1. Ewha Women’s University: Ewha Language Center

a. Carmen Wilson, Spring 2018 Final Report

For the past academic year, I’ve had the pleasure of studying Korean at Ewha Woman’s University thanks to the Light Fellowship. You can follow my adventures in detail and read reviews for the fall and winter quarters at my blog here: thecarmensutra.wordpress.com/.

Because the spring semester was a little chaotic, I was unable to update the blog regularly, so I will include my thoughts about my spring quarter (Level 5) at Ewha below.

In each chapter of the Level 5 textbook, there are three grammar points, between 70-90 new vocabulary words, one dialogue, a reading passage, one listening exercise, a writing exercise and a discussion/debate section. The grammar in Level 5 is nothing new. The grammar structures are basically more formal/academic versions of the Level 4 grammar points. Similarly, the vocabulary words are field-specific (art history, law, economy, even physics…) and usually don't occur in everyday life unless you work in said field or enjoy watching the news. As such, the dialogues become rather unlikely scenarios. I relied even more on rote memorization than usual to get through the dialogues in class, and to be honest, these kinds of dialogues may not be the best way to practice such high-level vocabulary.

The newly introduced debate section, however, creates the perfect arena for that. For this module, the class learns about the debate topic through news clips and articles before splitting into two opposing sides. Then, as you can expect, the teams express why they agree or disagree with the debate statement, present counterarguments, and try to persuade the other team to change their opinion. Debates are common to most upper level language classes, so this isn’t new to me. But I’m still not a big fan of debates; I’m not an argumentative or competitive person, so I find it hard to get worked up about topics I couldn’t care less about. I also question how effective this module can be when the teachers didn't correct the students' awkward grammar or phrasing. This module didn’t do much for me, but if you like to argue and/or have a teacher that corrects the students, this could be effective language practice.

Level 5 focuses more on the different types of writing than previous levels. You write art exhibition posters, movie reviews, product reviews, and personal reflection essays, just to name a few. How you follow the set format is more important than the length of the composition. Overall, I enjoyed the reading passages and writing assignments, except for one unnecessary change. After you finish outlining your essay you have to stand up and formally present your outline to the class. A lot of students write such full outlines that it might as well be the essay,
and it’s incredibly awkward when you haven’t even come up with an idea yet… (The writing is for HOMEWORK after all…) I prefer Level 4’s approach, wherein you write the outline quietly at your desk and the teacher comes around to check it. Maybe presenting your outline is a way for them to work in some extra speaking practice, but everyone just reads off their paper anyway, so if that’s the plan, it’s not working.

Outside of academics, Level 5 does a better job of engaging students with the language outside of the classroom. Though they don’t set you up with language partners or anything like that (at this level you’re expected to have your own Korean friends), they’ve integrated news clips, children’s stories, Korean myth, and even full length movies into the lessons; there’s also an overnight trip to Andong, a city three hours away from Seoul famous for mask dance and jjimtak. We learned about mask dance in Korean, got to practice it ourselves, took a tour of a traditional village and even got to sleep in very nice traditional houses. The whole trip was very refreshing. Everyone in our class got a little bit closer, too.

Out of my three terms here, Level 5 lands second on my favorite’s list. It’s not as overwhelming as level 3, but not as interesting and well-rounded as Level 4 (my favorite). Though Ewha is advertised to be a very balanced program, it's overall more effective at building vocabulary and developing reading/writing skills. I wouldn’t recommend Ewha to students just coming out of Korean L1/L2 or anyone aiming to quickly improve speaking and listening skills. The program lacks listening homework and review, and the dialogues provided for speaking practice are short and robotic. The class environment also tends to be on the quiet side, almost like a lecture sometimes. That’s not to say your listening and speaking skills won’t improve at Ewha. You will get better at least a little bit with Ewha’s curriculum design, but you won’t develop these skills as quickly as naturally as you would at say, Sogang. However, if you’re willing to take the time outside of class to practice conversation, then that would make up for this little pitfall is Ewha’s curriculum.

If you have any further questions about the program or the blog, feel free to contact me.

Again, a huge thank you to the Light Fellowship for this wonderful experience~

b. Renee Hernandez Rodriquez, Summer 2018 Final Report

Thanks to the generosity of the Light Fellowship, I had the great opportunity of studying Korean in Seoul this past summer. Having now completed the program, I can honestly say that my Korean skills have improved exponentially and that I had a fantastic study abroad experience.
I attended the Ewha Womans University Intensive Korean Language 10-week Program, which seems to be the least popular program choice amongst Light Fellows. I chose Ewha for a variety of reasons, a primary one being its location. Compared to some of the other programs, Ewha is located more towards central Seoul and is close to Sinchon and Hongdae, the districts often frequented by youthful crowds. This made it a much more attractive program to me. From there, I chose Ewha over Yonsei because of the former’s reputation of providing equal emphasis on writing, reading, and speaking while the latter focuses mostly on writing and reading.

For the Ewha program, each class of students was assigned 2 language teachers, one of which we met Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, while the other we met only Tuesdays and Thursdays. Our classes met from 9:10AM to 1:00PM, with two breaks to create three large time chunks for each day. We would typically start class with a listening quiz, which was just a recording of the conversation practice we had done the day before. And then our teachers would guide us through grammar, reading, listening, and writing exercises. We would only do three of the four skills in a single day, and the uncovered skill would be included in the next day’s lesson. Additionally, the writing assignments were only at the end of each lesson, with a total of 14 homework writing assignments spread throughout the whole semester. After having spoken to some of the other Light Fellows, I am under the impression that the Ewha Program had a lower workload on the day to day basis but had more difficult midterm and final exams.

