

AFSCME 3506

Adult Educators & Coordinators at the City Colleges of Chicago

Interview with Adult Educator Carlos Aulet

Carlos Aulet teaches English at Truman College. You can see his videos here.

How long have you been teaching at Truman?

I have been teaching at Truman College for fifteen years. I started working for the school as a substitute at the Lakeview Learning Center in 2000, and in 2001 I became a part-time teacher.

What classes and levels do you teach?

I currently teach level 2, but I have taught levels 1, 4, and Literacy (level 0).

Where are you from, and what languages do you speak?

I was born in Chicago at the old Cook County Hospital, and my parents were immigrants from Puerto Rico. They were humble people with a limited education. I grew up speaking English outside my home and “Spanglish” in my home. I learned English in the Chicago Public School system. It was difficult for me to learn Spanish correctly. Struggling to untangle Spanglish into “correct” Spanish taught me the discipline and the patience I needed to teach English.

Why do you like teaching?

I love teaching because I spent 36 years in public service. I began my career as a Correctional Officer, and I was a Chicago Police Officer/Training Officer, a University of Chicago Police Officer, a Child Abuse/Sex Abuse Investigator, and finally an Internal Affairs Investigator with the Illinois Department of Revenue. You might wonder what this has to do with teaching. Well, although I did meet a lot of nice people, in those jobs I worked primarily with, what I call, the “darker” side of society. Teaching at Truman College has allowed me to experience the best—and I mean the *absolute* best—of humanity. My students have taught me about the best of themselves, their people, and their countries. For this, I thank my students.



I also love teaching because it allows me to give back to my community and to my country. It allows me to teach a student English and good citizenship within the context of their own culture. It allows me to help build community while living in a multicultural, diverse country. Hopefully, we will not experience the civil strife that exists in other countries.

I have learned that I will never be able to pay back what my students have given me: love, friendship, respect, and what I have learned about the best of their own cultures. I have had difficult students, but I cannot say I have had a student who I did not like, who I did not love teaching. NOT ONE!!

Why do you like teaching at Truman?

I completed my undergraduate studies at Governors State University. My degree is in Social Science with a minor in Intercultural Studies. My graduate studies at Chicago State University, where I won Division Honors, consisted of Law and International/Comparative Justice Systems. That area of study allowed me to fit, as the cliché goes, "hand in glove" with Truman College. It is a truly international college. In the halls, you will find people from all over the world: Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Spiritualists, and all colors, races, and sexual orientations. There are young people, middle-aged people, and I have even registered a 92-year-old woman from Peru.

I like to believe that Truman is the "Harvard" of community colleges. Beginning with the current President, I have seen this college grow and improve. This is a President who has taken ownership. She communicates with her teachers, and she listens. The Dean of Adult Education also communicates with his teachers. If I have to talk to him, I simply walk into his office. Not once has he ever turned me away. Finally, my colleagues are the absolute best. In many cases, we are even good friends. We share our classroom stories, we advise each other, and we even share some family stories. We often share and celebrate our birthdays together in our personal time. Along with the students, what makes this college's Adult Education department the absolute best is that among us (the teachers) are musicians, singers, writers, and poets. We even have a teacher who is a professional stand-up comedian!! We are, I like to say, "a Cast of Characters," with one thing in common. We love our students, and we love to teach.

Yes, there are some workplace issues to resolve, but they are dealt with at the appropriate time and place. And like a family, there has been friction at times, but we've overcome it because our common concern is our students.

What advice do you have for people who want to teach ESL?

Yes, we must earn a living, and the City Colleges of Chicago should compensate us appropriately because we are underpaid for the work that we do. As the President of AFSCME 3506 wisely pointed out to me when I told him about what I do in the classroom, he said, "Carlos, you don't just teach English. You're building communities, you're building a nation." He's right. So my advice is that: teachers should do this very important work of teaching English and building communities and a nation. It has to be more than a job; it has to be a vocation. Develop close relationships with your students, colleagues, and

your local union. Together they will make you a better teacher, a better person.

Where are your students from?

I have taught students from all over the world, including:

Asia: Afghanistan, Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Myanmar, India, China, Thailand, Vietnam, Philippines, Korea, Japan, and Russia.

Europe: France, Spain, Italy, Turkey, Greece, Ukraine, Romania, Serbia, Poland, Belarus, and Germany.

Arab Countries: Iran, Iraq, Yemen, Syria, Morocco, and Egypt.

Africa: Ethiopia, Eritrea, Sudan, Congo, Nigeria, Togo, Senegal, Benin, and Ghana.

Latin America: Mexico, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Haiti, Dominican Republic, Colombia, Peru, Brazil, Chile, and Argentina.

What kinds of jobs and backgrounds do your students have?

Many students work in construction, do general labor, work as cooks, cleaners and nannies, and do gardening and landscaping. However, often my students have advanced degrees from their home countries, including doctors, lawyers, nurses, accountants, computer techs, elementary school teachers, etc. One of my students worked in the office at the Polish Consulate. Also, in one classroom, I had two students from Mexico who sat next to each other, but had different backgrounds: a trained attorney and a farm worker with very little formal education.

Why are your students studying English?

Most, if not all, of my students realize that speaking English is necessary in the United States. They feel they need to know it if they intend to maintain and live a civically responsible life, as well as be self-sufficient. They understand that they need to learn English if they are to assimilate into North American society, to express themselves effectively in social situations as well as for employment purposes.

What do your students think of the U.S.?

I had only one student who negatively criticized the United States. Other than that single student, all of my students have honored the United States and appreciate the freedom they have to express themselves, as well as the opportunities to work and support their families.

What advice do you have for students who want to improve their English?

What do I say to the person who wants to learn English?? Get in a classroom and never give up. I always tell my students, "If anything is going to be better in your life, it's going to happen because of your experience in the the classroom." Have reasonable expectations of yourself. Don't be hard on yourself. Realize that learning English is a process that takes time. Define your goals, and at the end of each day, ask yourself, "What have I done today that has brought me closer to my goal?"

What advice do you have for people who want to live and work in Chicago?

Work hard and stay close to your family. Take advantage of the educational resources and cultural activities that the City of Chicago has to offer. Learn something about the different cultural groups that

live in this city. Find something you can do to give back to the Chicago community.

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