13 Gen TaLK Orientation and Opening Ceremony

This August the TaLK (Teach and Learn in Korea) program hosted the 13th generation orientation and opening ceremony for students who were accepted into the TaLK program in Jeju. There were 207 students in attendance, and of these students, five were from the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA).

Thomas Alvarado, Jon Andresen, Chris Fey, Amber Garza, and Tiffany Lee were accepted and will be in Korea for the next year teaching English at elementary schools in rural part of South Korea as well as learning about Korea, its society, culture and language.

25 students from UTSA in total since 2012 have been accepted into the TaLK or EPIK (English Program in Korea) programs to teach English in Korea. In addition to the aforementioned five students, two representatives from UTSA were invited and attended the orientation and the opening ceremony organized by the National Institute for International Education (NIIED). Mimi Yu, the East Asia Institute’s (EAI) associate director and Erina Romanowich, program coordinator of the EAI also participated at the TaLK MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) schools training.

From July 28th- August 3rd, the TaLK program conducted training for the MOU schools in Seoul and on Jeju island, where they visited two elementary schools to observe TaLK scholars’ classroom teaching, attended lectures given by TaLK scholars along with those presented by the NIIED staff and other TaLK MOU schools.

Part of the training included cultural visits in Seoul and Jeju to gain more knowledge of Korean culture from the inside out. “These training sessions helped me to gain in-depth knowledge about the TaLK program as well as Korea as a country,” said Romanowich. “Now I am more confident and ready to assist UTSA students to serve on the TaLK Program in a better way.”

For the 13th generation scholars, their training started at the new English Education Center located on Jeju island. They attend three weeks of training that will prepare them to be English teachers. This training also gives them opportunities to connect with other scholars, so they can network and assist each other in the future.

“My experience at orientation has been an interesting one: when they split the 200 of us into eight groups, I felt like being in a small community,” said Thomas Alvarado. “Our group members became fast friends and we help each other along the way by sharing teaching ideas and giving constructive criticism when it comes to making lessons plans. I know the friendship made here will be long lasting and I know once we get to our schools, we will continue to support one another adapting to living Korea and learning more about its culture.”

The TaLK program was set up by the NIIED as a way to help foster learning and enhance international exchange. It only accepts native English speakers from seven countries including the U.S., U.K., Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, and the University of Texas at San Antonio.
Zealand, and South Africa so that the program can improve the quality of the English curriculum in rural schools.

The TaLK program accepts college students in their junior year or above and aims to help elementary aged children learn to speak more fluently in English. TaLK hosts after-school programs where young Korean students can practice their English in a more conversational way.

In addition to the TaLK scholarship program at which the scholars teach part time (15 hours per week), there is also the EPIK fellowship program, the latter is also run by the NIIED but is a full time English teaching position that covers all levels of schooling.

EPIK also only accepts native English speakers from the aforementioned countries, but the EPIK teachers are required to have a bachelor’s degree or higher. In addition, they teach in schools at all levels from primary to high school in more urban environments than TaLK. For more information on the TaLK and EPIK and how to apply, please visit http://www.talk.go.kr/talk/talk_new/intro.jsp or see EAI homepage at http://www.utsa.edu/eai.

UTSA’s EAI has worked very closely with the Houston Korean Education Center and the Consulate General of the Republic of Korea in Houston to help promote both TaLK and EPIK since the MOU was established in 2012. In addition, UTSA works with both offices on culture related events such as the Kimchi Festival as well as offering Korean language classes.

“Being able to serve on the TaLK and EPIK programs in Korea is very essential in training our UTSA students in gaining global experience and understanding this fascinating country and its society ,” said Dr. René Zenteno, Vice Provost for International Initiatives. “UTSA is working to expand our efforts to engage students for these types of international service learning and teaching opportunities. I am pleased we have been able to team up with the NIIED and we look forward to more future collaboration in this exchange.”