I believe that one of the greatest strengths of the Ewha program was how well structured and formatted it was. Each of the 14 lessons had a theme, which allowed for vocabulary and grammar sets to be taught in the context of each lesson’s theme. This thematic structure also made the grammar easier to learn as well as easier to remember. Additionally, the teachers were extremely kind, patient, and they genuinely cared about their students. I can recall one of my professors helping my classmate resolve her problems with her visa. They were also extremely open to answering any questions and to adjusting the speed of the class if needed. On the other hand, the Ewha program did not provide any way to meet native Korean friends unlike SNU, which offers its Buddy Program. In terms of developing speaking skills, Ewha’s Language Program seemingly encouraged us to memorize conversations rather than having us formulate sentences from our own thoughts. However, both of these issues were quickly resolved once I actively practiced speaking Korean outside of the classroom setting. Overall, I am very glad I chose the Ewha program, although I do wish that I had been able to share my experience with more of the other Light Fellows.

In terms of my living situation, I lived in an Airbnb apartment in Hongdae. Because I lived in Hongdae, the brisk 20-minute walk to school became part of my daily morning routine. It was a double with a private bathroom that I shared with a fellow Yalie. The Airbnb, even though split between two people, was quite expensive and even went over the Light Fellowship housing budget. But since the room was very clean, came with good facilities, and was very well located, we thought it was a good alternative to a homestay, one-room, or dormitory, which have received mixed reviews from past Light Fellows.
One of my goals I had for my time abroad was to actively engage with different parts of Korean culture. Ewha offered optional extracurricular activity classes and outside cultural excursions which included everything from pottery classes to Kpop Dance clubs. From the many, I chose to participate in the Korean Cooking Class. This particular extracurricular activity had four meetings throughout the semester and each meeting was dedicated to cooking two Korean dishes in a cooking studio. My classmate, 리메 (Rime) from China and I signed up for the cooking class together. We quickly became very close friends as we learned side by side how to make 파전, 김치, 비빔밥, 된장찌개, 불고기 (pajun, kimchi, soybean paste soup, and bulgogi) while we practiced our Korean together. As I am writing this, I realize that the only times I ever cooked were all in the Korean Cooking Class. This means that I either ate out or ate convenience store food for all of my other meals. I do not know whether I should be impressed or disgusted with myself. Nevertheless, I am very glad to have participated in the Korean Cooking Class as it allowed me to interact with a very relevant part of Korean culture and to become closer friends with 리메.

One of the most difficult things I encountered whilst living in Seoul was making native Korean friends. As I already mentioned before, Ewha did not offer a Buddy program and the fact that I was living with a fellow Yalie only further exasperated this problem. That is, it was much easier to make plans with my roommate rather than to actively go out and try to make Korean friends. More than anything, I was too insecure in my speaking skills to speak to Koreans my age. It was only when one of my teachers told me that I needed to improve my speaking skills and advised me to make Korean friends that I knew I needed to really address this issue.

After some sleuthing on the internet, I discovered a language and cultural exchange group that was geared specifically toward Korean and English speakers. While attending the event, I became friends with 윤성 (Yoon Sung), a Korean who is currently learning English. I never visited the language exchange group again, but I did meet up with 윤성 many times after that. He introduced me to a few of his close friends and they all took it upon themselves to show me the parts of Seoul that I had yet to see. And they were also very patient with me as I practiced speaking Korean. Some of my best memories from Seoul are some of the times I spent with them, like when we went down to eat fried chicken by the Han River together. I still keep in contact with these friends that I was fortunate enough to meet, and we even have plans to meet each other in New York this coming Spring!

In a similar vein, I wanted to discuss how my friendships developed with my classmates. Despite the fact that we spent 4 hours with each other every day, I had trouble becoming close with them. There was a good mix of nationalities in our class including Chinese, Japanese, Taiwanese, Thai, Italian, and American (I was the only one). But, the majority of the class was Chinese or knew a bit of Chinese. So as soon as class ended, my classmates would start speaking Chinese since it was easier for them to communicate that way. They would eat lunch together quite often but I felt deterred from joining them. It after the halfway point in the
semester that I started to invite myself to their lunch outings. After a few times, they also started inviting me and we eventually began to spend more time together outside of class. Sadly, it was in the last 2 weeks of my program that I just started getting truly close to my classmates. In retrospect, I wish that I had started inviting myself to their lunches and talking to them earlier in the semester.

To conclude, I have a few pieces of advice to offer future Light Fellows. Just in case my previous anecdotes did not make it apparent, allow me to list out the lessons I learned. First, definitely join a club of some sort! Whether it be Korean cooking, a sport, or Kpop dance, being in an extracurricular club allows you to explore more of Korea’s culture, to make new friends, and to practice your Korean. Second, make Korean friends and become friends with your classmates as early on as possible. Not only will they explore Seoul with you, but you will likely make friendships that will continue even after you leave Korea. And your Korean speaking skills will improve (no surprise there). I am offering these two pieces of advice specifically because my most favorite memories from my time abroad were all related to the club I joined and the friends I made. And my final piece of advice is to have goals for your time abroad. Whether it be visiting sites or doing a certain activity, make a written list of all the things you want to do before you arrive in Seoul. Actively try to accomplish your goals and even add on more as they occur to you. I am strongly recommending this because time truly flew by there. There were so many things I wanted to do and before I knew it, the semester had ended. But if you follow that tidbit of advice, you can accomplish everything that you want to do.

Again, I am very glad to have been able to study abroad in Seoul. There is such a vibrant and rich culture there, one I personally believe everyone should encounter. And now that I have personally come into contact with it, I know that I will come back for more. But more than anything, I am extremely grateful to the Light Fellowship for this opportunity. This summer was a truly eye-opening experience and one I will never forget.