**Exchange term at Seoul National University (Spring 2017)**

My exchange term is one of the best highlights of my university career. The only thing I regret is not going on exchange earlier so I could potentially do two terms abroad! My host institution is Seoul National University (SNU), recognized as one of the top institutions in South Korea. I attended Seoul National University’s first semester (March-June) in 2017. SNU has two official semesters (1st and 2nd) and a condensed Winter and Summer term.

**Preparation for exchange**

The most difficult part about preparing for exchange is waiting for the results of your nomination, visas and accommodation. Otherwise, both the coordinators from SFU and the host institution were very helpful with any questions I had, so I highly recommend sending them an email if you have any problems or concerns about your exchange term. Regarding course registration, SNU uses this website for course registration: [http://sugang.snu.ac.kr/](http://sugang.snu.ac.kr/) (If the site is slow or does not work, most websites in Korea work better using Internet Explorer). The exchange coordinator from SNU will send some detailed instructions on how to register once you receive your proof of enrollment, but it is helpful to see what courses are available. Course offerings are different every semester, so plan accordingly!
I arrived to Korea in late February, so it was still quite cold. Most of the time it felt like Vancouver’s weather except a bit colder. If you choose to live in the dormitories, they do not provide any bed sheets or pillows, so you can either bring or purchase those in Korea.

To get to SNU from the airport, I recommend taking the airport limousine buses that go to SNU (6003 – SNU main gate or 6017 – SNU rear gate (dormitory side)). I arrived before dormitories were open so I took a separate airport limousine bus towards Silim Station. These buses are great since you do not have to carry your luggage on and off the subway system which gets very crowded during peak hours. Transportation in general is very easy with a T-money card (Similar to the Compass Card) as the subway system is very extensive. From Seoul National University station, it takes about twenty five minutes to walk to the SNU Gwanak campus, or you can take a commercial bus or free campus shuttle (both along Exit 3 of the subway station)

I had no difficulties using my credit card or cash in Korea. I recommend getting a credit card that has no foreign currency transaction fees, especially if you plan to travel to other countries around Korea. Compared to the cost of living in Vancouver, it was cheaper for most things, especially if you eat at the campus cafeterias. Most of them provide a 1000 won discount if you are an SNU student! You can check the menus of some of the cafeterias using the SNU app, or through this website: https://www.snuco.com/html/eng/menu/snuco_eng07.asp.
During Exchange

I arrived a few days before the official orientation to travel around. Seoul’s subway system is very extensive. Line 2 (green line) includes many stops such as Gangnam and Seoul National University.

The College of Business Administration had its own orientation along with the official orientation from the Office of International Affairs (OIA). While some of the information is repetitive, it might be useful to attend so that you can meet other exchange students as well as the exchange coordinators from the different offices. Both offices at SNU had great exchange coordinators who answered any questions I had both prior and during my exchange period.

SNU has dorms available for exchange students, see more information here: [http://dorm.snu.ac.kr/eng/](http://dorm.snu.ac.kr/eng/). There are no mixed dormitories, but if you live in the graduate dorms (available for undergraduates as well), you can find both males and females living in the dormitories. Applying for dorms can be a lengthy process, and I did not find out about the results until two weeks before I was leaving for Korea. You will need to fill out the application form and prepare a medical certificate (including vaccinations), passport and dorm fee as the deadlines after acceptance were very tight. Dormitories are typically very popular as it is significantly cheaper than finding a place outside (I paid 456,000 won which includes a deposit of 100,000) for the entire semester. Unfortunately, if you do not get accepted, there is a long waitlist to get into the dorms. Many of my friends that did not live in the dormitories lived at SNU station, which is
about a twenty-five-minute walk from campus. Living on campus is very convenient to hang out with friends, meet new people and go to class.

Class sizes and class length is about the same as SFU. Many of the lecture formats and grading depend on the professor and the faculty you are in. You can find most of the information when you are selecting your courses once the professors update their syllabus online.

Seoul has approximately 10 million people living in the area, making it easy to find something or someone who is interested in similar things as you. K-pop and pop culture is very popular, and you can find noraebang (노래방) which are karaoke rooms anywhere in the city.

*Dream Concert 2017 at Seoul Olympic Stadium*

If you like hiking and miss home/SFU, SNU is also on top of a mountain. The campus itself is much bigger than SFU, so you can find all kinds of activities and club events. There is a free on-campus shuttle or you can choose to walk up and down the hills of SNU. If you are taking engineering classes, the engineering buildings are all at the top of the hill!
One of the peaks of Gwanaksan at SNU

My best memories from exchange all involved SNU Buddy. SNU Buddy is a student run organization that is officially under the Office of International Affairs at SNU. You get matched with a personal buddy who is a Korean student at SNU and can help you get accustomed to Korea. You also become part of their buddy group which includes other personal buddies and other exchange students. The buddy group organizes different outings within your buddy group, along with official SNU Buddy events. All the events are great ways to meet other students and many of the people you will spend most of your time with outside of classes! The Korean buddies are great English speakers and can take you to many places that only locals go to. You can apply for SNU Buddy before the semester begins so you can choose a personal buddy that has similar interests to you. My Korean buddy was super helpful for any questions I had before coming to Korea and throughout my exchange term. The friends I met from SNU buddy became many of my close friends that I travelled with after my exchange term!
Reflection After Exchange

This exchange term challenged me to be independent and gave me opportunities to learn from different cultures. I thoroughly enjoyed my exchange experience because of all the amazing people I met. Everyone on exchange was very friendly so it was easy to make friends. Since we were all on exchange, we all faced similar problems, making it easy to relate to one another. The biggest challenge I faced was the language barrier when I first arrived to Korea. It was a bit difficult to get around as I did not know the language and had trouble finding my accommodation. As I met other exchange students and my Korean buddies from SNU Buddy group, it became a lot easier to explore different areas and activities that locals do.

Here are some general advice and tips as an exchange student:

- Korean people may not be comfortable speaking English, so it may be helpful to learn the Korean alphabet before you arrive to Korea so you can read and recognize some words for you to get around
- If you live in dormitories, your roommate might not be comfortable speaking much English, but you can still get along with them!
- Don’t be afraid to invite other people along, most people have free time since there are not as many commitments when you are on exchange
- KakaoTalk is the messaging app that Koreans use. Kakao also has different apps on Android such as KakaoBus and KakaoMetro. These apps, especially KakaoMetro were very helpful for me to travel around.