EXCHANGE REPORT:
SEOUL NATIONAL UNIVERSITY
SPRING 2012

Grace
Introduction

Self-discovery, growth and unforgettable moments … these are the words that come to mind as I reflect upon my exchange experience. My name is Grace and I am a fourth year business student, majoring in Accounting. I participated in an exchange program at Seoul National University (SNU) in the College of Business Administration (CBA) program in Spring 2012. I chose to go to SNU because it is recognized as the number one university in Korea. It has a renowned reputation for having the best and brightest minds in Korea, producing leaders across various fields, in business, politics and culture. Each year in the CBA program, the freshman class ranks within the top 0.5% of the nation’s student body and Korea’s top 100 CEOs are alumni of this business program. As a business student, I wanted to expand my horizons by developing an international perspective and networking with Korea’s top professors and students.

Preparation

At first, I was hesitant about applying for exchange as I was so close to graduation and exchange would delay my graduation. However, I wanted to take advantage of what might be a once in a life-time opportunity and after talking to the department advisor, I decided to apply. I am of a Korean heritage but as I immigrated to Canada at a young age, I did not know too much about the history, politics, economy and life in Korea. So I believed that this exchange would allow me to discover more about my cultural roots. While researching for schools, I read a report of a past exchange student who attended SNU which greatly interested me, so I contacted the student to ask more about the exchange experience. The student kindly replied to all my questions and gave me some good advice on where to conduct further research. Also, the advisors at ISS were extremely helpful; I frequently visited Nina and Christina to ask questions and get help on my application form.

Application Process

There are two application deadlines every year – one in January and one in June. I applied in June, which is the second round of applications and one drawback is that the number of exchange spaces available depends on the remaining institutions from January. Therefore, there may be schools that are no longer available in June. For this reason, I strongly recommend students to apply for the first round of applications. The application process is long and lengthy; I applied in May 2011 and received the acceptance letter from the host university at the end of December. So be prepared to wait – there were times where I got anxious but I eventually learned to put my mind aside on other things and be patient. I strongly suggest that you start the application early, at least 2 months before the deadline because of the references. You need two reference letters from professors and given their busy schedules, it is always a good idea to ask them ahead of time. Study plan is another section that
takes time since you have to first check the course availability, course pre-requisites, review the course outlines and get an approval from the department advisor. While you are only required to take three to five courses, have back up courses in case you are not able to get all your desired courses. For myself, I chose eight courses that I could potentially take and submitted as part of my study plan. A study plan itself can take up to a week so plan your time accordingly.

Visa & Other Required Documents

While most exchange students apply for student visa, I decided to apply for F4 visa which is for people of Korean heritage that grants the status to both attend school and work. I processed my visa in Korea because the processing time is much shorter in Korea than in Canada. However, I was missing some documents and had to get it reissued in Korea so it took me more than a month to get my visa. The required documents include a certificate of Canadian citizenship, citizenship card and a copy of recent family register. Applying for F4 visa is a bit more complicated because it is the process of officially giving up Korean nationality and obtaining a temporary residence in Korea as a Canadian citizen. The immigration office in Korea located in Mokdong is extremely busy, so when you are dealing with visa matters, make an appointment ahead of time or arrive at the office before the opening time. Another document I needed was the dormitory application which required a medical certificate issued within 3 months including a chest x-ray. With regards to the medical certificate, a doctor’s note should be sufficient. For the chest x-rays, you are first required to get a referral from a doctor; with this doctor’s referral it should cost you $0.

During Exchange

Thinking back to the first day that I met with all the other exchange students, there was definitely some awkwardness. To make the matters worse, I was very busy at the beginning of the semester with acquiring a visa and working part-time that I missed out on some main social events. Nevertheless, I kept an open mind and tried attending as many social events as I can. As a result, I spent the rest of the exchange with a group of fantastic people. Knowing that we were all going through the same kind of experiences, I was able to quickly connect with other exchange students. Keeping an open mind and being approachable is a key to maximizing your exchange experience because it is all about the people that you meet and the relationships you establish.

Arrival

I arrived in Korea on February 28, 2012 and was picked up at the airport by my mom’s good friend in Korea. I made arrangements to stay over at her house for few days until the dorm check-in date. The dorm check-in process was simple with forms available in English; all of the Resident Advisors (RA) are fluent in English and are quite helpful. The dorm only provides you with a bed
sheet and a laundry basket so the residents are required to bring their own blankets and pillows. I chose to bring a sleeping bag so that I would not have to spend extra money on bedding. For the first few days of school, there were orientations held by CBA Global and SNU Buddy, where exchange students were matched with a local buddy at SNU. There are plenty of social events and activities organized for exchange students so be sure to attend as many as you can!

