

News Release

U of M Crookston Senior Sumin "Nicki" Gwak, Finds Campus Filled with Opportunities for International Students

By Itolfe on Wednesday, April 8, 2015 *Written by Nicki Gwak (in top photo at right), a senior from South Korea majoring in communication*
One of my aunts is a Canadian, another aunt and one of my uncles is from the United States

and one of my grandmothers lives in Japan. With this diverse background in family, I had been dreaming of going abroad and being fascinated by exotic things.

Fortunately, I had a really good chance in one program in South Korea that transfers students from universities in South Korea to universities in the United States. I believed that I was grown up enough to live by myself, and I did not want to miss this chance. Finally, I applied for the program and I got in. For preparation, I studied English and took some general classes to help myself adapt to the new environment.

I remember the first day when I arrived at the University of Minnesota Crookston. The very first feeling I had was, "It is so cold." And when I got to my room, nobody was there, but I knew that someone would be living with me, my roommate. A couple of days later, my roommate arrived. It was so awkward, and I was too shy to talk to her. Worse, I did not know what to say because I was pretty sure she was not going to talk to me. We looked different, and we did not speak same language. However, unlike all my assumptions full of worries, my roommate Christiana Boadu broke all these walls between me and her and filled me with confidence. She did not actually tell me what to do, but I naturally learned a lot hanging out with her and her friends. And I was so surprised when I found myself not feeling like I was a stranger anymore.

The most interesting part that I enjoy at UMC is the student organizations. With a high recommendation from my roommate and Community Advisor, I started to get involved in the student community through student clubs. Among many of them, Multicultural International Club (MIC) opened my mind and sight to learn how to get along with students from many different countries. Through the club, I had a great time talking with them and exchanging our own cultures with each other, and there were a lot of fun events as well! Starting with MIC, there were many opportunities for me to be involved in many groups, and wherever I went, everyone welcomed me, which was so sweet and a great comfort to an international student.



Like this, I got a lot of help from others including student communities, my friends, advisors, and teachers. Appreciating all the help, I was also dreaming of making myself useful to others and being someone who could help international students, like me, enjoy the campus life in United States. During the second semester, some Korean students and I founded the Korean Students Association (KSA) to help existing Korean students on campus and the future students. It was hard to be responsible for leadership but also fun to organize programs and help them practically. It is too great to describe verbally how great and satisfying it was to help others.

However, KSA did a great job and I was looking for more ways to be helpful to others in the community where I belonged. It was MIC. As an active member, I enjoyed a lot of fun things such as the International Dinner Series, several trips to Fargo and Grand Forks, and serving in the community. Especially in community service, such as working at the food banks, the Gala for Girls, the Humane Society, along with opportunities to engage in conversations through Soup and Substance, people were so nice and volunteering was not hard at all, rather I had fun a lot! And one day, one of the members asked me to run for an election to serve on a board. And luckily, I grabbed the opportunity to become a president of MIC. It was different being one of official members of the board compared to just being an active member within the club. I needed to be more confident, more decisive, more responsible, and more open to others. There were some moments full of stress, but I chose it because I wanted to help others. There was no reason

to be burdened. Instead, I enjoyed it, why not?

At the same time, I got an opportunity to be a Community Adviser (CA) in Residential Life. Being a CA sounded really difficult, and it required me to do many things as well. The most difficult thing is improving my English again, enduring pressure to be a student role model, and balancing my work and study. However, all the work improved me and made me more mature and confident. And I was involved in another community which was amazing. People liked to learn about my culture and they also liked to teach me about their cultures.



Likewise, I met many opportunities while at UMC being an international student. At the same time, I believed that I also gave opportunity to other international students to have a memorable time at UMC and for others to learn about differences we have and to understand those. For example, this year, I presented at the Korean Dinner coordinated by Rae French. It was another great chance to make my last semester memorable and to let my friends, the Crookston community, and all the people from UMC know about my home country, South Korea. I was surprised that so many people came to the dinner and people seemed interested in what I was talking about. I can say it was a great finale for my last semester.

During all my semesters at UMC, I have been both internationally and domestically involved in this small school. And I am going to graduate this May. Through all the opportunities UMC gave me, I feel such achievement. But at the same time I feel so sad to leave the school and the special people including my friends and all faculty I worked with that I will not forget forever in my life. I really appreciate all the experiences that I have had and that I might not be able to have as I get older.

And I also learned a lesson while I was a student here. If I get something from a community, I need to give something back to the community. Being a help to others is a great way to improve the community where one belongs and to improve oneself as well. And being an international

student does not mean that one always needs help from others.

Grab the opportunities that lie in front of you. There are more chances than people actually thought. And through the opportunities, it will be amazing once you find yourself being around with great people and being a great person to others. Lastly, I would like to emphasize that University of Minnesota, Crookston has opened all sorts of possibilities and potential for me, and so it can for you.

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