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Episode 31: Christal Ramirez

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Transcript

Christina Torres

Hi everyone, and welcome to Futures in Languages, a podcast showcasing stories from UCF's Modern Languages and Literatures Department alumni, and your host, Christina Torres. And today we'll be talking with Cristal Ramirez, who graduated from a major in Poly Sci and International Relations. She did her TEFL certificate in the Modern Languages department, and she graduated in spring of 2020. Thank you so much for joining us today, Cristal.

Cristal Ramirez

Thank you, Christina. I'm really excited.

Christina Torres

It's a pleasure to talk with you today. I know that we have a lot of things to talk about, but let's go ahead and start off with a general question. Can you tell us a bit about yourself and where you're from.

Cristal Ramirez

So I was born in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, and I came when I was just about six months old. So I actually came here, to America, my dad brought me and we lived in New York for a while, and we lived in Texas for a while, and then we settled down here in Orlando, actually. So I grew up here in Orlando, Florida, if anybody knows Waterford Lakes area? Yeah, I literally was raised in this area and I'm still here. But it has been super cool to grow up in the same area because you grow up with the same people. So I have the same best friends since I was like 7 years old and yeah, and then I decided to go to UCF because honestly, I was scared of like the whole financial situation and I knew UCF was gonna be like the most financially responsible decision for me to make, but I ended up really loving UCF, like UCF compared to any of the other schools, I think was my best decision cause it's just an awesome school. I love the campus. I loved the major that I picked, the professors that I had, the events going on, the football games, the groups that I joined the gym. I just loved everything about UCF, so I'm really happy with my decision and yeah.

Christina Torres

Yeah, I'm just so glad that you talked about uh, you know, financially savvy and academically savvy decision because I think it's important for listeners to also consider their finances when they go into undergrad and how wise of you to make that choice, and to go somewhere that fit you both financially and personally and lead you in your professional trajectory. One of the things that I talk about with UCF is again, it's my hometown university too. Like I grew up in Sanford. We did like science fairs, we would go visit UCF campus to do like the egg drops off of like buildings and what like 3rd or 4th grade. So I've seen the campus grow a lot in our time and I mean you have two in our lifetime, and I'm really proud of the diversity that we see at UCF, and really proud of how it can feel both like a big school and a small school. Really, depending on what you do and where you go, there's a little bit of something for everyone, and you're right, our gym is really cool so.

Cristal Ramirez

Yeah, I really, I think that's like something that I also regret. But like, you know, you're so young and you don't really know, and it's such a big school. So you really have to put in the initiative and like, have the motivation to get out there and find like your communities, because I feel like I found my communities too late. Like I just did everything too late. Not too late, I still got to do it.

Christina Torres

But but but you did it, you still did it?

Cristal Ramirez

Yeah, exactly. But like at the beginning. I wouldn't, like I wished I joined groups, you know, did more research on the things that I wanted to do. So I was more prepared for when I was graduating, you know, had something like lined up and stuff like that. I mean, I'm not going to say that I didn't enjoy my time though.

Christina Torres

Yeah, yeah, of course. But I think that's a feeling that a lot of people share. It's like it takes a second to find your footing in like how you manage your time with your classes and how you manage your time with your social life outside of class and how you can work your clubs in and how to not feel overwhelmed. You know, like that's a delicate dance that I think everyone at 18, 19,20, you know like, we were there, we remember it. It's a delicate dance and it's tough to find that balance. But I agree with you, especially like in my experiences in school. By the time I was in senior year, I finally found my footing and then it was like boom, it's done what you know. But what a cool trajectory to have experienced and to share with our listeners. So you mentioned that you found your group at the end. Could you share with our listeners a little bit more about maybe some clubs or some groups that you participated in at UCF?

Cristal Ramirez

So at the beginning, since I was like a Poly Sci major, I wanted to join like the model UN Group. But it was it was intimidating, you know, so I never went to the meetings. And there was an international relations club that I was like in the Facebook group, but I never went to the meetings with that either because I was I was super shy in the beginning. And I encourage everybody to get rid of all your shyness, just do it. But towards the end I got out of my shell, and I had this one class where I met this one girl and she was like, oh, we had this meeting for they were called Global Ambassadors. So they basically are like tour guides for the international students at UCF, and it was so much fun. It was just basically a group that would meet up every week and then we would just hang out with all the international kids, and that was a pretty fun group. But then I also did, I was really into running in high school, so I tried to find groups at UCF, and so I did 1/2 marathon training with the, with the group at UCF, and then I'm going to little workout classes too. The yoga was really fun, but I think that's pretty much what I did, yeah. With the TEFL certificate, we did the conversations with the international students, so that was really cool. And we had to do, like, volunteer stuff with the TEFL certificate. So that was also cool and like, an opportunity to become part of, like, another group.

