On Wednesday, September 17th, 2014, the East Asia Institute (EAI) hosted an information session for English Teaching Opportunities in Korea. Guest speaker Director Geunhye Kim from the Houston Korean Education Center came to introduce the Teach and Learn in Korea (TaLK) Program and the English Program In Korea (EPIK).

Director Kim spoke about Korea, a country located on a peninsula between Japan and China. She informed the audience that Korea has a high demand for competent English speakers. The TaLK and EPIK Programs are two great opportunities to teach English overseas. These programs accept people from various English-speaking countries including the United States, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, the United Kingdom, Ireland, and South Africa. Director Kim also showed the audience a short video about the Peace Corps that went to Korea after the Korean War to improve the country.

Unlike other programs, TaLK is considered a scholarship. Therefore, only two years of college minimum need to be completed to be eligible for the program. Participants of the TaLK Program will be paired with a Korean instructor to teach English to elementary school children in rural areas. The TaLK scholar will be teaching in an after-school program, so the work days are Monday through Friday, approximately fifteen hours a week.

Applicants can apply for a six-month or a one-year contract. The contracts can be extended twice. The first step to applying is filling out the online application, which can be found at http://www.talk.go.kr/. Following that, applicants will be interviewed and will need to submit various documents to be screened. Upon passing the screening, they will be sent an email and an admission package. They can then accept the scholarship and prepare to leave by obtaining either an E2-2 or F4 visa.

There are many differences between the TaLK and EPIK Program. The most important is that the applicants must have at least a bachelor’s degree to be eligible for EPIK. Participants of EPIK will be teaching in primary and secondary schools during school hours, not after school as in the TaLK Program. They work Monday through Friday, eight hours a day, and will be asked to either assist a
Korean teacher with their English class, or to conduct the class together. The scholar will also have to prepare materials for class and assist with activities related to the English language.

Applicants can apply through the Korean Consul General’s office in Houston or by emailing the EPIK office in Seoul, Korea at epic@korea.kr. Similar to the TaLK Program, the applicant will be interviewed and various documents must be submitted. The mandatory documents include the application and required essay, two signed recommendation letters, an FBI criminal background check, a diploma, a transcript, and a copy of the photo page of the passport.

After the information session, Director Kim gave the floor to four former TaLK scholars from UTSA to speak about their experiences in Korea. At the same time, the audience were given an opportunity to try out the delicacy from Korea. Available for food tasting was cabbage kimchi, cucumber kimchi, japchae (sweet potato noodles), and rice.

While the audience was enjoying their dishes, each of the TaLK scholars gave a presentation about their time in Korea. Topics included orientation, the province they were assigned to, the places they visited, and their experience with the Korean students and schools. The scholars’ testimonials were exceptionally appealing to the audience members, who are very interested in the program, and some confirmed they will definitely apply to the TaLK program. The audience members were given a chance to ask several questions to the scholars. They asked questions about how one should be prepared for the program, if having some Korean skill help, and what Korean people are like. After the event, Director Kim and the scholars stayed to talk to students who were extremely interested in the program and to answer any question the student had.

“Both TaLK and EPIK programs offer amazing opportunities for those that would like to teach and learn abroad in Asia, particularly in Korea,” said Dr. René Zenteno, Vice Provost for International Initiatives. “These programs are great ways to expand knowledge of the world. ”

Over the last two and a half years, more than 25 UTSA students have participated in the TaLK and EPIK Programs. “Our UTSA students have made a positive impact on the young children in the rural areas in Korea in terms of their English education,” said Dr. Wanxiang Yao, Director of the East Asia Institute. “At the same time, the TaLK and EPIK Programs have given our UTSA students the unique opportunities to experience what it is like to be a global citizen with an international mind. We look forward to working with both programs to continue this partnership—it is a win-win situation.”