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South Korea Critical Reflective Assignment

My first study abroad experience was wonderful and exciting. It was my first time flying out of the U.S. and the first time I flew by myself. As we arrived in South Korea we had Korean students greet and help us find our way to Ajou University. When I first arrived to the dorms, Young Sub, who was my roommate was there to greet and help me with my luggage. As I got to familiarize myself with the dorms and University, I eventually met everyone in the program at a meet and greet. From there we had trips and activities laid out for us along with our classes. These activities included a trip to Jeju Island, Taekwondo classes, cook offs, movie nights, amusement parks, Mud Festival, hiking Hwaseong Fortress, water sports day and many other activities. What I loved about the program was that Korean students participated in this program with us and we met other people around the world from Germany, Singapore, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Switzerland and much more.

As I enjoyed my trip in South Korea, I encountered and engaged in a wide range of differences between the American and South Korean culture. One of the main things that were different was that subways, and buses were more common to get around in S. Korea than owning a car. Another difference was that their driving laws or regulations are not enforced as well as in America. Mopeds, motorcycles and some cars would run red lights if there were no cars going through the street.

The longer I lived in Korea the more about it I learned. The land in S. Korea is mostly mountainous and land was real scarce. Their soccer fields were made out of artificial grass and golf was not popular. I thought golf would be very popular among S. Korean's considering the amount of S. Korean women playing and winning on the LPGA Tour. However, golf is a luxury sport and mainly for the rich. Most golf courses' were private and required a weeks worth of reservation before playing. In addition, I talked to a friend's parents and was told that they would fly to Thailand or near by countries just to play golf. Golf was also very expensive that could cost up to \$150-\$250 on average where as in America we have the luxury of playing golf for \$25-\$45 dollars.

Another cultural difference that I thought was interesting was how much they respected older people. When we went out to eat the youngest person would

pass out the water, silverware, and cook the meat if we are doing a Korean barbecue. In addition, when we were on the bus or subway and it was real part it was common courtesy most of the time to let an elder take your seat more than you would see in America.

During my study abroad program, while we were taking classes along with the Korean students I learned that their education system was more difficult than in the United States in regards to their grading system. All Korean students could not earn an A in the classes that they had taken. Certain students could only get an A, B, C, D, and some would fail. In our case for all the students studying abroad in S. Korea we were an exception for their grading system.

Before I began studying abroad, there was this issue of a disease spreading around in S. Korea called MERS. We received frequent messages about what MERS was and ways to help prevent the spread of disease. However, there was no definite information on how to prevent it and how serious the disease was and how people got it. There was basic information as people who had the disease were usually in hospitals and that some people had died. The outbreak of MERS in S.Korea greatly impacted the amount of participants in the program leaving more than 20 students dropping the program.

What people did not know about MERS was social media and the way U.S. global media portrayed this disease was worst than what MERS actually was. In social media and on the news all I heard was about a disease spreading around S. Korea that was highly dangerous, people were dying more as time went on and how people do not know the actual cause of MERS or how to prevent it completely. However, knowing all this I still went to S. Korea and did my own research. U.S. Media made MERS worst than what it was. People who had MERS were usually older adults and people who had died from MERS had other health issues such as cancer. The areas that MERS had spread to were only in hospitals that were big such as in cities as Seoul. Once we arrived in S. Korea they gave us a more clear understanding of the disease MERS and how it was not as dangerous as the media made it out to be. This gave me a better understanding how one country specifically more powerful countries could greatly impact another country.

After studying abroad in S. Korea it made me want to travel the world and experience different cultures. Maybe after a few years I would like to travel somewhere else around the world after I save money. Another aspect that I took from S. Korea was how healthy they ate and how smaller the portions are. This made me want to change my eating habits of junk food and eating about two or three times more rice per meal than they did. Lastly health and their image was a big part of their life. I saw a lot of people working out or just running around the tracks and it was common to have workout machines at parks or play grounds. This made me want to start working out again and get back into my daily routine of lifting weights and running. Overall while studying abroad I had no disorienting experience or any thing bad that happened to me that would prevent me from studying and traveling back to S. Korea to meet all of my friends.



This is a photo of the Han River in Seoul. This picture is meaningful to me because it shows how beautiful S. Korea can be and this is a famous area for Korean movies and Dramas are taken at. Also, this picture means a lot because of the memories I spent with friends as we hangout and walked a long the Han River.



This is a photo of all the members who were apart of the 2015 study abroad program in Ajou University. This photo was taken in Jeju Island and if it weren't for this trip at the beginning of the program we would have never gotten to know one another. This trip was the icebreaker for all of us allowing us to bond and get closer as this was our family while we were in S. Korea.