Christina Torres

Yeah, absolutely. And thank you for sharing that. And and kudos to you for training for half marathon. I did one and then I said I'm finished. I crossed the finish line and I'm like, we're not doing this, yeah.

Cristal Ramirez

I like let it go. For a while, but then now I'm back into it and, there are so many run clubs here in Orlando. I have a different run club every day of the week and I just completed another half marathon in QS, and my first marathon in Athens, Greece.

Christina Torres

Well then. For you again respect respect. Yes, yes. And you're referencing some of the volunteer work that you did through the TOEFL certificate program, which we're going to talk about a little bit more. But for those who are listening, I just want to share that when you participate in the TEFL certificate program, it is important, and we do give you opportunities to interact with international students, with folks who are learning English as an additional language, both here on campus and also sometimes online and also out in the community. And so you do get opportunities to have really nice conversations with folks who are not from Orlando, or with folks who are learning an additional language. You get an opportunity to observe and or sometimes lead class in volunteer positions in the Orlando community through nonprofits or through observing it at state colleges that we have partnerships with. So we do make sure that folks coming through that TEFL certificate have these critical experiences before they have to lead or before they are in charge of their own classrooms as well. So thank you for bringing that up, Cristal.

Cristal Ramirez

And I actually really enjoyed that part cause I've I've always had like since I was, I was raised here in Orlando, even though I was born in a different country and like I grew up with, you know, my Dominican parent, and I always have, like, a fascination of international people. So when they're like people from another country, I'm like, wow, I wonder what your way of life is over, like, there just how different your life is from mine. And I just love meeting people from other countries because it's so different from the way that I've lived, and I just love learning about other people.

Christina Torres

Yeah, and this was beautiful opportunities for learning as a whole. And that to me is one of the really great things about TEFL is that you get to meet all kinds of people from all walks of life who are all learning language for different reasons, whether that's business, college, or just the desire to travel. And you get to hear their stories, too. And frankly, hearing student stories is one of my favorite parts of my of my job here too. You took us through your Poly Sci and some of your TEFL cert experiences. Do you have any like major take away stories from your experiences volunteering during your TEFL cert?

Cristal Ramirez

Yeah, I mean, really just going to the classes. I remember one of the volunteer things that we had to do was just go to different classes and just talk like, have conversations with different every time. It was like maybe once a week and every week you would have a different kid to talk to. And I still remember, like the kids that I met through that volunteer thing because there was this one Japanese guy, and I still have

him on Instagram and like we became friends just based off like a 30 minute conversation that we had in that class. He was so nice and he invited me to like a party that night, but I really enjoyed that.

Christina Torres

OK.

Cristal Ramirez

It was just, what I love to do, talk to people from different countries and I got to do that once a week with a lot of different people. I met this one Dominican girl. So I remember like all those conversations that I had and I really, really enjoyed that. I remember also I had to teach a class once and that was really nerve wracking. But you know, people say that public speaking is like one of the best skills you can have. So I definitely like I knew that before doing it. So I was like, I'm really gonna put myself out there and, like, take this opportunity because I have to do it. But then also because I want to improve my public speaking skills, so that was cool. I really liked everything that I had to do with TEFL. It was really eye opening. Also the grammar classes. I'm like, you don't, you speak English? But like, there's so many things that go into a language, grammar, punctuation, most of the time I was doing it wrong and the teacher she was, you know, teaching me things that was like blowing my mind because I'm like, I speak this language every single day and I don't know the most basic things about the language.

Christina Torres

I believe that you're talking about my retired colleague, Doctor Marcello Farina.

Cristal Ramirez

Yes, I loved her. I loved her. She's an awesome professor. Oh, my gosh, I enjoyed going to her classes.

