Exchange Report
Daejeon, South Korea
KAIST
Fall 2016 – Spring 2017
When I first planned my exchange, I had much concern since there was nobody around me who had visited or studied at KAIST. Getting help from former exchange students was the best way to plan my exchange prior to departing. In terms of academic details, KAIST website was the best help. As a Korean citizen, I did not have to apply for any visa. I did not pack many clothes because I knew I would buy some clothes in Korea since Korea has clothes of higher quality at lower price than Canada has. If you are arriving in Korea in the summer as I did, be aware of the scorching and humid weather. The weather in summer is insane compared to Canada. Also, in the fall, the dust storm usually sweeps over Korea, therefore bringing your own or buying a dust storm mask in Korea is recommended.

I went to my grandmother’s house right after I arrived at the Incheon Airport. In order to get to KAIST from the Incheon Airport, you first have to take a bus that takes you to the Daejeon Terminal Complex for about 3 hours. Once you arrive at the Terminal Complex, take a taxi at the taxi station to get to KAIST. It will take you about 20 minutes and cost you about 7,000 won. Taking a bus and especially taxi in Korea is very convenient compared to Canada. You will be given a bus card by KAIST international office once you arrive at KAIST, which you can deposit money and use it to ride buses. You just tap in and out as you do in Canada. I also recommend downloading the app called ‘kakao taxi’ when riding a taxi. I personally used my debit card, which I received at Kookmin Bank after opening my bank account to ride buses. (It was a debit card that can be tapped in and tapped out like a bus card)
Off-campus housing will not be an option for non-Korean exchange students, however, if you are Korean, and you are somewhat considering living off-campus because you have family living in the city or etc, I strongly recommend you live ON-CAMPUS. 99.9% of the students I have met at KAIST live on-campus. KAIST clubs start between 7pm and 9pm. I have had a quiz and an exam at 7pm. Last bus usually runs before 11pm in Daejeon so it is very difficult to participate in academic and extracurricular activities if you live off-campus unless you can bear those difficulties. The dorms are cheap so you won’t have much financial difficulties because of this. While you are living on-campus, I highly recommend that you rent a bicycle since the campus size is big.

KAIST has recently ranked the world’s sixth most innovative university and topped the “Asia-Pacific region’s Most Innovative Universities”. KAIST is also the #1 University for having the highest frequency of professors throwing out questions to the students. Accordingly, you may find the courses challenging but I believe it can be manageable if you ask your peers for help whenever you feel lost. In terms of lectures in general, class size is small compared to SFU. Most courses are taught in English so there was a wide range of courses I could choose and register for courses I wanted to take. Also, most students speak English so it was not that difficult to communicate in English and Korean. In addition, when registering courses, you do not have to hurry because registration system is not based on ‘first come first serve’. The courses that I took did not have any mandatory tutorials, but some had optional tutorials held at night. Being late or being absent is usually not tolerated. As you may know, Korean students study really hard, and I was very impressed and motivated by their passion and intelligence. Just like Fall term is the starting and a main semester in Canada, Spring semester is the starting and the main semester in Korea. To enjoy the KAIST festival, which is held once every year, go on an exchange in the spring.
During computing class

KAIST Festival

French class group presentation (skit)
When shopping at an underground mall, bring cash instead of a debit card, because they usually charge you more money for paying with a card. Before changing Canadian dollars to Korean won, make sure you check XE currency website to predict the possible days of highest currency rate of the week, since the Canadian dollar currency rate is falling.

↑ Bongmyeong-dong Yurim Park (15min walk from KAIST)

I lived off-campus since I had my family member living in the city. I was the only one in class who took bus to go to school. I could not join any clubs, so it was more difficult for me to make friends in the beginning. However, BECAUSE I did not have any ways to approach other students other than starting a conversation and investing in friendship myself, I did so. They later told me that I had more friends than they had. KAIST students were kind and friendly. They welcomed me as an exchange student. Living off-campus allowed me to have chance to get to know local people and maximize my experience by walking around here and there on my way home. I cannot describe every place I visited and every activity I did but I will post some pictures. Staying in dorms may give you regrets for missing out lots of local events so I do recommend that you search any local events on the internet or check your email because KAIST international team has various events for international and exchange students like a trip to other city and international festival at KAIST.
Daejeon Arts Centre

Watched performance with KAIST friends

Daejeon Museum of Art

At the Expo Science Park Festival

Expo Science Park Music Fountain

Expo Hanbit Tower
Daejeon is a quiet place compared to Seoul. ‘Dae-jeon’, name itself in Korean means ‘Big field’, so a lot of people think it is kind of like a rural area but it’s not. Daejeon is known as the City of Science. Not only KAIST adds to such fame but also the National Science Museum and the Expo Science Park are well known and are located in Daejeon. It only takes about 5-10min to get to those places from KAIST by taxi. I like Daejeon because it is not as crowded as Seoul and therefore has less traffic jam as Seoul has. Looking down at the city on top of a mountain or of a building or even looking up at the sky in Korea might feel different from doing so in Canada.
To give a piece of advice, be aware of strangers. You may encounter people just randomly starting a conversation with you or asking you to fill out a survey on the streets. If you do encounter them, just ignore and walk away.

Overall, my exchange experience has been priceless. I met a bunch of good people unexpectedly and definitely gained motivation to work hard towards my goal throughout my life. It was a rare chance to feel the differences between Korean and Canadian cultures in real life and to learn about how differently things are done and viewed elsewhere in the world. Receiving different styles of teaching has also helped me widen my academic horizons and develop my ability to adapt to a new educational environment. It was hard coping with a new environment but during the process of overcoming such initial difficulty that every exchange student may face, I learned more about how to handle new situations by myself and gained confidence.
Other cities/places outside Daejeon in Korea

↑ Se-jong Lake Park (Sejong)

↑ Lotte World Amusement Park (Seoul)  ↑ Han River Park (popular place to go on a picnic)

↑ Namsan Tower  ↑ Namsan Tower
Jeonju Hanok Village
↑ Chung-Yang Ice Festival

↑ Daecheon Beach

↑ Danyang

↑ Busan