This week, we are giving gratitude to our final English Conversation Facilitator and long-time friend to OISS, Professor Ron Heilerman. Ron met up with Molly, OISS Assistant Director of Programs, for a coffee this winter to talk about his career and journey with OISS, so the below is a snapshot of that conversation. Thank you Ron, for everything that you have done for our international community over the last 7 years!

Tell us a bit about yourself, and what led you to volunteering with OISS?
Ron was born and raised in Brooklyn, NY. His first love was music and he graduated as a music major from Brooklyn College, CUNY. While he was there, he decided to take Chinese and that is where he found his next passion. He went on to attend Yale College to pursue a degree in Chinese History and continued studying the Chinese language with the fantastic native speakers and instructors that were on campus.

Ron took this passion and turned it into a career as a professor of Chinese History at Quinnipiac University in CT for over 40 years, and spent summers in China from 1978-1991.

After Ron retired in 2014, he was looking for ways to stay engaged with international students in the New Haven community and knocked on our door at OISS to see what types of volunteer positions we had available. Ron drew off of his personal experiences of moving away from home and traveling around the world and understood how challenging and lonely that can be, so he wanted to donate his time to make that process a little easier for our international students at Yale.

After that original knock on our door, he’s volunteered with our office in several capacities, including being one of our star English Conversation Facilitators for the past 7 years!

What have you enjoyed the most about being an ECG facilitator?
Ron has found the experience of being one of our English Conversation Facilitators to be extremely rewarding, and one of the most enjoyable activities that he has taken up during his retirement.
He also occasionally gets to speak Chinese with our students and scholars and has gotten some good laughs when perhaps one of his tones is slightly off. But that's the advice he gives to the participants - don't be scared to try! You don't have to be perfect to learn and participate.

He also says that in a way, everyone that works with international students is an ambassador of the U.S., and it is our responsibility to make sure that their experiences in our country and community are enjoyable. He has been impacted positively in his experiences with Yale's international community and he hopes that he has made that same positive impact in the lives of those he's worked with. Which we know he has!

**What would you say to someone who is considering joining our English Conversation Groups as a participant?**

Ron's advice to those thinking about joining our English Conversation Groups is to just dive in. Students should feel free to drop in on any or all of the conversation groups where they will not be tested or competing for grades but, rather, improving their skills while having fun at the same time. It's an excellent opportunity to work with a native speaker on vocabulary, grammar, and learn about U.S. culture and context. Don't hesitate to speak up and participate - it's a supportive group and an excellent place to build a community.

Ron would also encourage others to volunteer with OISS. He says if you're thinking about volunteering, you will not regret it. It's more rewarding than you can even imagine.