Christina Torres

She's great. She's great. And that's one of the things that we talked about in those TEFL cert classes, which I incidentally teach in the TEFL certificate at Modern Languages. Being a native speaker of a language is not, in and of itself training to teach that language, and this is one of the things that we really explain in detail and the cert is like, number 1, congratulations that you've made the decision to really receive your training before you go overseas because you can get jobs overseas without specific training. But really, consider your comfort level if you've not been formally trained in the nuts and bolts of the language. So we deconstruct English language, we put it back together so that everyone has that concrete declarative knowledge on language, and they're armed with what I call the teacher toolkit. Before we, you know, before anyone goes overseas, before anyone leads a class, you have the nuts and bolts of English language and some strategies to teach it as well. I like that you talked about memorable conversations, because that's the thing that as a teacher, I remember a lot of my students too. And over the years, like you have these stand out conversations and and they stay with you. You know you carry your students with you in the next phase of your career, of your life, folks coming through classes. You stay with us too. So yeah, thanks for mentioning that. And what have you been up to since graduation?

Cristal Ramirez

Yeah, so since graduation, I well, I graduated in May 2020, so, you know, like we've been, yeah.

Christina Torres

Special time in history?

Cristal Ramirez

Everybody knows what happened during that time. It was COVID and before I graduated, like December 2019 till like May 2020, honestly, I was doing a couple internships like I interned with the, this is where it comes in when I was saying earlier that I did everything too late. I had four internships at the same time, all at the end, yeah. So I wasn't really working, I was just doing internships. I interned with the Multicultural Affairs Office of the city of Orlando. That was a cool experience, then I interned at a nonprofit called Prospera, and they're a business development nonprofit that helps Hispanic owned businesses basically get their foot in the door. Yeah, it was really cool. And they're basically like business development consultants. But that was a cool experience. And after that I think it was just COVID. Yeah, so after COVID.

Christina Torres

Yeah, COVID was a thing. And before we move on, I'm just really, if you don't mind sharing with our listeners, could you share a little bit about maybe some stories of those internships like any like one or two stand out stories for anyone who's maybe considering internships so that they can imagine the impact of the experience in their own, in their own lives?

Cristal Ramirez

So with the city of Orlando, so I've always been interested in government, hence the political science degree. So I was like, oh, let me try my local government and they didn't really have internships online, so I just emailed all the head of the departments that I was interested in, because there's a lot of departments in the City of Orlando cause, you know, it's local government. So all the ones that I was interested in, I just sent out an e-mail. So I sent out an e-mail to Economic Development and Multicultural Affairs, and I ended up getting the one from Multicultural Affairs and I was basically an assistant to the director of that office. So and events we attended, I attended meetings with her. She eventually did like a Multicultural Affairs board, so it was a bunch of a bunch of community members that would come together and try to discuss the issues that they are all seeing in their community and seeing how it can be resolved by working together. Basically that was really cool to witness, and I just learned a lot about the city and all the possibilities and, all the possibilities of what each department can do and learn what each department can do. So it was really cool and I'm really glad that I did that. But then afterwards I was there for a while and I wanted a job in the city, but I couldn't get one and so then I applied to Prospera through Handshake, the UCF Handshake.

Christina Torres

And for our listeners who aren't familiar with UCF Handshake, could you could you share with them.

Cristal Ramirez

So it's, it's for students. It's like a job board like Indeed, LinkedIn, but it's for students, and employers go on there specifically looking for UCF students. So it's a good way to get an internship really, I've heard people get jobs from that too, volunteerships around. So it's a really good tool and it's free. And these

employers are specifically looking for UCF students. You know how LinkedIn it's UCF students, plus a bunch of other people. So this one is just for UCF students, so it's like it gives you better chances of like finding a job or an internship. So I got Prospera through Handshake. And that one, I was really just putting like data from all the events that they did and like taking minutes from their meetings, which was, yes, I was like, doing all the tedious work, But I actually learned a lot like going to those meetings and going to those events. Like I learned what it takes to, like, start a business. Which is a lot, and thank God that there are organizations out there like Prospera that helps people. That don't know what they what to do when you want to start a business, they can go to Prospera and ask any questions that they want, not for free, but like you know, low cost cause it's a nonprofit. But sitting in those meetings where it was, everybody at Prospera and then these people would come in and they would present their marketing, their branding services and these people would get grants, so then they can help the people that are trying to start their business, if that makes sense.

