

# Experience Report – DAAD PROMOS Scholarship 2025

**Host Institution:** Kwangwoon University, Seoul, South Korea

**Home Institution:** Westsächsische Hochschule Zwickau (WHZ), Zwickau, Germany

**Period:** Fall Semester 2025 (South Korea), Wintersemester 2025/2026 (Germany),  
September 1st – December 31<sup>st</sup>

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# 1. Life and Study Conditions

## Personal and Academic Interest in the Country

My decision to study in South Korea was driven by a deep fascination with the country's unique blend of deep-rooted tradition and hyper-modern innovation. As a business student from WHZ, I really wanted to experience firsthand the academic environment of a nation that is a global leader in technology and R&D.

## Preparation and Organisation

The application process was streamlined thanks to the well-established partnership between my home university and Kwangwoon University. The International Office at WHZ provided crucial initial guidance. Applying for the DAAD PROMOS scholarship was a clear process, with detailed checklists available online.

- **Place of Study:** I obtained my study abroad placement directly through the WHZ International Office's nomination to their partner, Kwangwoon University.
- **Visa:** After receiving the admission documents from Kwangwoon, I applied for a D-2 Student Visa at the Korean Embassy in Berlin. The requirements were straightforward, though it required careful preparation of documents.
- **Flights & Insurance:** I booked my flights well in advance for a better price. For health insurance, I opted for a comprehensive international student plan that met the requirements of both DAAD and Korea.
- **Housing:** Kwangwoon University offered on-campus dormitory placement for international students. I applied immediately upon receiving the instructions and was fortunate to secure a spot. The convenience of living on campus cannot be overstated, especially in the initial weeks.
- **Language:** My Korean language skills were minimal upon arrival. I utilized online resources like Talk To Me In Korean (TTMIK) and mobile apps (Duolingo, Papago) to learn basic phrases. This pre-departure effort proved invaluable for daily life.
- **Administrative Procedures:** Upon arrival, the most important task was obtaining my Alien Registration Card (ARC). The Kwangwoon International Support Team organized a session to help students with the online application and even accompanied a group of us to the local immigration office, which was incredibly helpful.
- **Transport System:** Seoul's public transportation system is, simply put, phenomenal. It is punctual, clean, safe, and far more extensive and affordable than

any system I have used in Germany. The T-money card system is incredibly convenient.

## Practical Tips

The most useful information came from three sources:

1. The **Kwangwoon University International Office** – for all academic and administrative matters.
2. **Kakao and Naver groups and online communities** for international students in Seoul – for real-time advice on everything from the best restaurants to travel tips. Having a Korean number makes life much easier!
3. **Senior students** from WHZ who had previously participated in the exchange – their firsthand insights were priceless.

## Special Impressions and a Good Anecdote

The most life-changing aspect of this journey has been the overwhelming kindness of Korean people, despite my limited language skills. There were countless instances, but one particularly memorable anecdote stands out. There is a small restaurant called MARU – the chef was a sweetheart; helping me and my friend with ordering and the most patience I have ever seen. This level of selfless kindness is something I will carry with me forever. It taught me that communication goes far beyond shared vocabulary.

## 2. Summary and Evaluation of my Stay Abroad

### General Impressions, Study Conditions, and Contacts

The academic environment at Kwangwoon is intense and highly structured. The relationship with professors is more formal than in Germany, with a great emphasis on respect. The support from the International Office and my assigned academic advisor (Han Sunae) was exceptional; they were always available and proactive in ensuring our well-being.

My relationship with classmates was fantastic. While there was an initial shyness, both from my side and the Korean students', group projects and shared classes quickly broke the ice. I made friends from all over the world, as well as some local Korean friends who were eager to practice their English and show me their culture.

## Academic Content and Courses

I took courses in Business Statistics, Sociolinguistics, Speech and Debate, English Conversation 2, Advertisement and Society and Society and AI. So, the curriculum was challenging and directly relevant to my field of study at WHZ.

A significant difference from the German system is the evaluation method. At WHZ, grading is often more absolute; you achieve a certain percentage and get the corresponding grade. At Kwangwoon, relative evaluation (a strict curve) is common. This means your grade depends on your performance relative to your classmates, which creates a more competitive atmosphere. It took me quite some time to realize, that this was a real thing because it meant that some students would "always fail", which simply didn't seem fair in my head. Furthermore, attendance is mandatory and often constitutes a significant portion (up to 20%) of the final grade, unlike in many German universities where it is often optional. This ensures consistent engagement but also adds constant pressure.

My overall course experience was amazing, however that doesn't mean it wasn't difficult. I remember specifically in Sociolinguistics I had perfect attendance but then during my midterm exam I felt incredibly lost. It was just 6 sheets of true or false questions, but every statement felt like a trick question, even though I perfectly understood the actual, physical lectures, I couldn't make out the cores of the statements. It made me realize how different the Korean expression in English was and how that was something I had to learn too.

## Comparison: WHZ vs. Kwangwoon

| Aspect                           | WHZ (Germany)                                  | Kwangwoon (South Korea)  |
|----------------------------------|--|--|
| <b>Academic Pressure</b>         | Consistent, high self-initiative required.     | Intense, constant pressure due to relative grading and frequent assessments. |
| <b>Student-Professor Dynamic</b> | Informal, first-name basis often possible.     | Formal, respectful, hierarchical.  |
| <b>Attendance</b>                | Often optional, especially in larger lectures. | Mandatory and graded.  |
| <b>Evaluation</b>                | Primarily absolute grading.                    | Primarily relative grading (curve).  |
| <b>Campus Life</b>               | More independent, less centralized.            | Very integrated, "campus-centric" with many facilities and events.           |
| <b>Study Focus</b>               | Deep theoretical understanding, self-study.    | Applied knowledge, regular assignments, and group work.                      |

### Additional Activities

I participated in several workshops organized by the university, including a traditional Korean cooking class and a mentor 1-1 event. I also joined the dormitory's gym, which became a cornerstone of my new routine. Exploring Seoul's diverse districts, from the historic Bukchon Hanok Village to the trendy streets of Hongdae, was a constant and rewarding activity. One of my favourite events actually happened rather early, around late September and it was the fireworks at Han River! I have never seen such a spectacular, massive event of colour explosions. I am so glad my Korean friends took me there!

## Conclusion

### Personal Evaluation

My study abroad at Kwangwoon University was undoubtedly one of the most rewarding and transformative experiences of my life. It pushed me far beyond my academic comfort zone and fostered immense personal growth.

### Take-Away Values

- **Resilience and Adaptability:** Thriving in a completely foreign environment.
- **Intercultural Communication:** Learning to connect beyond language barriers.
- **Global Perspective:** Understanding a different approach to education, work, and life.
- **Self-Discipline and Initiative:** The adoption of a healthier, more structured lifestyle.

If I had to put it in one sentence it would be: **The best things in life require the most effort and endurance, and my planning, arrival and experience in Seoul was just that.**

### Recommendation and Final Thoughts

I would wholeheartedly recommend an exchange semester at Kwangwoon University, and in South Korea in general, to any student. It is challenging, yes, but the personal and academic returns are immeasurable.

If I were to do something differently, I would dedicate more time to learning Korean before departure. Even a basic conversational level would have deepened my interactions and integration even further.

This journey was not just about studying in a different country; it was about learning a different way of being. I am returning to Germany not only as a more knowledgeable student but as a more confident, independent, and globally aware individual. I am deeply grateful to the DAAD PROMOS program and my home and host universities for making this life-changing opportunity possible, even when I made mistakes from my side.

Thank you.