



2025 Sally Wellman Excellence in Teaching Award Letter for Mahrijemal Taganova

Nominated by Zyyarat Kamylyjanov

Mahrijemal Taganova is an excellent teacher from Turkmenistan. She works as an ESL teacher at The Circle Community Navigation Organization and is also a PhD student at Seattle Pacific University. Even with her demanding studies, she gives her full energy to her learners and makes sure each of us feels valued and respected.

One reason she is special is the way she explains why English is difficult for people like me. In Turkmen, one letter always means one sound, but in English, the same letter can have many different sounds. Even though both languages use Latin letters, they work differently. I never understood this before, but after she explained it, I could finally see why I was making mistakes. She makes a complicated subject simple, and that gives me confidence to continue learning.

What makes her teaching unique is her respect for our first languages. She does not ask us to put them aside; instead, she uses them as bridges to English. For example, in our class we have both Turkmen- and Spanish-speaking students. On the first day, she gave us our own alphabets and then showed us the English alphabet on the board. We compared them together, and for me it was a powerful moment. I realized that my language is not a problem, but a tool that helps me learn English better. This respect makes us proud of who we are.

Her lessons also opened my eyes to details I never knew. She explained clearly that some letters can make more than one sound. For example, I had no idea that s can sound like /s/ in house and like /z/ in rose. These details changed the way I read and helped me understand why people sometimes did not understand me.

Every class with her is full of discovery. She teaches phonology, orthography, suffixes, daily vocabulary, and how native speakers actually speak. She explains why the "k" in know is silent, why "listen" is /'lɪsən/, and why the "w" disappears in answer. She also shows us how native speakers connect words together in sentences, so we can sound natural and fluent.

Her care continues beyond the classroom. For homework, she gives us passages to read and asks us to record our voices. She listens to every recording and gives personal feedback. This shows how much she invests in our progress.

I am 33 years old and have studied English with many teachers, but none compare to Mahrijemal. She is talented, patient, and knowledgeable, but also kind and motivating. She never ignores our questions, understands our frustrations, and always encourages us to continue.

Mahrijemal is not only teaching us English, she is changing how we see ourselves. She shows us that our languages are not barriers but bridges. She gives us confidence, respect, and hope. A teacher like her is rare, and I strongly believe she deserves this award.