

## Year Abroad Report: Jeonbuk National University (JBNU)

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### Application

The decision to apply to Jeonbuk National University was a relatively easy decision for me. JBNU offers two scholarships for Tübingen students and since I have two other siblings who are currently attending university, it seemed like an obvious first choice to me. Even though my grades were good, I was unsure if I would be able to get into JBNU. Luckily for me, I was one of the only two people who put Jeonbuk as their first choice, so I got in without any problems. After being chosen as an applicant by Tübingen University, I had to submit some more forms and documents to JBNU. As far as I can remember, the whole process was without any major problems. While waiting to be officially admitted to the university, I focused on finishing my classes in Tübingen and writing my final papers.

## **Preparation and Arrival**

The visa process was by far the most stressful part of preparing for the year abroad. They required quite a lot of documents and unlike the majority of the other Tübingen students, I do not have a German passport so the requirements were a bit different for me than for them. For the visa, I was able to choose between going to Frankfurt and giving my documents in person or sending the documents via post to Berlin. I chose the latter and thankfully got my visa a few weeks before the flight.

Things were going pretty smoothly until about a week before the flight, when we got the notice that we will not be able to move in the dorm on the day of our arrival (as we have planned), but that we will have to wait three days until the official move-in day. The other student from Tübingen (who I would be sharing a room at the dorm at JBNU with) and I quickly decided to book a hostel. This turned out to be a really nice experience since the owner of the hostel was really kind, spoke English well and offered us free food upon our arrival. He also told us where to buy the things for our dorm and gave us a few tips on where to travel.

The day of moving into the dorm was a little bit chaotic since the night before, my roommate realized that she did not do the Tuberculosis test and that she could not move into the dorm without it. So in the morning, someone from the International Office picked us up at the hostel and took us to a hospital near the university for her to do the test. Luckily everything ended really quickly and we were taken to the dorm where we signed a document and gave our fingerprint (which is used to open the doors of the dorm and the cafeteria).

I feel very lucky that the only Covid measures we had to adhere to was the public transport mask usage, which meant that I could enjoy my first week and explore the city. I was really excited to finally be in South Korea and was ready to discover the campus life here and experience new things.

## **Language and Content Courses**

One of the biggest misunderstandings that happened in Korea was that my roommate and I were placed in the wrong language courses. The first red flag was that they did not ask us to do a placement test and they let us decide which level we wanted to go to (I thought I got lucky so I did not question it at first). The second red flag was that we were put in language courses that were about 1 to 3 hours every day. After talking to other Tübingen students, who have all been taking 4 hours of Korean classes every day, I realized that there must have been some mistake so I talked to my roommate and we got in contact with the International Office and explained our situation. After a few days of anticipation they gave us a placement test and put us in the right intensive 3rd level Korean course.

The intensive Korean language courses at JBNU use the SNU Korean language books and the courses are very well structured. There are small exams on writing or speaking every week and there is an exam for every quarter of the book with a midterm and a big final exam. The midterm and final exams are divided into two days. The first day is grammar, vocabulary, listening, writing and reading, and the speaking test is on the following day. The speaking part lasts only 15 minutes and you are given all the necessary information about a week before the exam.

The majority of the other international students are from Asia (China, Mongolia, Vietnam...). Even though most of them do not speak English fluently, they are really kind and we did our best to communicate in Korean. Undoubtedly one of the best parts of taking those classes was randomly getting a snack from one of the other students (which is something that I will definitely miss). There are however other exchange students who speak English on the campus. They will probably be taking lower Korean classes but you will undoubtedly meet them at the dorm's cafeteria. If you find yourself missing speaking German, there will most

likely also be a few students from another German university so you will have a native to talk to.

The level 3 and level 5 classes were held in the morning and the level 4 classes were in the afternoon. I had a lot of luck during level 3 because our teachers and the other students all got along really well and we laughed a lot so it was a nice start to my exchange year.

A few weeks into the semester, I was contacted by the German department regarding the tandem program. There were 5 German students at JBNU and we were all individually paired up with about 4 to 5 Koreans in each group. I met up with my group a few times and we ate food together and were able to practice both German and Korean. Since there were a lot of new German students who joined in the second semester I was not contacted by the German department to participate in the language exchange again.

During the second semester I was finally able to take some content courses. I took two English courses: 1) English and American Literary Criticism and 2) Understanding British and American Drama. Both of these classes were twice a week (once 2 hours and once 1 hour). In comparison to English courses at Tübingen, the ones at JBNU required a lot less work and were relatively easy. I solved the required coursework very easily and had no problem getting high marks.