Christina Torres

Thank you. So let me make sure that I understand this correctly. So there's a team of folks at Prospera, which is the the nonprofit that's assisting, If I remember correctly, the Hispanic owned businesses or the folks who want to have Hispanic owned businesses in the creation and the start up of those businesses. So from what you were saying, there's a team of folks on staff at Prospera who apply for grants to get money in order to assist the ones that are coming in who are looking for assistance.

Cristal Ramirez

So there are already like these businesses that do like marketing and branding, and then they come in and present their services to the Prospera team, and then the Prospera team will give them money, so then they can go and help, like these Hispanic owned businesses that need marketing, that they don't really have a marketing or branding. So then they help them, like, get their foot in the door and, like, help them with their marketing because marketing is a big,

Christina Torres

A big aspect,

Cristal Ramirez

Part of the business, right?

Christina Torres

Yeah, I can imagine how much you've learned in listening to those meetings about the nuts and bolts of owning a business and working in a nonprofit, which makes sense because I understand that now you work for a nonprofit. Could you tell our listeners a bit about the nonprofit where you work now?

Cristal Ramirez

Yeah, so I was Actually unemployed for like a year during COVID.

Christina Torres

COVID was hard for everyone, so yeah.

Cristal Ramirez

Really sucked, but I've finally found Orlando Center for Justice and that is where I'm currently working. It's a nonprofit that provides legal aid services to the underserved communities here in Central Florida. And I've been with them now in March, I'm going to be there for two years, and in two years I have done so much. Anybody knows like how a nonprofit works, we don't really make a lot of money, and like we're funded by outside grants, outside funders, so we really have little, a little bit to work with.

Christina Torres

Yeah, yeah. And then you have to find creative ways to find funding for the projects that you need to be working on.

Cristal Ramirez

Yeah, I mean, so at the beginning, I was hired to work with a children's reunification center, so I there's a a reunification center here in Orlando, and every kid under 18 that comes into that center, we have to do a "know your rights" presentation and a legal screening. So every kid that comes in, we present their legal options and their defenses and talk about the immigration court and their rights. So it's a really informative presentation. so they have that information as soon as they get here into the United States. And then we also do legal screenings to see how we can help them before they leave with their family member anywhere in the US. I've heard a lot of stories.

Christina Torres

I'm sure are these unaccompanied minors.

Cristal Ramirez

These are unaccompanied minors that come from Central America, Haiti, w've had kids from Africa, Europe. So yeah. And I've been doing it for two years and I've served over 500 kids. So yeah, in two years. So it's a lot, but it it's, you know, just listening to all those stories makes you really appreciative of the life that you have. You know, even working immigration. My dad was a U.S. citizen, so I didn't have to deal with a lot of immigration things. But now, working in immigration, it's like, wow, these people, they, they want a better life. That's all they want honestly. The system makes it so hard for them to just get a work permit, go to school, become a citizen, you know, because that's what they all want.

Christina Torres

It sounds like you are working to support those, in this case, the unaccompanied minors who are arriving and, do they stay at the nonprofit? How does that work? And for those who might be curious listening.

Cristal Ramirez

So our office is here on Semoran, and we are basically just the legal, the legal part of the shelter.

Christina Torres

OK, got you.

Cristal Ramirez

So they they have their case, the shelter is somewhere else, And they have, like, their case managers.

Christina Torres

OK.

Cristal Ramirez

And you know, everybody working on their cases, we just come in and give them information about the legal system and what they need to do, such as like always go to their court dates and stuff like that. But that has been one part of my job.

Christina Torres

Wow, so then your nonprofit supports these kinds of shelters that house these unaccompanied minors. And I'm sure other folks, too, that need legal advice. Is that correct?

Cristal Ramirez

Exactly. Yeah, exactly so.

Christina Torres

OK, great.

Cristal Ramirez

We also do like consultations for anybody that's interested anybody that needs an attorney for their immigration case. So I am not an attorney. I was just well, at first I was data coordinator, then for briefly, I was a legal assistant, then briefly I was something else, and now I am a grants program coordinator.

Christina Torres

OK.

