

My Korean life: Many countries, many races

¿Have you ever seen the ads from the clothing brand Benetton? I remember some where people from different races were photographed together wearing this brand; and that image, the mix of different races and countries, came to my mind when I went to my orientation at SKKU on my first week in Korea.

The first surprise was to find out that I was one of 300 exchange students going to SKKU just for the spring semester. I never thought it would be that many. We all met on Orientation Day and we filled a very large auditorium. I just knew a couple of people I had met on my dorm during the previous days, so I went with them to the Orientation but lost them among the crowd and ended up sitting with some new people.

The good thing about going on exchange is that, usually, nobody knows anybody; and that makes it much easier to just walk into someone and introduce you. For introvert people, this might sound like a difficult situation, but I think it's an excellent opportunity to develop the skill of meeting new people (which is a very important ability in today's business world). Unfortunately, when you have 300 new people to meet, some uncomfortable situations can arise. I particularly remember a moment that afternoon where I saw a girl standing next to me, she saw me back, I smiled and said: "Hello, I am Christian". She kept smiling but with a serious voice said: "I know. We met this morning. You're the guy from Nicaragua". I was so embarrassed!

It was also very interesting to discover that about 99% of all the people I met (and I didn't meet all the 300 exchange students) had no idea where Nicaragua, my home country, was located. I became an expert on explaining how it is located on a small strip of land called Central America, south of Mexico and north of Colombia. However, afterwards, if I would run into any of them again, sometimes they would not remember my name, but remember I came from the "small country in middle America".

SKKU also has a Buddy Association, where Koreans students who want to improve their English or just meet foreign students become the designated buddy to us and help us with to make the settling process easier. My buddy was named Soyeon, she was a undergrad student from the Child Psychology and she was very nice to me during my whole stay. She was assigned with a group of about 20 people from about 15 different countries. She organized group activities so we would all get to know each other better, and also was very helpful if you called her. In one occasion, she even went with me to the clinic because I had a strong allergy.

Undoubtedly, the opportunity to share with so many people from various countries is one of the best things you will experience on an exchange program; and maybe because everyone knows it will only last for a short period, relationships grow really fast and in a very strong way. I was very lucky of getting to know good friends, with whom I hope to keep relationship after this experience is over.