## **Campus Life**

The New Silk Road building, which is where the Korean classes are held, is about 15 minutes by foot away from the dormitory. The campus is relatively big and has quite a few nice spots to hang out and study. There are a few different coffee shops, convenience stores and small restaurants on the campus which is really convenient. Deokjin park is right next to the dorm where the international students are situated and there is also a river about 15 minutes by foot from the dorm. Both places are really nice if you enjoy walking or running.

There is a Buddy Program at the university, but there are not a lot of Korean students who participate in it so I sadly was not able to get a place in the first semester. But thanks to a friend who did get in, I was able to hang out with her group a few times. These groups usually consist of 2 international and 2 Korean students. This experience was really fun and I heard a lot of positive things from other friends who got in, so I decided to try out my luck again in the second semester. Thankfully this time I was assigned to a group. My group consisted of two Korean girls and a girl from Taiwan. One Korean girl's English was not the best, but we were still able to communicate in a mixture of English and Korean so there weren't any problems. We traveled to Gunsan together, visited the Hanok village and met up many times for dinner and drinks so I definitely suggest signing up.

Student clubs at the Jeonbuk university are really diverse and there are a lot more than I expected there to be (various sports, dance clubs, singing clubs, a film club etc.). I ended up joining the English Conversation Club (ECC) and the Kotural club. ECC has a lot of Korean and foreign members so it is a great opportunity to easily meet friends. Kotural is a club that mostly has international students and is focused on sharing student's cultures and experiences. Both experiences were really fun and I definitely recommend joining a club since this is the easiest way to meet new friends, both Korean and foreign.

The dormroom consists of two beds, two desks, two regular closets, a shoe closet and the bathroom. Cooking inside the dorm is strictly forbidden, but there is a water dispenser on every floor with hot water for making ramen or tea/coffee. On the first floor, there is a laundry room with 3 washing machines and 2 dryers that you can use for 1,000won. The Chambit cafeteria (part of the dorm that foreign students are in) does not have the best reputation amongst Korean students but I thought that the food was relatively good (especially considering that I do not have to pay for it). Though seeing sweet french fries as part of breakfast was definitely something to get used to.

## **Travel**

Having the scholarship meant that I had more money at my disposal for traveling around South Korea. Jeonju is in the middle west part of Korea, so it's relatively easy and cheap to take a bus and do a day trip to the beach or to one of the historically important cities like Iksan, Gwangju or Gyeongju. Jeonju is only 3 hours away from Seoul and only 14,500won (if you know where to buy the ticket). I did not do a lot of solo traveling in Europe but I have grown to really love it here. At first, it was a challenge since there are times when my mastercard was declined at a restaurant or a shop, but after making a Korean bank account I no longer have to worry about that. Since coming here, I have been to over 12 cities, not counting Incheon (since the airport was the only part of the city that I saw). Being able to experience different parts of Korea has definitely been my favorite part about studying abroad.

## **TOPIK**

During summer I decided to apply to take the TOPIK exam. I heard that it was really difficult to get a place at JBNU so I made sure to log into the websites as soon as the application was open. Thankfully, by the time I was able to book the test there was still a place at JBNU. Filling out the information and paying the fee was relatively easy and all I had to do was wait until the actual date.

The test itself took place on a Saturday at the New Silk Road Center, the same building where the Korean classes are held. There were people in the lobby who were there to help guide the students and help them get to the right floor. After finding my room, I saw that a friend from my Korean class was in the same room so both of us were really happy there was someone

we knew there. The test went by without any difficulties and all that was left was waiting for the results.

## **Departure**

I booked my flight ticket a few months in advance after discussing with my family and figuring out when my classes end and how long I wanted to stay in Jeonju. I decided to stay in the dorm for a few weeks after the official end of semester in December. Thankfully, JBNU allows those who stay at the dorm to pay up until the date of their flight. With the help of a friend, I went to the office that is in charge of dorms and I was able to easily adjust the price for the dorm so that I only pay for the days that I will be staying there.

I spent the remaining time I had seeing friends and making as many memories as possible before leaving. I was able to have a very nice final trip to Busan with friends and say goodbye to my favorite cafe owners. The last week was kind of hectic because I was balancing packing, closing my bank account and seeing as many friends as possible. I was able to have one final dinner with my friends before leaving the next morning on the first bus to the airport.

## **Fazit**

In short, I consider my year abroad a success. Even though there are a few disadvantages of not being in Seoul (events, concerts, internships...), I was happy with my choice of studying at JBNU. I was able to meet many amazing people during my time there and make great memories. JBNU is a university with a great campus, friendly students (both Korean and international) and has many things to offer. I will definitely miss living in Jeonju and I am really grateful for the great experience I was able to have there.