Cristal Ramirez

But I didn't tell so much because I'm still working on the shelter, and then I started doing, like legal assistant work, and then I started event planning, which was really cool. I really enjoyed that part.

Christina Torres

What kinds of events do you plan for?

Cristal Ramirez

So we hold two events a year, three last year. But my first big event that I planned was called Immigrant Appreciation Day. And that is held in downtown Orlando and it's basically just a bunch of organizations that come together, and we had cultural performances, food trucks, and all these community organizations that came out and just provided resources for the community, you know, so we just invited people that just wanted more information about things that they don't know. Because there are so many nonprofits, and so many organizations here in Orlando that people don't know.

Christina Torres

I'm sure.

Cristal Ramirez

So like an event like that is such a perfect way to bring them all together and just have people come out and be like oh wow, I didn't know that existed. And that's something that I really need, you know.

Christina Torres

Sounds like both an informative time and also a little bit of a party, yeah.

Cristal Ramirez

Yeah, exactly. And then we also host a 5K in January and that's just to celebrate the new year, you know in a healthy way and bring community members again together because we have some orgs that come out to table that event. And that's more of a fundraiser for us that helps with another program that we all have that's called the Hello Project, and the Hello Project is in a legal orientation that we hold every first Thursday of every month. It's a legal orientation for newcomers to the community, so like everybody, anybody that has come to the to this area within the past two years, if they need information on like what to do, what is around here, what resources are there, just how to find their court date, where the court is. Just basic information that not a lot of people know when they first get here.

Christina Torres

Especially if you're new to a city, like anytime you're new to really any city, even if you speak the language, it can be very can be real turned around. Yeah, for sure.

Cristal Ramirez

So that's something that we're doing now that is, we're really excited about. But yeah, event planning, was writing grants for a while. Like, is that my director would come to me and she's like, oh, you want to try this? This was my first time, first full time job, so really what I wanted out of this experience was to experience everything you know. So that's what I got.

Christina Torres

Yeah, yeah.

Cristal Ramirez

I really got to do a little bit of everything, and I really enjoyed my time at OCJ.

Christina Torres

It sounds like a really important, really diversity of experiences. Like you say it's, it's so helpful to be well-rounded. That's something I tell all the students coming through my classes, whether that's, you know, my applied linguistics minor courses, or the TEFL certificate classes. And whenever I work with Masters level students, it makes sense and it's I think a wise choice in the beginning of your career to try to be as well rounded as possible to try to get as much diversity of job experiences as possible because you never know where life is going to take you.

Cristal Ramirez

Yes! And you never know what you will like unless you try it. Right?

Christina Torres

Absolutely, yeah.

Cristal Ramirez

So, like, I wanted to try everything 'cause I honestly I still don't know what I like to do. So like I I'm figuring out life. I'm 26 and I'm still doing things that are new and exciting and you know, I don't think I'll ever figure out what I want to do because I want to do everything.

Christina Torres

Yeah, I think I felt a lot of that too, and I still, in some ways, I'm like, I still want to do everything, I still want to do a lot of different things, but it's so nice that we're able to continue to grow and change in our career trajectory. And I tell you know, we talked about this on the podcast too, that no one's ever stuck and sometimes there's this perception in undergrad when you're choosing your major that you will be stuck in this one thing and only that thing. But you're an example of, no, you can learn lots of stuff.

Cristal Ramirez

Yeah, and that's what's good about this podcast too is like, because like every day I'll meet people not every day, like when I do meet people, yeah, they tell me their what their job is, I'm like, I would have never thought that's a job like you know.

Christina Torres

There's so many jobs, yeah.

Cristal Ramirez

And that's another reason why a lot of people say this, it's like, really cliché, but networking is important, like talking to people, asking them questions, asking them how they got to where they are now is so important.

Christina Torres

It is.

Cristal Ramirez

Is it like opens your eyes to like what the possibilities that are out there because there's so much you can learn in school, you know, and there's so much you can learn on the Internet and you don't really know what everybody does. So asking people what they do is such an eye opening thing because there are so many things out there in this world. And just asking questions and meeting people is the best way to learn about it.

