

**EXCHANGE REPORT****Name****Year and term for exchange**

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VT20

Exchange university

KAIST

Degree programme

Biotechnology

KAIST Spring 2020

Before departure

I applied to study abroad as I wanted to have a change of scenery and experience another culture while also taking courses related to my study. South Korea fit my program well and as I found the courses at KAIST interesting, I applied to it.

After applying to KAIST and getting accepted, I applied for a D-2 Student Visa and prepared a couple of forms KAIST wants each student to fill in (one of them being a health check up form) I also took a couple of vaccinations that were recommended when traveling to S. Korea. All in all it was a straightforward process as KAIST provided information and a checklist which made it easy to keep track of what needed to be done. I also had to apply to courses before going to KAIST. I believe for courses that have more applicants than the max class size the spots were randomized. All courses I applied to had space for everyone who applied, however for courses like Korean classes and other ones that a lot of people apply for this is not the case, so it is good to prepare some back-up courses you'd want to apply for.

Lastly, I did some other preparations like learning how to read hangul and studied some Korean. While it is not an issue living in S. Korea with English, in retrospect learning at least how to read hangul was helpful at times.

Upon arrival

I arrived in South Korea one week before the semester started and went to Daejeon, which was fairly easy from Incheon airport. Before I was able to move into my dorm, I lived outside of campus a few days and the first week was basically spent getting used to the new time zone, organizing my dorm and getting to know a few other international students. Due to circumstances no reception was held, however I explored the campus to get familiar with it as the campus is quite big (compared to KTH).

Financials

I took full CSN throughout my semester abroad and also got a travel grant from KTH which managed to cover most of my ticket to/from S. Korea. Generally, S. Korea is less expensive than Stockholm from my experience at least when it comes to food. A lunch/dinner at the school cafeteria would cost under 50 SEK, however eating outside campus was generally a bit more expensive but still cheaper than eating out in Stockholm at least. Transportation within Daejeon is cheaper compared to Stockholm as well. If you take full CSN for a semester, it is not financially difficult to study abroad at KAIST through KTH from my experience.

Accommodation

The dorm was very cheap (around 4000-5000 SEK) for a semester (~4 months), however I did not have access to a kitchen (I do believe you could sign up to have access to one though). It was easy to apply for a dorm through KAIST and I did not have any issues.

University and studies

KAIST is a big campus and the university has many different departments. I belonged to the Department of Bio and Brain Engineering which offered a lot of biotech courses in different areas such as bioinformatics, bioelectronics and bionanotechnology.

There were only 2 lectures per course per week, each being 1.5 hours long, and since the schedule is fixed I had Fridays off as none of my courses had lectures that day. This was very different from my schedule at KTH which usually is different every week and has a lot of scheduled lectures, seminars,

etc. Personally, I preferred the block schedule at KAIST as it was easier to have a routine and there was sufficient time to study during the days.

Overall, I enjoyed my courses at KAIST and think that the lectures were interesting, the homeworks helped me learn core concepts and the examinations helped me apply my knowledge by writing term papers about various subjects which further helped me understand the concepts of the course. Some courses did have “regular” midterm and final exams, which were like the ones I were used to at KTH. When it comes to grading, I believe all of my courses had relative grading compared to KTH which uses absolute grading.



Courses

As a graduate student 3 courses at KAIST was ~30 HP, and I applied for the following courses:

- Immunology BS452 (common course, both for graduate and undergraduate)
- Bio-inspired Systems BiS471 (graduate course)
- Neural Engineering BiS752 (graduate/doctorand course)

Immunology BS452

Immunology was a mandatory course and as the title suggests, the content was about immunology. This course had more or less the same content as the immunology courses I would have taken at KTH. There were weekly homeworks and a final term paper where we had to use the immunology knowledge we learned during our lectures and apply it to COVID-19. I enjoyed the lectures and thought the examination method was interesting as we had to apply our knowledge to the current pandemic.

Bio-inspired Systems BiS471

BiS471 discussed electromechanical systems, about sensors and actuators and how we can use nature as inspiration to apply the physics to create bio-inspired electromechanical systems. The lectures covered a lot of the physics briefly and gave some examples of bio-inspired systems for practical applications in our society. It was an interesting engineering course that really differed from my usual biotech courses at KTH in the sense that it was physics-heavy. There was one mid-term exam and a term paper which we also had to do a presentation of. For the term paper, we had to use the theory presented in the course and present a bio-inspired system.

