

Korean Language At Dartmouth

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With South Korea growing in strength economically and North Korea proclaiming itself a threat militarily, Korea has become an important area of study. As a reflection of these trends, several universities across the U.S. have been starting, reintroducing, and expanding their Korean Studies programs. Dartmouth's seeming ignorance of the area is a truly scary fact.

Though students at Dartmouth have expressed interest in courses in Korean culture and language, little has been accomplished. In 1989, several students, with the help of Professor John Rassias from the French Department, organized the Korean Studies Task Force (KSTF). In its five years, the Task Force has presented several proposals for Dartmouth to offer classes on Korean Studies at Dartmouth. The deans have turned down all of these suggestions. In the departmental courses listed for Asian Studies, not a single course refers to Korea specifically, limiting the student's East Asian world to China and Japan. Eventually, KSTF hopes to incorporate a Korean Studies program into the Asian Studies department as a sub-field of specialization. The Task Force argues that Korean language, culture, and literature are an integral part of Asian Studies and have several arguments for why Korean Studies should exist at Dartmouth:

Firstly, Korea has become a significant world power with a booming economy and represents a serious challenge to Japan in international business and in political influence in Asia. A Korean Studies program might more practically prepare Dartmouth students for their future. If Dartmouth wishes to attract minority students, a program in Korean language and culture would provide incentive for recruitment. Expanding the curriculum would show incoming students that Dartmouth is serious about maintaining high standards of learning by offering courses in every important area. Finally, a program in Korean language and culture would transmit a clear message throughout the academic world that Dartmouth is committed to internationalism.

Currently, Dartmouth is the only Ivy League institution offering no course devoted to Korean history or language. At Brown, the Korean language program, started in 1987, offers two year-long courses. In 1991, to make up for lack of a Korean culture course, Brown invited a visiting scholar to teach Korean history courses. Barnard and Columbia offer two non-language courses, "The History of Korea to 1368" and "The History of Modern Korea." At the University of Pennsylvania, students can take Elementary, Intermediate, Advanced, and/or Business Korean as well as two non-language courses dealing with Korean political history. At Cornell, the Korean Studies program, started in the late 1980's, offers two non-language courses plus two courses on Korean language. At Yale, an Elementary Korean language course was reintroduced into the cur-

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I'm Sorry that I
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Would you have time
this Thursday afternoon 4pm
for a meeting with
the KSTF members?

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nculum in 1991. Due to high enrollment, Yale began offering a second year course, Intermediate Korean, in 1992. Similarly, in 1992 Princeton reintroduced their Korean language program consisting of Elementary and Intermediate Korean, two year-long language courses.

In September of 1993, Son Chu-Whan, the president of the Korean Foundation, a government organization that funds Korean studies outside Korea, presented Harvard president Neil L. Rudenstine with a check for a third of the \$3.5 million Harvard will receive over the next three years. "This is a wonderful day for Korean studies - not only at Harvard, but in American generally," said Rudenstine. "Other institutions will see what has been accomplished here, and we hope they will follow." Carter Eckert, professor of Korean history and director of the Korean Institute at Harvard said, "There's a desperate need for more scholars in Korean studies." Because there have been no scholars qualified to speak about important aspects of Korean civilization, Eckert describes Korea as the "missing link" in many seminars held in East Asian Language and Civilization Departments. "Because of its geographical location, Korea has one of the most complex and rich histories imaginable. I also think that Korea, like Japan and China, is going to become increasingly important during the 21st century. It's a blank spot that needs to be filled in for all of us."²

The grant given by the Korea Foundation is the largest amount ever given by the Korean government to a foreign university. This effort to expand Korean studies reflects the rapid growth of the country's economy over the last few decades. The fact that Korea can endow a chair for \$3.5 million during a period of worldwide retrenchment not only shows its economic success, but also demonstrates that Koreans recognize the importance of promoting Korean studies internationally.

This recent interest in Korea is hardly restricted to the Ivy League. At Berkeley, Ohio State, University of Chicago, UVA, University of Michigan, Tufts, Bowdoin, Northwestern, and Wesleyan, students can take courses devoted entirely to Korean culture. At the University of Chicago, Ohio State, Brigham Young, and Eastern Washington University students can major in Korean Studies.

However, at Dartmouth, the only course offering Korean history is History 74, "Imperialism in Modern East Asia", with 30-40% of its class time devoted to Korea.

Students at Dartmouth have expressed interest in studying Korean language specifically. Because it remains unavailable in Dartmouth's curriculum, however, few do. Students may attend a student-instructed language workshop once a week. The workshop, student-initiated and completely student run, was started by several members of KASA (the Korean American Students Association) in 1989. In the fall of 1992, Henry Kim '93 offered two levels of courses, beginners and advanced. In the fall of 1993, 30 students expressed interest but due to time and scheduling conflicts, only 10 were able to take the course. Students pay

twenty dollars per term. Those who cannot afford the fee may take the course for free, KASA's budget permitting. Students may fulfill their language requirement by taking a Korean language test, also at a cost. Though the program remains relatively inexpensive, Sangwoo Lee '95, an instructor last year says that "once a week is not enough."

In the past, Dartmouth students wishing to learn Korean language more intensively have attended the summer program at Yongsei University in Seoul. Students must apply independently to the school, and though Dartmouth plays no role in the program, the faculty has granted credit for approved courses. Because no professor at Dartmouth has adequate knowledge of Korea or Korean language, a professor from UC San Diego has evaluated and suggested credit approvals. Pamela Crossley, chairperson of the Asian Studies Department, expects this will become institutionalized. Teresa Lee '95, who spent a term at Yongsei, recognizes that she had few options in her pursuit to learn Korean language. "Because Dartmouth has no program, I was forced to go elsewhere," she says.

Korean Studies remains nonexistent at Dartmouth due to the prioritization of other programs before Korean. The Asian Studies Department has discussed the possibility of Korean culture and language courses many times, Crossley says, and indeed, faculty members would like to see Korean Studies courses added to Dartmouth's catalogue. Susan Blader, professor of Chinese language, expresses enthusiastic support for the prospective expansion: "We'd love to add Korean." Because no existing faculty member has Korea as their specialty, however, adding even a Korean Studies culture course would involve either the introduction of a new professor or the temporary loss of an existing professor while he or she researched the area. Before expanding into a new area, the department feels it must first stabilize its existing programs, and at this time, the Hebrew and Arabic programs take precedence. "When the college makes a commitment to a new field, it likes to make sure the supporting courses to go along with the language are there," says Crossley. The department has a small staff, Blader says, and cannot "spread too thin." The Asian Studies Department plans to offer a comprehensive Hebrew and Arabic program before it introduces Korean Studies into the curriculum.

Currently, about ten percent of students at Dartmouth are Asian-American. Koreans and Korean-Americans compose about a third of them, with those proportions growing.³ Certainly Dartmouth should not offer a Korean Studies Program expressly for its Korean population. However, if Dartmouth is any indication of national trends, this high percentage does suggest the prominent role Koreans and Korean-Americans will play in the near future. In light of Korea's growing international relevance, and the expansion of Korean Studies programs at universities across the nation, perhaps Dartmouth's should begin.

1 The Boston Globe, Oct. 1, 1993.

2 Harvard Gazette, Oct. 1, 1993.

3 Dartmouth Alumni Magazine, Nov. 1993.