Christina Torres

And we don't know what we don't know, that's been my biggest take away from getting to what I call 23rd grade. When I finished my PhD, I was like I am so much more acutely aware that there's so much to know that I don't know, but I'm going to keep trying. You know, we're going to keep trying. We're going to be lifelong learners and we're going to take it one step at a time. So thank you for sharing that. And I know that you talked about what you do in your nonprofit at the Orlando Center for Justice, can you walk us through maybe, I know it's there's no such thing as a typical day for you, but could you walk our listeners through maybe a recent example of a day so that they can get a sense of what kinds of things you do on a day-to-day.

Cristal Ramirez

So we're a pretty small team, we're like 18 people. So like a typical day for me would be, well, every day I have to check the shelter, like how many kids left, how many kids got in and then I have to schedule their "Know your Rights" presentation. So all of the kids get their presentation on time before they leave and then have to schedule their legal screenings before they leave. So we can mark if they are a kid that needs extra attention. So then I do that. Sometimes, our director, because we have currently 4 attorneys on our team, so each attorney has their legal assistant, but you know, sometimes the legal assistants aren't available. So I'm more of like I bounce around everywhere like any one will come to me and as, oh, "Cristal, can you do this?" But just like translate a document, to reach out to the client for payment, e-mail a client because we're missing paperwork for them, maybe schedule a meeting with the attorney. So that's, like, part of the legal assistant work. We do trainings right now. I'm in a training for just immigration 101 because I did it when I first started at OCJ. But now we're doing it again just to like refresh our memories. It's crazy how much you learn like you know now that I'm, like, doing the job and doing this training again. Like oh wow, now I get it.

Christina Torres

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Cristal Ramirez

Now I'm connecting the dots of that training. I'll get grant sent to me and they're like, oh, Cristal, "can you look into this grant? Do a timeline for us and write down the questions and start drafting them." I'm like, OK.

Christina Torres

So it seems like there are facilitator of a lot of different areas in this nonprofit.

Cristal Ramirez

And then like with the Hello project, now it's calling the clients because are calling the people that come to the orientation because at the end of the month, we have a self help clinic, where it's just like a mini-consultations and help them get started with their case. So we're like planning that part now. Yeah, I just do a little bit of everything really. And if you wanna do a little bit of everything join a nonprofit.

Christina Torres

OK, that's fair advice from Cristal, listeners. Everyone who's listening. And do you have any one kind of stand out case that you've worked with or around that you could maybe share? I know you can't share a lot of everything, but like maybe in general broad strokes talk about for our listeners.

Cristal Ramirez

I mean, I think what will stick with me with about this job is definitely like talking to those kids. I've talked to, as I said, maybe it's 300 to 500, let's just say. Yeah, I don't know what exactly the number is, but it's around there. These stories that I hear it's just crazy kids that are literally 12 years old, crossing from all the way from Guatemala to the border of the United States completely by themselves. And like they tell me stories of how they can't eat, and they get robbed and, I've heard really bad stories, but definitely talking to those kids is will be a very memorable thing coming that will always stick with me from this job.

Christina Torres

I can imagine that it feels so important and so just really almost like a privilege that you're able to be there to help these people, these kids who need the help when they need the help when they arrive at your at the shelter associated with your nonprofit.

Cristal Ramirez

And like by the time they get to the shelter they're like already happy because they're like here, you know, they made it. So they're just super grateful, these kids are, besides everything that they go through, they're still talking to me with a smile on their face. I'm like, how? Like it it's just so crazy. And you know, I approach talking to these kids in a way or I'm not there as a legal person, I'm they're just, I'm having a conversation with them, trying to figure out, like, what kind of life they live, what problems they had, how they got here, why they wanted to come here. Those are all the types of questions that I have to ask, and just having a conversation with them, I don't want it to feel very legal, so I just do it in a way where it's nice for both of us and it's not heavy on them, where they have to recall all the horrible things that happened throughout those journeys.

Christina Torres

What a beautiful way of really showcasing the resilience of people. That's what you're showing, talking about these kids' resilience, and you get to be there to witness that. What a, what a wonderful thing.

Cristal Ramirez

Oh yes, I also wanted to say that I'm really proud of myself of that event that I planned last year. The Immigrant Appreciation Day, because this being my first full time job, you know, I wanted to see like what I was capable of. And like they gave me, this was like probably the first big project that they gave me and it was a really successful event, and I was, I felt like really proud of myself, you know. But like that will also be a very memorable part of this job.

