

**Freeman Scholars Asia Abroad Program – Fall 2016**  
**Seoul National University, South Korea**  
**Jeremy Michael Jimenez**



Me at Dongdaemun Design Plaza the first week I was in Seoul.

### **Introduction**

My name is Jeremy Michael Jimenez, and I am currently a third year at the Shidler College of Business. For my exchange program, I chose to attend Seoul National University (SNU) in South Korea. Before choosing South Korea for my exchange, I really wanted to go to Japan for exchange but due to my graduation plans, I thought studying abroad in the Fall would be a better option. While abroad, I wanted to gain better knowledge of South Korea and the world outside the United States. I honestly had no idea what to expect, since it was my first time leaving North America (besides Hawai'i).

Growing up from a large, mix racial family in the Bay Area, I have been blessed with growing up in an extremely cultural diverse area. But, along with growing up in the Bay Area with 4 siblings, traveling with a large family can be financially burdening. Growing up, I was only able to visit Mexico, Canada, and states around our nation; these trips were usually funded by fundraising or a part time job. After seeing my sister study abroad in Italy while I was in high school, it became a dream of my own to go abroad. This opportunity would not have been possible without the generosity of Mr. Freeman. I cannot begin to thank you for the wonderful gift! Without your kindness and generosity, this opportunity would not have been possible. I am truly blessed to be selected as one of the recipients for the Freeman Scholarship.

## University Experience

This semester, I took 5 classes at SNU. The classes were Special Topic in Management (Negotiation), Financial Management, International Business Management, Introduction to Cinema and Elementary Korean. Financial Management is very similar to Shidler's Business 314 class and is a course that was pre-approved. This class was the most difficult for me, since finance and accounting skills are not my strong suit. For me as a marketing and international business major, I knew it was going to be a tough class but I wanted to challenge myself academically and take it anyway.

Overall, I thought the classes were different than the way University of Hawai'i classes are taught. SNU emphasizes test scores more than Hawai'i and puts less emphasis on assignments. Finals for my classes ranged from 35% of my grade up to 65% of my grade. I found this to be a biggest difference. Sometimes I felt nervous to ask questions in class because of 눈치 or the "air of the classroom". Sometimes, it feels inappropriate to ask questions or the environment/peer pressure is against it. The learning environment is also very studious, since Seoul National University is the best university in South Korea. As a Korean in SNU, it is seen as a guarantee to a successful life and bright future. I have never seen a school viewed so highly in a society.

Aside from my academic life, SNU offers one of the best exchange student programs I have heard of, called the SNU Buddy. SNU Buddy is a program exchange students pay ₩45,000 at the beginning and get put into one of ten groups. In the groups, you are matched with a Korean student at SNU who you can go to for any problems you have in South Korea or just to hang out with. They are there to help you adjust to the change in lifestyle you experience in South Korea. Though I did not get close to my buddy or talk to her very much, the program overall gives you the opportunity to meet hundreds of exchange students from around the world, as well as access to many Koreans who speak English well. In the program, you are able to participate in events like Olympics, river rafting, paintballing, Membership Training (or MT), and so many other events. I am truly grateful and blessed to participate in this program and make many friends from across the globe.



This is **Group 1** for SNU Buddy Fall 2016. I really became close with many individuals within our group, so we decided to take a group photo at a studio! (I'm seated at the far right).

Throughout my time in South Korea, I also had the opportunity to make friends outside of SNU. I met one of my high school friends studying at Yonsei University who happened to be in Seoul at the same time, and he introduced me to his friends. We went to different restaurants, pubs and cafes together. I also met many strangers on the subway, outside on the street, and at different shops. Though I do not speak Korean, I like to think of myself as outgoing and bubbly, which allows me to make friends easily. Speaking to that, I did struggle to connect with a lot of students and Koreans due to the language barrier.

### **South Korea**

South Korea was a lot of what I expected. Like previously stated, I grew up extremely diverse parts of the United States of America. I researched and learned more about South Korea before going and I knew that it is one of the most homogenous countries on the planet. So essentially, South Korea is around 99% Korean. I also heard from other students from Shidler about what South Korea was like and about their experiences.

I was surprised by how diverse the university was though, and the amount of exchange students that are at all universities across South Korea. I learned while in South Korea that the government heavily supports education and support foreign students to come and study in their country. Overall their universities are much cheaper, especially living accommodations. 86% of South Korean high school graduates go to university; this is the highest rate in the world.

The value of education is much higher but comes at a high cost. In America, I believe we espouse that education is very important but not the only way to success. Some of the best entrepreneurs are college dropouts and people can be successful with no college experience. We teach that education is a way to be successful but not the only path. In America, the question is “Will you go to college?” In South Korea, it is not really a question of if you will go to college but when and where.

#### **Busan One Asia Festival**

I got to see many famous Kpop acts perform live in front of thousands of people.





Not only does the government support education more than America but also the arts. The government spends billions of dollars to train Kpop idols, Kdrama actors, as well as fund current idols and production companies. I think this is amazing and really drives the idea learned in university that South Korea is aiming to be a “soft power”.

