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**U.S. Department of State, The English Language Programs
Georgetown University, Center for Intercultural Education and Development**

**“You Know It Has to Be in Spanish, Right?”:
UW-River Falls Alumna Thrives as State Department Fellow in Mexico**

San Jose Chiapa, State of Puebla, Mexico – University of Wisconsin-River Falls alumna Sara Allsop Hendricks didn’t set out to be an English teacher.

“I initially wanted to train animals for movies,” Hendricks remembers. “I’ve also been a lifeguard, valet, old-timey photo-booth photographer, comedian, wrangler at a dude ranch, and terrible jewelry salesperson.”

Ultimately, though, Hendricks fell in love with teaching and became an educator. That decision led her to complete a master of arts in TESOL degree at UW-River Falls in 2010 and, eventually, to become an elite U.S. Department of State English Language Fellow, setting off on a path that has taken her around the world.

As a native of Eau Claire, one of Wisconsin’s biggest cities, Hendricks is experiencing a new lifestyle as a Fellow. She now lives in the tiny village of San Jose Chiapa, Mexico, teaching at a brand-new bilingual university in a program designed by the U.S. Embassy. Her demanding schedule has her cycle through classes, teaching every student in the university at least once a week.

“Even classes like mechatronics and informational technology are taken in English,” Hendricks says.

She frequently has to stare down daunting professional challenges, such as the time the State Secretary of Education invited 35 university presidents to meet Hendricks and listen to her pitch a new academic conference.

“Oh, by the way,” a colleague told her a few days before the meeting. “You know it has to be in Spanish, right?” Hendricks crammed for 48 hours and aced the meeting. The conference, “Teaching to the Future,” was held in April with Hendricks as organizer.

Professional challenges don’t throw Hendricks because she’s used to international adjustments. She gave birth to her first two children while teaching in Japan, then had her youngest in Mexico in 2017. She is that rare American who has had the experience of driving

across Mexico with a five-year-old, three-year-old, and four-week-old, her husband beside her with two guinea pigs on his lap. Then came the drug-interdiction checkpoints.

“Once the officers met us and saw our car stuffed with five humans and two pets and a trunk that could barely close, they just asked us to please keep driving,” she remembers.

As is so often the case when a citizen serves her country, the whole family is called on to make some sacrifices. Hendricks met her husband while they were both students at UW-River Falls, and they’ve since traveled the world teaching together.

“We bonded over our love of different cultures and languages,” she says.

While Hendricks has pursued her fellowship in Mexico, he has been right there with her, ensuring their kids’ burgeoning bilingual educations are on track while finishing his own master’s degree online.

“His flexibility has been what allowed us to undertake this adventure,” Hendricks is quick to credit.

After two extremely successful years in Mexico, Hendricks’ fellowship will finally draw to an end next month. Instead of retiring back home, though, she’s already planning her next adventure abroad. For Hendricks, whether it’s Wisconsin or East Asia or Mexico, some things are universal.

“No matter where I go, I always find my new neighbors, colleagues, friends, and I are so much more alike than we are different.”

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The English Language Fellow Program U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs:

The English Language Fellow Program recruits both experienced English language professionals and recent master’s graduates trained in English as a foreign language and English as a second language. As Fellows, they travel abroad and assist with the improvement of English-teaching capacity around the world, with the ultimate goal of fostering a better understanding of the United States through cross-cultural partnerships. Fellows are placed at universities, teacher-training institutions, ministries of education, and NGOs for ten-month assignments abroad to assist in the teaching of English at all levels, curriculum development, workshop and seminar design, and program evaluation, among other things. The program is administered by the Center for Intercultural Education and Development at Georgetown University.

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