Christina Torres

It sounds like you put a lot of hats on and that you were able to execute that. And that leads me to my next question, which is how did that TEFL certificate program in the Modern Languages department help you in your life now?

Cristal Ramirez

So definitely with the translations because for some reason I always stumbled upon like Spanish speaking jobs or internships, like Prospera with Hispanic owned business, the multicultural affairs the director was Venezuelan, and then OCJ, It's working my majority with Spanish speaking people and you learn all the, you know, terms and everything from the TEFL certificate. What I've learned from the TEFL certificate is definitely like being aware of grammar really. I mean, that's my most memorable thing from the TEFL certificate is just being aware of how you write things and it's kind of made me, what's the word? You know, checking my work always.

Christina Torres

I would imagine that. That's actually a good skill to have when you're doing technical writing, especially for grants, is that really particular eye for how things are written.

Cristal Ramirez

Yeah, definitely. It's helped me with my writing, my translations, yeah, I mean, and it's such a, and for me also, it was such a good tool I have because when I got my TEFL certificate, it was always kind of like a Plan B type of thing because I traveling and I you know, I heard that you can travel and be like an English teacher.

Christina Torres

Turns out you can. Yeah, but you don't have to use skills in the TEFL certificate, which is why I appreciate, you know, you sharing how this applies to life here in Orlando.

Cristal Ramirez

Yeah, exactly. It's also helped me with my presentation skills, and it helped me with conversation skills too, right? Because they all those volunteer things that I had to do with TEFL like it, I'm thinking about it now, it helps me. Now, I'm not really scared to do presentations like with the Hello Project, I had to do a whole presentation in front of the newcomers of Orlando. Yeah, so, I mean, thinking back, it has helped me in various ways, but I'm excited to use it in the way that it was intended for. I would love to be an English teacher point and maybe I'll be able to do that in the Peace Corps.

Christina Torres

Yeah, your experiences now can definitely fold into a lot of different other types of positions that you might find internationally too. So that's wonderful. We have and I know you mentioned translation. Hold on to that thought because we have our new segment which is called "Ask Our Alumni," and today's question comes from Cassidy. I'll go ahead and just play her question.

Cassidy

When you are interpreting or translating, what are some of the questions you have to ask yourself?

Cristal Ramirez

So at OCJ we do a lot of translations of client text messages, evidence, personal statements. So really, when I'm thinking about translating something, I think about it in the way that they're trying to say it in Spanish. And then I think about it then how I would say that same thing in English.

Christina Torres

So as a follow up to your comment about translating, how do you especially when there's so much need for precision in, in legal type translating? How do you approach, for example, connotation or the feeling, the intent behind word choice as you translate?

Cristal Ramirez

Yeah. So you really just have to try your best honestly. But if you do find it to be kind of difficult sometimes, especially because you wanted, you had well, in the legal aspect you have to put it in the voice of the person like of the original document, and sometimes you do jumble or stumble upon these words where it's like there is not really a word that you can, you know, directly translate. You know, we have an awesome team that will, like, put in the group chat like how do you translate this, and everybody comes together and then on top of that, you know you have all the all the different, we'll have, like, a whole conversation about like what one word means, because in Costa Rica it might be something, I mean completely different than something from Dominican Republic, you know, so we've had, we've stumbled upon some of those before. Yeah, but my babysitter growing up, she was from Peru, and we became like or we're still like, super close family friends, like my family and her family. And I remember growing up like they would always say "arrita arrita," and for them arrita is right now.

Christina Torres

Oh, for us, it's in the future.

Cristal Ramirez

But yeah. In the future, so I remember growing up and always being confused by what she meant.

Christina Torres

And so that intention behind what folks say, it's so nice that you have a collaborative team to work on translations. And sometimes...

Cristal Ramirez

Because we have people. from all over the place, like Mexico, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Colombia. So we all get to work together and, you know, try to translate that one word.

Christina Torres

There you go. Sometimes it takes a team, sometimes it takes a village. Yeah, I've got one last question for you here today, Cristal. And that is what advice would you offer someone who's interested in studying TEFL?

Cristal Ramirez

Yeah, some advice. Really go into it open minded because you don't know what you're getting yourself into. You think it's a lot easier cause it's like you're studying to become like an English teacher But no, there's so many nuts and bolts to get into that and to really learn, and it's hard to be a teacher. Like you have to learn something and then learn how to say it to other people. Which are two completely different things, and you don't know how long it's going to take to do those two things.

