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Reciprocal exchange  
Korea University



This previous spring semester I had the privilege of studying abroad in South Korea at Korea University. Not only was this a prestigious school, but its wide diversity of students from other exchange programs amazed me. Through KU's buddy exchange program I got to meet a lot of great people and I made friends with people that I still talk to today. Studying abroad in a country half way across the world was such a life changing decision and the best one I have made yet. I got to explore Korean cuisine at its finest and get the best hands on experience learning and using the Korean language by interacting with students and doing every day errands like ordering food at the school cafeteria. Traveling in Asia has always been a dream of mine and

I was grateful to have the chance to do so at such an early age. It has helped me grow academically because I came into Korea knowing how to say “hi, my name is” and “where is the bathroom”, but I left being able to speak and understand full sentences. Although there is still a lot to learn, being able to read and write Korean will give me a lot more opportunities and motivation to learn and come back to Korea knowing more. I took Intro to Beginner’s Korean; Contemporary Korea, which illustrated Korea’s cultural beliefs, values, and education system and why it is what it is today; Mural Painting, where I met the most caring and inspirational professor I have had yet; and Resource Recycling Waste, where I learned a lot about municipal waste throughout the world. The professors were spilt evenly; some professors I had were passionate and mindful of the student’s background and cultural beliefs, whereas some professors lacked the skills and enthusiasm they needed in order for me to deem them a good teacher. My classmates were either all exchange students or the majority Korean. The Korean students often stick to each other and vice versa for the exchange students. With some exceptions, overall the classes felt divided. Some say it is because of the language barriers and that could in part be why there was little interaction with native and foreign students. However I learned a great deal not only in school but outside of school interacting with native Korean students but also the other exchange students who came from all across the world. Studying in Korea has transformed me in a myriad of ways. There was personal growth by living on my own and being more independent but also it gave me a better understanding of cultural differences, values and conflicts.

Being in Korea has given me so much insight on cultural awareness and how little I knew about the world around me. I felt that being in the U.S has made me very unaware of issues going on in the world because everything in the news is always from an American perspective.

Some of the most memorable experiences I have had in Korea that has affected my personal growth is my roommate. We had our fair share of disagreements and a lot of the reasons behind them were our cultural differences. She was born in China and studying at Korea University for a whole year. She would be easily irritated by the little things I do and then she would be very angry at me and I would always assume that she just has a temper. At first it was so troublesome that we could not see eye to eye on things because I never understood why she was upset and she never understood how I could not know. However, after our first big argument we talked through our differences instead of trying to get the other person to think the same way we do. We valued what the other person thought, but more importantly we made each other listen. I think that was what led our friendship to grow, not only by communicating like what most people think works, but being curious about what the other person grew up believing and listening to what they value as opposed to questioning why they value something. My roommate started off as a headache but until this very day she is my best friend. Even though she is still studying in Korea, we keep in contact at least twice a week and I made a lifetime friend. These cultural barriers taught me that we can choose to keep them 'barriers' or we can simply tear them down with not our words but simply by listening. Overall I would highly recommend this to other students because not only did I have fun but it really does give some great perspective and a great way to communicate and interact with people from all over the world and with the help of financial aid and scholarships the reciprocal exchange is affordable and I got more out of it than any other semester here at UMASS Boston so it was definitely worth every penny to study abroad.