Neural Engineering BiS752

BiS752 covered core concepts such as bioelectric potentials, impulse propagation and electrode-electrolyte interface before diving into state-of-the-art technologies within neural engineering such as visual prostheses, neural tissue engineering and brain-on-a-chip. It was examined through a final exam and a term-project which included a term-paper and a presentation. This was my

favorite course as I thoroughly enjoyed the contents. While this course was the hardest and included difficult homeworks, the professor was very good at explaining different concepts and the course material was nice to have to dig deeper into the concepts to understand them better. I highly recommend this course for anyone interested in neural engineering.

City and country

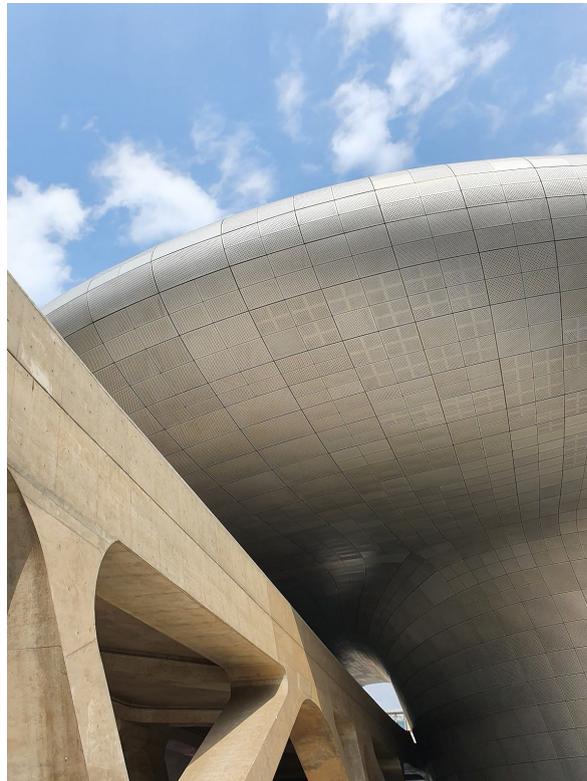
I found Daejeon very cozy and enjoyable, but it ofcourse did feel smaller compared to other big cities (e.g. Seoul) which had its perks. Every city and place has its own charms and I can highly recommend, once it's safe and possible again, to travel around and experience different parts of the country.

What I really appreciated when it comes to practical things was how easy and accessible transportation was in general in South Korea. While it was a struggle sometimes figuring out how to get to the train stations and transfer busses, it was definitely quite easy to figure things out once you found them and it was fast to get to other places. You have one card for the subways and busses, which can be used (to my knowledge) anywhere in the country, and there are easy to use apps to check your routes and such. Also, if you wanted to take the cab they were generally very cheap (at least compared to Sweden).

S. Korea is rich in culture and I enjoyed experiencing it and learning more about it and the history of the country. There are a lot of places and activities around the country where you can learn a lot about the culture and history, something that I appreciated a lot. The food culture is rich as well, there were so many things to try and I definitely recommend trying out as many different things as you can. The nature is also incredible, especially during cherry blossom season!

Lastly, I experienced that everyone was very friendly and helpful. In the beginning especially when I had issues navigating around or needed help with things, no matter if there were any communication barriers I always got help and for that I am very thankful and appreciative.

Seoul:



Busan:



Jeju:



Leisure and social activities

KAIST usually has different clubs and a lot of activities throughout the year from what I heard from full-time students there, and new students can join a reception. However, due to the pandemic this was cancelled so I was not able to experience those typical uni-activities they offer. While this was a bummer, there were still a lot of activities to enjoy. Usually, I spent time with friends outside hanging out around campus, ate lots of good food or did other activities such as hiking, climbing, watching movies etc. I also enjoyed taking walks, running or bicycling along the river near the campus. Generally, despite the circumstances it was very easy to have a (pandemic-safe) social life.

Other recommendations and observations

I recommend getting a bicycle as it is the easiest way to get around campus and also is a nice way to explore the city. Bicycling or running/walking to go enjoy the scenery of the city as a break from studying, by myself or with others, was definitely one of my favorite day-to-day spare time activities (ofcourse, after fika).

If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at miliadis@kth.se