Houston Korean Education Center held two 10-week concurrent beginning-level Korean Language and Culture courses this spring semester. Dr. Deukhee Gong, Director of the Korean American Cultural Center of San Antonio and Ms. Jin Ah Castillo of UTSA’s Bicultural-Bilingual Studies Department taught the classes.

The classes started off by teaching the students basic greetings and introductions along with basic Korean history. The students learned the writing system including consonants, vowels and complex vowels, in addition to learning vocabulary and forming sentences. By the end, the classes had attained the ability to carry on a basic conversation. After the class concluded for the semester, the EAI asked the teachers their thoughts about the class.
“I had no idea why students would want to learn Korean!” laughed Ms. Castillo. She was excited and wanted to share her culture as well. Both teachers feel that the Korean language has little exposure, especially in San Antonio. “Korea has developed dramatically and rapidly,” said Dr. Gong, “therefore, if you know Korean, you will have more chances to get a job.”

The classes were taught with an agglomeration of pair and group work. In addition, regular assignments and quizzes were given to encourage practice. “Although the students couldn’t even read any Korean at all at the beginning of the class,” Castillo commented, “they became able to read full sentences and hold conversations near the end of the semester.” Now that the class has ended, both teachers feel accomplished and still think of their students often. Next semester, they plan to add more activities and push to use even more Korean in class.

In addition to interviewing the teachers, students were also asked questions about their experiences and the reasoning behind taking the class. One student responded with the word hallyu, which refers to the spread of South Korean culture around the world. Another student expressed that she wanted to learn Korean so she could talk to her boyfriend’s mother since she is a Korean native and hardly speaks any English. One class member joked saying that now she will be able to watch Korean dramas without subtitles.

The students had mixed expectations before entering the class since this was the first time a course like this has been offered on campus. They expected the class to be hard, but exclaimed that they had a lot of fun. They learned a lot, perhaps a little too much.

Besides learning about culture and food, one student stated that Korean will become
handy when he applies to the Teach and Learn in Korean (TaLK) Program in the fall. Most students felt learning other languages is essential and will open more doors later in life. After all, the more perspectives one can look through, the greater chance that changes can develop.

The majority of the students wished to continue their Korean education. Many were ecstatic to find out that an intermediate-level course would be offered in the coming fall. The moment it was offered, more than 20 students rushed to get their applications in early to reserve their spot in the next class.

“The East Asia Institute and UTSA are grateful for the overwhelming support we received from Dr. Jung Joo Park and the Korean Education Center in Houston,” said Mimi Yu, Associate Director of the East Asia Institute, “Bringing a Korean language and culture class to San Antonio finally became a reality because of this collaboration.” “We hope many of our students will go teach and work in Korea through the TaLK and EPIK Programs to totally immerse themselves in the Korean society, its culture and language,” said Julius Gribou, UTSA’s Senior International Officer, “I am pleased more and more UTSA students are interested in these global opportunities, which will be very beneficial to them when it comes to completing in the political and economic arena in the future.”