

An Interdisciplinary Collaboration and its Implications for Korean Language Instruction at Auburn University

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Introduction

Auburn University is situated in a unique, Korean language-intensive environment created by the growth of a Korean-based automotive industry across Alabama and West Georgia the last two decades. In order to meet this growing demand in bridging the two cultures, the Office of International Programs at Auburn University strategically partnered with Keimyung University in Korea to establish a Korea Center (KC) in 2012. Following year, King Sejong Institute (KSI) was established inside the KC to build a robust curricular and co-curricular focus on Korean language, culture and outreach. With these partnerships with a university and a government office in South Korea, Auburn’s KC-KSI has had the ability to offer Korean language courses at all proficiency levels, as well as cultural outreach to the community. The effort to grow instructional capacity in Korean across disciplines has received broad support across campus units. The Department of Foreign Languages and Literature (FLL) in the College of Liberal Arts has built a Korean arm of its Asian Studies Minor with the help of the instructors from KC-KSI teaching credit-bearing Korean language courses within FLL. This paper provides practical interdisciplinary collaboration effort created at Auburn University to provide a successful foreign language instruction and its implications and adaptations in other higher education institutions in the U.S.

King Sejong Institute inside Korea Center

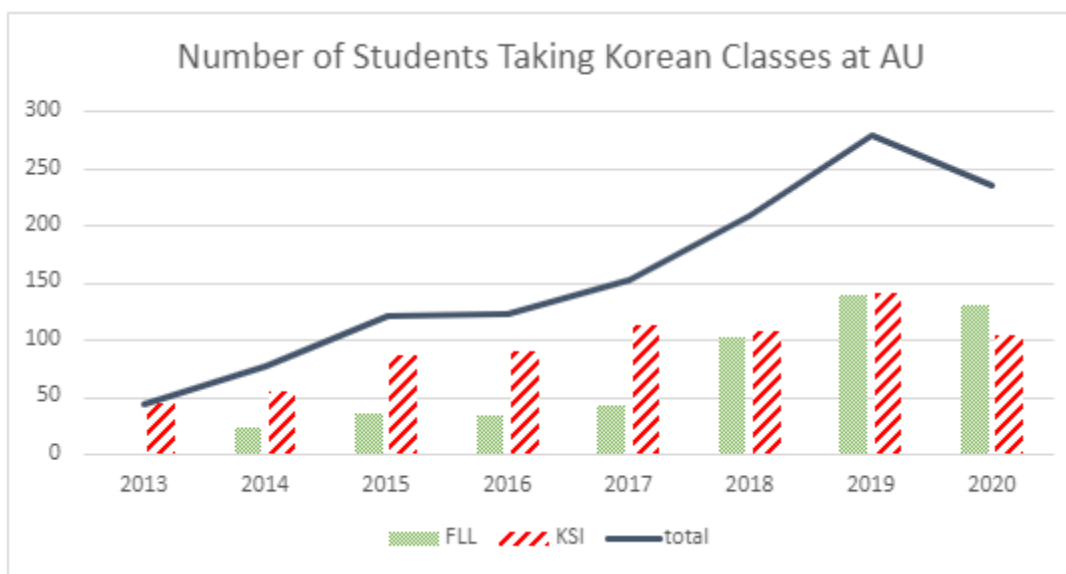
AU successfully established a King Sejong Institute (KSI) in 2013, as part of the Korea Center. Sponsored by the Korean government, AU’s KSI is one of the four institutes in the U.S. The KSI brings a proficiency-based learning rubric to the language offering at AU. While KSI provides non-credit instruction to students, staff and community members, the KSI instructors also provide many of the credit bearing courses within FLL. KSI instructors have started offering credit-bearing courses at AU since fall semester 2014. Since then, students at AU benefited from taking credit courses through KSI curriculum.

Korean as a Foreign Language Curriculum

Korean language classes have been offered at Auburn University since 2013 in both the KC-KSI and FLL. Though each entity has its unique structure, there is a great deal of cooperation and complementarity between the units. Thus, student enrollment in both KC-KSI and FLL since their establishment has increased gradually, as shown in the figure 1 below. While the total number of students enrolled in Korean language and culture courses at the university continued to rise from 2013 to 2019, there was a minor dip in enrollment numbers in 2020, due to the outbreak of the Covid-19. With the increase in demand and relevance for Korean language training, FLL hired a Visiting Assistant Professor to develop more upper-level Korean courses and added a Korean track to its already existing Asian Studies Minor. Currently, FLL offers FLKN 1010, 1020, 2010, 2020, 3010, and 3020. In addition, FLKN 3150 (Korean Proficiency through Popular Culture), FLKN 3450 (Topics in Korean Literature and Culture), FLKN 4010 (Oral Proficiency in Korean) and FLKN 4310 (Korean for Career Professionals) are under review with the AU Curriculum Committee. FLL and KSI have been working closely together to articulate the offerings of both credit and non-credit bearing courses. We know that KSI S1 & S2 correspond to FLKN 1010 & 1020, Beginning Korean 1 & 2; KSI S3 & S4 correspond to FLKN 2010 & 2020, Intermediate Korean 1 & 2; and, finally, KSI S5 & S6 correspond to FLKN 3010 & 3020, Advanced Conversation and Composition 1 & 2. The teaching staff in Korean, both in FLL and OIP, have the benefit of extensive training in FL pedagogy. All faculty members teaching Korean are practicing *learner-centered pedagogies*. Both KC-KSI and FLL Korean curriculum is based on proven pedagogical principles of proficiency-driven and task-based instruction among FL and Second Language Acquisition

(SLA) experts to offer practical and effective language instruction to students taking Korean class on campus.

Figure 1. Number of Students Taking Korean Language and Culture Courses at AU



Extra-Curricular Activities

The Korea Center partnership with Keimyung University and KSI have generated not only a thriving atmosphere for Korean language and creation of Asian Minors in FLL but also culture on AU campus. There are two student-generated clubs: Korean Language and Culture Club (KLC) and AU Korea X Dance (AUKXD), whose membership fluctuates between 60 and 80 students each semester. The diversity of this membership is quite large ranging from business majoring students to engineering students. More importantly, these Clubs expose members to all kinds of authentic language and culture that has proven successful in accelerating student language learning. Events such as film screenings and speech contests (which include expenses-paid travel to Korea from the Korean government and Keimyung University) have drawn large numbers of students. Above all, K-Pop has attracted the largest numbers of participants. Because of its place in popular culture, K-Pop has exploded as an activity across the U.S. and, thus, many students arrive at AU with experience in speaking and singing some Korean language. The Center has also generated a “Conversation Buddy” program that connects native speakers of Korean and English for tandem exchange of language and culture. Every semester, there are about 44 pairs. All these efforts on the part of students, with guidance from KSI, occur outside of formal language instruction.

Conclusion

Close collaboration between KC-KSI and FLL has created a synergic effect to offer Korean language and culture courses to students from both the university and the local community. Furthermore, the various cultural events hosted by the KC-KSI, such as Speech and essay contests, K-Pop Party and Korea Fest, part of Auburn Cityfest. The presence of a large Korean population in the region also provides students with a unique opportunity to engage with the language and culture outside of the classroom. Overall, the findings of this study clearly show that collaboration between KC-KSI and FLL has benefited both departments on campus in terms of enrollment numbers, as both have seen significant growth since the Korean language was first officially offered at AU in 2013.