

Meeting with an American exchange student

-David Shefchik

“The professor and fellow students are beyond kind...”

Senior at the University of Arizona and he enjoys tasting Korean cuisine

Each term at Kyungwon University fills us with excitement and the anticipation of a new beginning. However, the spring of 2011 is especially noteworthy. It is because David Shefchik, the first American exchange student to come to Kyungwon.

David Shefchik, the first American exchange student

I had begun to review the interview questions when I heard the voice of a young man fluent in English out in the hall. I knew at once that he was David, and greeted him with a handshake and the customary “Hi, nice to meet you.”

The interview conducted through translation by international affairs coordinator Mun-Jung Choi, started with a brief self-introduction from David. He described himself as a senior majoring in computer science at the University of Arizona, lightening the overly serious atmosphere with the playful addition that his hobby is eating (not cooking) delicious food.

When asked how he was adjusting to the climate of Korea, which is cooler than that of Arizona, he answered that it was no problem. Born and raised in Minnesota, a Midwestern state known for its cold winters, he felt confident in his ability to weather the climate; in this confidence I could also read a deeper resolve to adapt to life in Korea.

After the initial formalities were over, I grew curious about his story- what exactly made him come to Kyungwon, a university among many in the country halfway around the globe? David explained that he had decided to study with Executive Vice President Won Kim has lasted over twenty years. (David also expressed his thanks for Executive Vice President Kim’s help in arranging the opportunity for him to study abroad. David was interested in Kyungwon University because he wanted an environment in which he could be immersed in a different culture. David is taking core classes on mobile programming and operating system and elective courses in Korea History and Taekwondo.

Differences between Korea and America

I wondered if David had discovered any major differences between the Korean and American educational systems in the month since he came to Korea. He told me that he found it interesting that Korean parents continued to take an active interest in their children’s lives even after they entered college, unlike American parents, who tend not

to interfere in their college-aged children's affairs. Another thing he found surprising was that, unlike American students who usually take four courses for total of twelve credits per semester, Korean students take eighteen credits per semester on average, and sometimes as many as twenty one. "I was surprised to know how hard they studied.

What about the college life? I wanted to know about the lifestyle of American university students, and if it was very different from the lifestyle of Korean students. David disagreed with the mistaken beliefs of many that there would be many cultural differences between Korean and American college life because of the distance between the countries. In his opinion, they were largely similar.

I was concerned that David might feel lonely because he was alone in Korea. But, he said, "I am alright. My fellow students are very kind, and several speak English very well. I've also been learning Korean, so I can sometimes communicate with them in Korean. The executive Vice President introduced many new friends to me, and I haven't even had the chance to be bored. Not only that, my professors are really devoted to their classes and I love that. They are very understanding with me and treat me just the same as any other student.

At the conclusion of the interview, I asked David if there was anything he would like to say to his parents. In response, he jokes that he would tell them, "Mom, Dad, I haven't embarrassed myself yet," confessing that his parents had worried that he would commit some gross social faux pas due to the cultural gap between Korea and America.

Executive Vice President Won Kim stated that Kyungwon University planned to implement programs in anticipation of receiving more foreign exchange students in the near future, as well as increasing the number of English lectures to realize the vision of a global Kyungwon University.

For the first time, an American exchange student has come to study Kyungwon University. This is a significant milestone for our university, and as it would be a wonderful gesture of goodwill if we all could greet him when we meet him on campus this semester.