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South Korea, Seoul
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UMass Boston Reciprocal Exchange
Korea University



Seoul Pride 2016: Seoul City Plaza 5/12 with P2Pi

Title: Journey in Seoul, South Korea

Truthfully I have never been good at introductions or conclusions as it requires some insight and creativity, so bear with me. I always knew I wanted to study abroad or even be an international student, because it always sounded like a storybook adventure to me; venturing off into a new land and making a life there, so to speak. I always wanted to live in South Korea and started saving when I got my first paying job, but it still feels so surreal that I actually got the chance to spend 4 months there. I had so many wonderful experiences in academia and social/personal development since embarking on this journey.

All the classes I took were taught in English (except for Beginner's Korean). It was still intimidating being one of, if not the only foreigner in a class full of native 3rd/ 4th year students. The level of difficulty was relatively easier compared to UMass Boston's system in that there was never any homework or anything that needed to be done outside of class besides studying, reviewing and the occasional research for group projects. The lectures felt identical to the lecture system at UMass Boston as I took mostly science classes, but the exams were another story. For all of my classes the grades were heavily determined on the midterm and finals which each ended up to being worth 40% of my grade (Korean was 30% each), which was a new concept to me, but I guess it was a balanced tradeoff.

My Beginner's Korean and Bio Engineering class both had approximately 20 students each, while Animal Physiology and Korean Phenology had around 30-40 students. All of my instructors were awesome as they were ambitious, kind, understanding, funny, charismatic and even studied abroad so they knew how to help us adjust to life if we went to them. My classmates were all amazing and friendly, with some of them being able to accept my clumsy, kooky and somewhat ditzzy personality which is a hard thing to find ☺. The fact still remained that Korea University is one of the Top 3 schools in South Korea, which made me doubt my intelligence sometimes, because everyone seemed more ambitious and well versed in many diverse areas of study than me.

Living in Korea was amazing looking back, though I struggled the first week as my Korean skills were limited to greetings and for shopping purposes. The first month in Korea flew by before I knew it with from meeting my incredible roommates on day 1 and 2 to orientation to the club fair. During the first month I joined the Tae Kwon Do club (eventually had to drop out, because of conflicts with classes) and P2Pi which stood for People to People- International, which is basically the LGBT group at KU made up of international and exchange students. By the time I knew it classes started and all of my initial doubts and insecurities of coming here had just disappeared.

From the start of the semester to its end, a single movie had been playing in my head on repeat, which was *Mean Girls* as P2Pi were some of the greatest people I ever could have met, while isolation and reverting back to myself is the worst person I could ever meet. Being the shy and introverted person that I am, my friends in P2Pi got me to try things I would never do normally from going to a Drag Show in Hongdae, (which I actually sort of dressed up in) to my first ever Pride Festival in Seoul's City Plaza. Most of the memories I have and cherish involves my moments in P2Pi and the bonds I made, yet one of my most cherished memory of my time abroad didn't actually happen in Korea.

In April, my friend Steven and I were waiting to get our hands on Taeyeon's *Butterfly Kiss* concert tickets as she is a part of my favorite music groups, **Girls Generation**. Instead it was reported that the concert will be held in August, by which time I would have already left Korea, so I decided to pack up a small suitcase, buy a plane ticket to Taiwan and a concert ticket to **Girls' Generation Phantasia** concert, which luckily lined up with Korea's Children's Day, giving me 4 days in Taiwan. I went to the concert on the first night, which was totally worth it, and explored Taiwan for the other 3 days from the Taipei Zoo to taking a 6-hour hike through Elephant Mountain. In total I went to 4 amazing concerts while I was abroad consisting of Phantasia, Ipselenti, Suwon Super K-Pop and the concert held after Pride.