**School Life**

Living in a school dormitory helped me quickly adjust to the new environment and it gave me more opportunities to meet new people and make friends. I also got to know the RA and it was nice to have someone whom I can ask for advice, whether it was for school or personal matters. I lived in one of the oldest dorms, Building 925 and each room is furnished with a bed, desk, chair and a bookshelf. Except for the fact that there was no Wi-Fi, it was a convenient place to live in. The meals are not included in the dormitory fee, but you can get quality food from the dormitory cafeteria at an affordable price of $3 - $4 per meal. There are also plenty of places to eat around the campus and off-campus (Nakseong-dae and SNU Station area).

I took three business courses and two electives during exchange; the two electives I took were *Beginner’s Tennis* and *Elementary Chinese I*, which were both taught in Korean. To ensure that my level of Korean is sufficient, I had to complete a “Language Proficiency Form” as part of the host application. Sports courses such as tennis, badminton, golf and sports dancing are offered as electives so I highly recommend trying these courses out to learn the fundamentals of a sport. With regards to the business courses, I recommend “Special Topics in Business Administration” which is a course specially designed for International Students to explore Korean’s history, culture, politics, economy and current events. Along with classroom lectures, there are lectures from guest speakers and field trips to various organizations within Korea, like Hyundai Steel Plant. One memorable experience was attending the dinner banquet at Banyan Tree Hotel to learn about dinner etiquettes.

To meet with local students, I joined a business club called “WISH (What is Your Strategy for Humanity?)”, which is a club devoted to social entrepreneurship. Just like any other clubs, there is a formal recruiting process in place where you must submit an application form and go through the interview. Most business clubs will not recruit exchange students because you are expected to make an on-going commitment (minimum one year). However, you should still talk to the club executives and see if there are other ways to get involved. As an executive member at WISH, I participated in weekly study sessions where the members researched and presented successful social enterprises. From time to time, we had guest speakers like the CEO of Tree Planet who started a successful social venture. WISH alumni also came in to share practical experiences regards to career choices and work life. What I enjoyed the most was spending times with the club members as we went out for late
dinners and desserts after the sessions and really getting to know them on a personal level; it is through these people that I experienced what university life is truly like in Korea.

**Sightseeing & Travelling**

Seoul is the heart of Korea’s culture, politics and economy and it is unique in that there are many historical sites that coexist with modern facilities. I did a lot of sightseeing around Korea, visiting ancient palaces such as Kyung Bok Goong, Chang Duk Goong and Secret Garden. My favourite place was Namsan Tower, the third tallest in the world as well as Samchung-dong, where the street is filled with cafes, galleries, restaurants and shops. Places like Myeong-dong and Gangnam are one of the trendiest shopping areas where you can find the latest trends in fashion and style at relatively cheap prices. There are basically two travel destinations that all the exchange students go to: Busan and Jeju Island. Due to the weather conditions and airplane ticket prices, May is the best time to go in order to take part in leisure activities such as hiking and water sports to fully enjoy Busan and Jeju. I would not recommend travelling in July and August because those months are peak vacation periods and there won’t be much sightseeing to do especially at those popular travelling spots.

**Conclusion**

Participating in an exchange program at Seoul National University was truly an invaluable experience that became a platform for me to grow and learn more about myself. During the five months in Korea, I gained new insights and broadened my knowledge base through experiencing the breadth and width of academia. This was also a journey to explore my cultural roots that I can bring back and integrate with Canadian culture. Although it took some time, when I learned to open up myself, I was able to meet and connect with people from various backgrounds, being inspired by and inspiring others. For this reason, the hardest part about exchange was saying good-byes to people I have met and connected with. I was one of the last ones to go back home as most exchange students left immediately after the term. I stayed for almost two more months in Korea to travel and do more sightseeing. It was sad to see everyone leave and I could never get used to saying good-byes. However, I felt assured knowing that I could easily stay in touch with people I was really close to and that reunions can happen if planned. And I now have friends to meet up when I visit Finland, Singapore, China and Germany.

A word of advice for future exchange students is to be open to new experiences and meet as many people as you can because I realized that it is all about the people you meet. Before exchange, Korea was merely a place where I was born, with no special attachments. But now, Korea is a place filled with memories and unforgettable moments I will cherish because of the people I met during exchange. Enjoy every moment of exchange as it will surely be a stepping stone to self-discovery.