

Twenty-Two Years with UMUC in Bangkok

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My first meeting with anyone associated with UMUC was with Dr. Larry Hepinstall. We met in early 1993 at the New International School Thailand (NIST), a major international school in Central Bangkok.

I had just recently arrived in Bangkok. I was visiting the school with my Goddaughters on a site visit for them to enroll at the school. UMUC had a classroom on the second floor of one of the buildings, and Larry asked me what had brought me to Thailand. I said I was with my girlfriend—soon to be wife—on a Hotel Interior Design Project.

My conversation with Larry led to a job offer to teach classes there, starting in August, 1993. I met Dr. LeAnn Cragun shortly after that, as well as Dr. Joe Arden, our Asian Division Director. All of you know what an integral part of the UMUC Program Joe has been through the years, and he immediately threw his support my way to help get the program running again. Joe had prior teaching experience in Bangkok from 1967-70 and returned as the Asian Division Director from 1975-81.

We quickly negotiated our way to move classes closer to the American Embassy to support our Military and Foreign Service students. We held classes in three locations—JUSMAG, the Marine House, and the 2nd floor of the old Embassy Building. We tried to create the most convenient setting for classes. All three of these locations are within a kilometer, but Bangkok traffic was even worse in those days, so we juggled classrooms to fit the majority of the students' needs.

My first class was English 101 in Aug. 1993. I taught face-to-face classes regularly from then until the summer of 2009. Our program was always small in Bangkok, but we were able to create and maintain a core of interested students to keep it going. Most of my classes were required, so we could primarily focus on those to satisfy requirements. I taught all the English progression classes, plus Public Speaking, Creative Writing, Literature, and Library Skills.

Joe Arden did encourage me to take the WebTycho training for online teaching. I completed that training and taught online for UMUC from 2009 until 2015. (I do

appreciate having the early online skill-set, especially now that Covid 19 has turned all of us into online professors.)

I was fortunate to receive the Stanley Drazek Teaching Award in 2013 and had an enjoyable trip to Guam to receive it in person. The Maryland faculty in Guam were great hosts.

Most of my early teaching memories can be traced to the support we received from Ambassadors and Embassy Personnel, including those Security Guards at the gates.

Pre 9/11 access to Embassy facilities was quite easy. My yellow badge allowed me access without an escort. I knew all the guards there, both Marines and Thai. I had become proficient in Thai by 1997, which facilitated my access to the Embassy, JUSMAG, and the Ambassador's Residence.



We did have students other than military contingent during those years. Dependents, Foreign Service Personnel, and even the occasional Ambassador would attend classes. I developed good relationships with those early Ambassadors. David Lambertson came to my classes often. He loved literature, and enjoyed attending. However, his presence would often cause the marines in class to stiffen up and go respectfully silent. I took him aside and asked him if we could lighten up the mood in the classroom when he was there, as most of the young marines felt intimidated in his presence. I would chide the ambassador and he would give it right back. We did get some laughs and a pronounced increase in participation from students after that.

I was invited to the Ambassador's Residence for functions quite often prior to 9/11. Many high-ranking officials passed through the Ambassador's Residence then. I was also there to meet Bill Clinton in November of 1996. For a short time, I felt my UMUC tenure was somewhat like a White House Staffer. Well, only somewhat.

Much changed after 9/11. Stricter security controls began, with far fewer functions at the Ambassador's Residence. Less staffing ensued, and face- to -face classes started to dwindle even more. After 2009, many of the military students in Bangkok were being encouraged to pursue courses online.

I am still teaching here in Thailand and don't foresee retirement any time soon. Yet my time with UMUC has always been a large part of my fondest memories. Joe Arden has retired here, and he is still one of my longest friendships in this crazy metropolis. We have coffee together often as well as the wine and cheese gatherings he still hosts on occasion. I am sure that rings a bell with many of you. We will raise a glass to you the next time we meet...

Presidents and Ambassadors come and go, so I thought you might enjoy the chart below on the Ambassadors who served in Bangkok during my UMUC time here.

David Floyd Lambertson	Career FSO	Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary		July 22, 1991	September 24, 1991	Left post August 25, 1995
William H. Itoh	Career FSO	Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary		December 19, 1995	February 20, 1996	Left post February 1, 1999
Richard E. Hecklinger	Career FSO	Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary		December 1, 1998	March 9, 1999	Left post December 21, 2001
Darryl N. Johnson		Career FSO	Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary	November 26, 2001	March 29, 2002	Left post December 28, 2004
Ralph Leo Boyce		Career FSO	Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary	July 2, 2004	March 9, 2005	Left post, July 21, 2007

Eric G. John		Career FSO	Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary	August 3, 2007	January 8, 2008	Left post September 30, 2010
Kristie A. Kenney		Career FSO	Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary	December 9, 2010	January 8, 2011	Left post November 6, 2014
Glyn T. Davies		Career FSO	Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary	August 6, 2015	October 2, 2015	Left post September 29, 2018