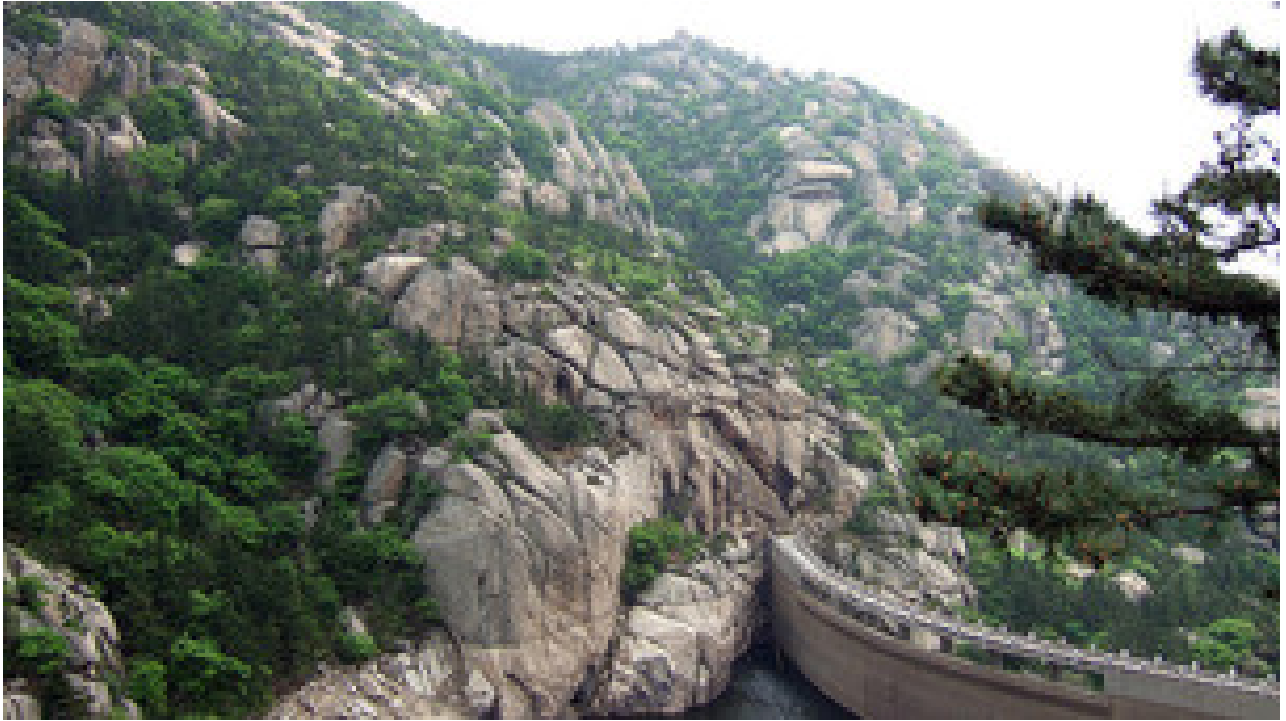
The old saying, "You cannot buy happiness with money" is true to some extent, but money can buy experience and experiences along with memories are what makes up one's happiness. **I strongly recommend studying abroad if you can and would highly recommend Korea University in South Korea if you are a fan of k-pop, k-drama and the Asian culture. I originally came to Korea for 3 reasons: to learn the language, immerse myself into the culture I love and to study the environment. In the end, I managed to accomplished all of**

my goals and many more that I was unable to think of and made some amazing friendships along the way that I believe will last a lifetime.

I plan to continue studying Hangul/ Korean, so I can return to Seoul in the future, preferably after I graduate. In a way, learning Hangul also helped me to improve my Chinese after being immersed in a country with a significantly high Chinese population. In the sense of academia, the passion, knowledge and insights I gained had helped me decide that I really do want to pursue a career in Ecology and Ecological research. Personally, studying abroad made me go head first into new situation, ripping me out of my comfort zone and allowed me to grow as a person. In the end, my time was well spent in Seoul and I wouldn't trade it for anything else as I do believe I came out of it a new person with a more optimistic outlook on life. I may have accomplished my original checklist, but after travelling and living abroad I have many more events/ experiences I look forward to. Thanks to my parents, UMass Boston's amazing Study Abroad Office, Gilman's Scholarship and Korea University for giving me the chance to live abroad and to the many friendships and bonds created for making it worth it.



Waterfall at the base of Mt. Ahasan, Gwangjin-gu, Seoul, South Korea



Hiking Mt. Yongmasan, Seoul, South Korea (connected to Mt. Ahasan)



Girls Generation Concert, Taipei Arena, Taipei, Taiwan



Suwon Super Kpop Concert, Suwon World Cup Stadium, Seoul, South Korea