, to kind of, you know, make, make so many people aware of what a multilingual place we live in and to value that more.

Claire Darmstadter

For sure. And I know specifically in this kind of newer role, you're working with facilitated language studies, and then also a STARTALK program, and I don't think many people are familiar with what those are. So can you just kind of talk us through what they do and what they entail?

Kristin Dalby

Sure, yeah, definitely. I'll start with facilitated language studies. So this is a program that maybe not a lot of people are aware of, possibly because there aren't too many. So to my knowledge, three high schools in Wisconsin offer this type of class. The class is called facilitated language studies. And it is facilitated by a licensed world language teacher. Each high school has slightly different offerings, but they offer less commonly taught languages. And there it's offered at Madison West, Madison East, and Plymouth High School and Plymouth is a smaller town in I think, east-central Wisconsin. The way it works is the students select the language that they want to study. It's not completely open, like I said, each school has limited offerings. And then the facilitator teacher helps connect the student to resources and helps the student make a plan of study and it's fairly self directed. But another piece to that is tutors. So my role I've helped to connect the high school teachers to tutors. Sometimes these are university students, either undergraduates or grads, sometimes community members. The Language Institute has been facilitating these connections for several years; the person who was in my role before me did that. And they even in times before the pandemic arranged visits, so the students in these classes would come to UW-Madison and be able to sit in on a class of the language that they were learning and, and also just have a visit for to campus and just to learn more about language instruction at the university level. So yeah, I've helped these teachers connect with students, most recently through the Morgridge Center and through Badger Volunteers. But also when that's not quite enough, I've connected in other ways as well.

Claire Darmstadter

And STARTALK

Kristin Dalby

STARTALK, yeah, sure. So STARTALK is, do you know what the STARTALK program is?

CLAIRE DARMSTADTER

Yes, I believe it's working with the Korean language, kind of a summer program for students because we don't necessarily have Korean programs in high school available.

Kristin Dalby

So yeah, STARTALK is actually a federal program. It's a federally funded program, supported by the NSA, the National Security Agency. And that mission is to increase the number of US citizens who are learning, speaking and teaching critical need languages. And there are programs for students in K through 16. And there are also teacher programs. And so STARTALK Korean Language and Culture Academy, which is the program that I coordinate, is a STARTALK program. So STARTALK, it's the name of several different kinds of programs. And this one is for high school students, rising High School nine, including graduated seniors, so rising into ninth and including graduated 12th graders, for either zero Korean experience, or just, they have a little bit of experience, we can accommodate like to novice levels. And it's a four week, free, intensive language and culture program, which will be offered virtually this year, because of the going restrictions with the pandemic, from mid June to mid July.

Claire Darmstadter

And you talked a little bit about how it's like a federal program that has kind of a purpose behind it. So when we look at some of these languages that might be funded or supported because we believe they're valuable to our national security, or there's something related to that, how do we kind of look at the status of the language, not as learning to to protect our security and looking at the speakers of these languages, potentially being a threat to security? How do we kind of raise the status without focusing on that negative aspect even if that's what maybe gives us the funding?

Kristin Dalby

That's a great question. You know, my experience in this so far is that it being free is certainly helpful, like because especially that helps us reach populations, where costs may actually cut them off from access to this kind of program. So while that is true access being more accessible because of the funding and the funding being there because it is this critical need. I think, though, when you look at the learners, and why they're taking it's because they have this, you know, that kind of more, you know, motivation, this inside motivation, this, they want to learn about the language, they want to learn about the culture. And although this may not be true for every single learner, I think a lot of them would not really identify as you know, I might potentially have a career in whatever agency if I learned this critical need language. So it's interesting, I feel like we can sort of satisfy the mission of the the grant funded program, but also satisfy that in a way that is kind of more, I don't know, in a way that just meets the needs of the language learners, which is not necessarily what I'm going to do for my job and how I'm going to help national security. I feel like they're not mutually exclusive, if that makes any sense.

