**LET’S TaLK!**

**Teaching English in Korea through the TaLK Program**

The East Asia Institute (EAI) is pleased to announce the arrival of Ms. Shannon Irby, who recently returned from the TaLK program offered at the University of Texas at San Antonio and will work as a TaLK Specialist to give consultation to UTSA students that are interested in teaching English abroad in Korea. The Korean Government Sponsored International Voluntary Program, or TaLK (Teach and Learn in Korea), is a scholarship program that allows students to be eligible to teach in Korea with only two years of college completed. Participants of the TaLK program will be paired with a Korean instructor to teach English to elementary school students in rural areas. As an after school program, work days are Monday through Friday, at approximately fifteen hours a week.

The TaLK program is a six-month or a one-year program (scholars can extend for up to two years).

Korea has the 3rd largest economy in Asia and is 15th largest economy in the world, while playing a large role in the technology and science industries. Korea is also one of Texas’ largest trading partners. Korea has a high demand for competent English speakers as it tries to globalize the country’s rural areas. South Korea is also the largest trading partner for the U.S.

Irby grew up in military household. Her parents were stationed in Japan when she was younger, and they visited Korea once for a weekend trip. Irby graduated from UTSA in May 2011, with a Bachelor’s degree in
Communications. She also studied Japanese as an undergraduate, has plans to obtain a Master’s degree and become certified to teach English in Korea again.

Irby taught elementary school English (grades 1-6) in Jecheon, Korea, for one year, February 2012 to February 2013. Jecheon is approximately two hours south of Seoul, Korea’s capital. More specifically, Jecheon is located in the Chungbuk Province, which happens to be the only landlocked province in Korea. Irby lived in the city, but the school she taught at is located in a rural area.

Though there are differences from living in the city and teaching in a rural area, Irby really enjoyed where she taught. “My school had about one-hundred students, while a friend of mine had around forty,” said Irby, “We would hear about other schools nearby having over three-hundred and fifty students, but I was happy with the students at my school.” Irby also mentioned that in her city there was a foreigner community, which was a good support group at times when she felt overwhelmed. Irby made friends from the TaLK orientation, as well as making a lot of Korean friends. She met international and local people while visiting Seoul and also met a lot of people from all over the world, who were mainly just visiting South Korea.

Her success to making Korean friends was learning the language. Learning Korean was a challenge for Irby, but she managed to learn as much as possible so she could communicate with her friends, as well as when on her own getting around in Korea. “It’s one thing to go to Seoul and be a foreigner,” says Irby, “but another to be in a rural area. People stare at you and are curious as to why you are there.” Through the challenges of adapting to Korean customs, Irby also adjusted to the food. Korean food can be very spicy, something she was not used to, though now she thoroughly enjoys it.

Irby has learned very much from her experience in Korea. She has a tremendous respect for teachers and teaching after the TaLK program, since it is no easy task. She knows more about Korea, its people and language and is more understanding toward the culture. “I would say I now have more confidence in myself because it was my first time alone in the country without my parents or being on a military base,” says Irby, “I would recommend the TaLK Program to anyone who wishes to embrace diversity and international education.” While on the TaLK Program, Irby was able to travel all over Korea and she event made it to Japan once. “One can live quite comfortably with the monthly stipend and save up money easily”, said Irby.

TaLK recruits twice a year with two departure dates from the U.S.: once in early February and once in early August. UTSA and the TaLK Program signed an MOU (Mutual of Understanding) agreement in March, 2012, so UTSA is considered an exchange school. Irby is available for consultation Monday-Thursday and the hours vary each day. Write to eai@utsa.edu to make an appointment and enjoy the once in a life time experience by applying to TaLK. For more info on the TaLK Program, please visit http://www.talk.go.kr