Christina Torres

I appreciate that you're talking about practice of that because you're right, in teaching you have to prepare again what I call the toolkit, and then you have to choose what tool to use that day for that lesson. Like, how do you make those choices because you can't throw the kitchen sink at everybody, and just because you know something doesn't mean that this is the best time to share that knowledge with your group, so it's a lot of decision making.

Cristal Ramirez

Yes, yes, definitely.

Christina Torres

Also, I heard that you're going into the Peace Corps. Could you tell our listeners a little bit more about where you're going and what your job assignment is going to be?

Cristal Ramirez

Yes, so I forgot to mention that I also did a work study in the Latin American studies program at UCF. So I worked with Doctor Tyler Fisher and I helped him with the programs that he was working on and that was also a really cool experience. And I learned a lot from him, he also was kind of like my mentor at UCF. I just, yeah and encouraged me to apply for the Peace Corps, so I applied to the Peace Corps in, I want to say fall 2019 and I was supposed to go to Costa Rica, but then COVID happened, and yeah COVID, and so then I didn't hear from them at all until this past year.

Christina Torres

Of course, COVID, yeah.

Cristal Ramirez

2022, that's when I started hearing from them again and they were like, oh, you want to go to Dominican Republic instead? I'm like heck yes. Oh my gosh, that's so much better for me. So then I did the process, I got medically cleared, legally cleared, and now my departure date is Monday. So you know I'm scared, but I'm really excited for this opportunity cause another thing that I didn't get to do at UCF was study abroad and I've always wanted to do that and.

Christina Torres

What is your job in the Peace Corps going to be in the Dominican Republic?

Cristal Ramirez

So I'm going to be a community economic development facilitator.

Christina Torres

OK.

Cristal Ramirez

So basically kind of bringing it back to what I did in Prospera of just helping local businesses get their foot in the door and grow from what they're doing now and bring any of the skills that I've had for my previous jobs to help them grow. I'm really excited. And I have always been just a visitor, tourist in Dominican Republic. I've never got to live there, so I'm really excited to just immerse myself completely into the country and learn, you know, how my mom and dad grew up, you know, everybody after my mom and dad too. Because I'm a first generation kid here so I'm just really excited for what's to come.

Christina Torres

What an exciting opportunity that your first time abroad is actually kind of going back to your family roots. So that'll be such an exciting experience Cristal and we'd love to hear how it's going. So please stay in touch.

Cristal Ramirez

Yeah, of course.

Christina Torres

Yeah, and a great opportunity to share all the skills that you've picked up working at your nonprofits and your internships here in Orlando. Is there any final thought that you'd like to leave our listeners with on your episode?

Cristal Ramirez

Well, I also wanted to mention that Peace Corps is also really nice because they give you such a freedom of like what you want to do with your projects, so I'm excited to maybe eventually explore using my TEFL certificate over there and you know, yeah. But some advice would be how I said networking is really important. It's really, really important, especially for somebody like me. I did not know what I wanted to do. So it's nice to just talk to people and see where they are, where they are in life and then maybe it gives you ideas of what you want to do, you know. So networking, you know, doing things that you really like to do and just keep exploring that until you find something that you really like to do and you get paid for it.

Christina Torres

Yeah, yeah. And I also like that you said, don't be discouraged about applications that don't go through because you never know, you might have end up in Peace Corps in a place that you're very excited about. So that's great, yeah.

Cristal Ramirez

Yep, Yep, everything happens for a reason. I'm a big believer in that.

Christina Torres

Well, thank you so much for joining us today. Cristal, it's such a treat to talk with you and good luck on your upcoming departure for Peace Corps.

Cristal Ramirez

Thank you so much and thank you to everybody listening and good luck with your future.

Christina Torres

Thank you for listening to this episode of Futures in Languages. I'd like to give a shout out to Davideo Guy for our intro and outro music downloaded from freesound.org. I'm Christina Torres and our featured guest today with Cristal Ramirez. Tune in to hear more alumni stories from Modern Languages. For more information about the TEFL certificate and other programs in the Modern Languages department, please visit our website at cah.ucf.edu/languages.