Claire Darmstadter

For sure. And I know you also, like you mentioned, you've worked in ESL settings, and you've done it more at the tertiary level. So like, you know, universities or other higher education, and I think most people associate ESL-type classes with elementary school, middle school, high school. Can you talk about how it's a little bit different with older learners and kind of how do you change your approaches as a result?

Kristin Dalby

Yeah, sure, it really kind of depends too where you're at. So like, for example, I have a lot of, kind of equal amounts of experience working in the target language environment. So here like at UW-Madison, you know, like so the goals of those students, it's different from when I was teaching English in South Korea where we were not surrounded by the target language, and by and large, the classes were not in English, right. So first of all, it really depends where you're at and what the goals of the institution are in terms of English language education. So here at UW Madison, it's supporting students in understanding what academic English is, what the expectations of them, what the expectations in their classes may look like, depending on their instructors and and their majors, having them understand that like there are different educational approaches. And it's not just a language class I guess is what I'm trying to say. I feel like there's also, at least when I taught it, there's the hidden curriculum, there's sort of additional adjustments support for international students. These classes are designed for students to be taken early in their career. They don't always do that. But I'd say that's definitely one of the

goals. You know, and also just having students understand what the concept of plagiarism means here and what academic misconduct is here. Not because by any means, do we think that international students engage in this more but because these concepts, there are different definitions of them and different ways that they're interpreted in different educational cultures. So I feel like that's one. It's support. It's definitely support. And by the time they get to ESL classes at UW Madison, these are really, yes, of course, we're still dealing with language, but it's it's more about, I feel like style and using academic language in a Midwestern large public university educational culture. And then in Korea, it was very different. It was trying to equip the students with enough English. Usually, the universities I worked with wanted to kind of focus a little bit more on specific English specific to their majors. I worked a lot with engineering students, so kind of, but there was a lot more language support, it was a lot more what you might think of as more traditional ESL teaching, but certainly an academic approach too but students were doing the bulk of their their coursework at the university in Korean, whether or not that was their native language, it depended.

Claire Darmstadter

Yeah, that's really interesting, looking at the different perspectives, and rationales and all the different components of the program. I think people don't really consider that it's more than just like learning English as a language. And there's so many other outside components and factors that influence. So additionally, you also work as the director of a second language acquisition PhD program. So can you just kind of talk about what are some careers or pathways people are on prior to enrolling in this program? And then maybe what one can do with a PhD in this topic post graduation?

Kristin Dalby

Sure. So yeah, I can definitely talk about that. So prior it, you know, it depends a lot, I think you end up with students who have been language teachers a lot of times now, where, what kind of language, it varies. It could be people who have been high school Spanish teachers, it could be people who have studied in their home countries, for example, like study language, in their home country, and were teaching English in their home country. So a variety of backgrounds, but usually somewhat related to language and often language teaching. When they leave, there's a variety of paths they can follow. And we do have, I'll send you a link to our alumni page, which lists what our alum have done. So a lot of instructors and professors, again, in various languages depending on what they specialized in. We also have researchers, one of our alum works right here at UW-Madison, in the Wisconsin Evaluation Collaborative, which, like I said, is housed here at UW Madison. We have let's see, there's a director of a Language Resource Center. So I think that's title six, I believe, research center. And we do have some that go back that go into K-12 education as well. So again, it's pretty varied but is often related to language, applied language to applied language studies.

Claire Darmstadter

Yeah, well I will include that link below. Also, STARTALK; I didn't realize it is free, so I think people will really enjoy checking those out. Last final question before we leave. Can you just

give me one reason why you think being multilingual and why we should celebrate multilingualism as a superpower?

Kristin Dalby

Because being multilingual expands your knowledge system views so much. And so I love that you call it a superpower. I think if you can look at the world and understand that there are multiple worldviews and that they are all valid, being multilingual assists with that. And then once you go down that path, I think that leads to much greater empathy and harmony and understanding about what being human means. So, yeah, I think I'll end it at that.

Claire Darmstadter

Oh, for sure. So well said, thank you so much for chatting with me and I hope you have a great day.

Kristin Dalby

Thank you.