One stereotype that a lot of people say with Asians, Koreans included, is that they all look the same. In South Korea though, Koreans actually are trying to all look the same. The beauty standard of South Korea is very different than the United States. They value looking uniform and you can see many Koreans wearing the same outfits as each other. When I thought I was just imagining this, other Koreans told me socially speaking, they do not like to stand out because of feeling like an outcaste. Plastic, or cosmetic surgery, is also very common, and talked about openly among many. When submitting resumes for a job, you usually include a picture of yourself, emphasizing their value on appearance. I think America values a more individualistic approach and supports people being themselves and showing individuality.

Another beauty standard that stood out to me was the pale skin. Korean society values white, pale skin, and you can see all the advertisements, cosmetics, and actors in the same shade. As I entered many different shops, lots of employees would offer me BB cream to lighten the appearance of my skin, since I am darker than many people around me. This is opposite of America, especially Hawai’i since I believe we value having a “healthy glow” or tan.

One experience I had with this standard occurred when I was visited Busan. Busan is a beach city 4 hours by bus from Seoul. It has a few famous beaches, which my friends and I visited. When we went to the beach, the Korean people were still in their clothes in the water, not wanting to show their skin. I asked one of my Korean friends who went with us, why they kept their clothing on. It was explained to me that it is so they do not get too dark. This is tied into the way society wants them all to appear. In South Korea, it saddens me to say that appearance matters a lot. I felt self-conscious about my appearance many times during my time abroad.

This picture is me in Busan at Haeundae Beach. You can see the people by the water in their clothes and many others in a similar fashion.



Another interesting political event that happened in South Korea was their impeachment of their president. I was able to experience a South Korean protest, which was surprisingly family friendly and fun. South Koreans came out in hundreds of thousands, demanding their president to step down out of power due to corruption. With the protest came music, singing and dancing, with families bringing their children along to protest. I thought it was amazing that so many people participate and fight for what they believe in, especially peacefully. I hope that the rest of the world can learn from them.

One of the most important lessons I learned while abroad in South Korea was not so much the country itself but my own global perspective. Being an exchange student at a foreign university broke my American bubble and introduced me to many different cultures from countries all around the world. The more I talked to other students and people from around the world, the larger the world seemed. I knew that I always wanted to travel since I was in middle and high school, but studying abroad really sparked my “travel bug”.

Another thing I that changed is my view on the United States. I always knew that the United States had a few problems, but the more I had to explain why things were the way they were, the more broken our country’s system seemed. Why doesn’t the United States support education more? Why do they loan students money instead of awarding it to the student? Why do we not support the arts? There are so many questions I have with my own country. I realized abroad that while I am young, I hope that I can work for a multinational corporation and get the opportunity to work abroad or travel.

### **Tools for the Future**

I learned a lot about world business practices in my International Business Management course. This course had different groups in the class make videos and explain different countries in the first video project and multinational corporations in South Korea for the second video project. We were split into groups for both projects, giving us the opportunity to collaborate with students from around the world. I learned so much about business practices in South Korean and around the world.

Outside of the classroom, I learned a lot about Korean business due to interviewing real businessmen in Korea for my class project. These study abroad experiences in the classroom and outside the classroom transfer directly into my business skill set as the world continues to globalize. In addition to meeting so many South Korean people, and meeting many people from Europe, Asia, and other parts of the world - these are connections and friendships that I hope to have for the rest of my life. In the future, as stated before, I hope to work for a multinational corporation and live in a different country for a short time while I am young. If I am not able accomplish that, I hope that my marketing and international business degree will help me get a job which allows me to travel.

### **Lessons Learned**

Studying abroad is more than learning in a different university. It is more than a classroom, more than a language course and more than business classes. It is your experiences with the other exchange students, the national citizens, and their culture. Most of my learning took place outside the classroom, learning the etiquette, mannerism, and customs of not only South Korea, but of other countries with my exchange friends. Honorifics are very important in South

Korean culture and age, class and gender play very important roles in Korean society. The world is not limited to the United States, and what is 'normal' in the United States is not normal globally. I learned so much about a country I knew close to nothing about when I first arrived. Looking back at when I first came to South Korea, I am a very different person. I will be here for another semester, so I feel like I will engage with the culture on a deeper level in my second semester as well. I hope in my second semester I can pick up more Korean to immerse myself more into the culture. No Korean's first language is English, and I do believe that engaging and learning a culture heavily involves language.

### **Conclusion**

Once again, I cannot be anymore thankful to Mr. Freeman for blessing me with this gift of a first-hand experience to expand my global knowledge. In the beginning of my journey, I truly did not know what to expect, since it was my first time traveling outside the United States alone. Studying abroad is everything I wanted and more.

Though South Korea was not my first choice, I definitely do not regret choosing to come here. Whether it was studying at Seoul National University's beautiful new library or singing until the early hours of the morning in a noraebang to catch the first subway home, I will truly cherish all the friendships and memories I created here in Seoul. The semester is over, most of my exchange friends have gone home and I still reminisce all the good times we had. I want to thank once again Mr. Freeman for providing me with this gift to help fulfill my dream to live abroad. I can finally say I lived in another country besides the United States. 고맙습니다, Mr. Freeman.



Here is a picture of me at Everland, the biggest amusement park in South Korea.