

## REPORT AL RIENTRO DELL'ESPERIENZA DI SCAMBIO - A.A. 2015-2016

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In this report I'm going to describe my exchange experience at KAIST, Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology, starting from the courses choice and university system to campus life, furthermore, I'm also going to write about Daejeon and Korea in general.

During my semester abroad I attended at three courses, two of them were from the Department of Industrial Design, while the third one was from the Graduate School of Culture Technology. The design courses choice is quite limited, due to the fact that the Design department is quite small in KAIST but also because differently from our home university, exchange students are not allowed to take undergraduate courses if they are graduated and vice versa. Nevertheless, students are allowed to, and actually they have to, take courses from other departments, with no limitation about topics: this is why in any course you can find students from different majors, which is quite stimulating. This is true also for exchange students, as the only constraint is that we have to choose at least half of the courses from our department.

Another thing it is useful to know to understand KAIST system is that there is only one design major, and students differentiate their topics depending on the laboratory they are working in. They actually spend most of their time in their laboratory working maybe more on research projects than on courses, which is also a reason why even project courses are generally demanding not too much time compared to the ones in our home university.

I also had the chance to work on an individual project in one of these laboratories, as I'm going to explain hereafter.

The courses I chose are Design Project 1 and User Centered Design Methodology, from the Industrial Design department, and Human Computer Interaction from the Graduate School of Culture Technology.

Design Project 1 was related to the development of vernacular everyday products using different methods, the outcome was including 3D printed and smart objects. This course was mainly focused on the research and concept phase than on the technical development. Anyway we finally had to develop a working prototype: students in KAIST are more focused on developing prototyping skills, for example using Arduino, while they are much less focused on other topics, such as manufacturing, which is one of the reason why I would suggest an exchange KAIST to students interested in interaction design, rather than other areas.

The project I developed with my group has been selected for the design week in Dubai, October 2016.

User Centered Design Methodology was about user research methods, we had to work on four projects using different methods which outcome had to be insights or design guidelines about our user or design project. This course was strongly theoretical and included article and paper presentation and discussion, so I found it quite different from what we are used to in our home university. This course is also a good suggestion to who is interested in topics as UX and interaction design.

The third course I took is Human Computer Interaction. As I mentioned this course was not from the design department, but as the professor had a design background it was still focused on design more than on technical aspects. The theme of the course was the one to develop a project related to Korean culture, so it has been particularly interesting to learn about it. This was also the only course I took including a midterm exam. Even if the final outcome had to be the development of an application (phone/VR) the theoretical side was still strong, so writing assignment were an important part of the work.

As I mentioned above, I had the chance to develop an individual project in a laboratory. My advisor could provide me a sit in his lab and let me work on a personal project offering support for programming and learning Arduino and Processing tools. This semester I was the only exchange student in the department, so I'm not sure about how often this would be possible, therefore I would suggest to the next exchange students to contact their advisor if they have this intention. With three courses and a lab project I could have a rich and satisfying experience at KAIST and also enjoy my exchange period in Korea.

KAIST is one of the best universities in Asia and in the world and it has a really good reputation in the country, its students are considered extremely smart and it is known as a stressful and demanding environment, but I would say that the situation is quite different for exchange students.

In KAIST I could find a really welcoming environment, where exchange and international students are guided to accomplish any needed procedure from the beginning to the end of the semester. I suggest to future exchange students to take part to the buddy program, as it will give them the chance to get in touch with Korean and other international students, participating to many different events. International students associations are also very active in KAIST, organizing various events and trips for convenient prices. Several kind of Korean courses are offered, by KAIST and also by external institutions and volunteers, so there are many possibilities to learn some of the language, which is quite useful to travel around.

The campus provides many facilities, including several convenience stores and gyms in the dormitories, a clinic, an international kitchen and a swimming pool. Prices in the campus stores are cheaper than in those outside, meals in the campus are quite cheap as well.

The cost of life is generally lower in Korea compared to Italy, especially considering Daejeon, where the campus is located, which is also cheaper than other cities like Seoul. Daejeon is for sure a smaller city, but there are many universities and it also has the advantage of being in the middle of the country, thus it is quite comfortable to travel.

Korea is extremely safe to live and travel around, and Korean people are kind and helpful, even if english is not spoken and understood by everybody, which is probably one reason why it was quite easy for me to adapt to life in Korea. I can't say I had any kind of cultural shock as I might expect to: it has been a chance to get to know asian culture but in the meanwhile I found Korea to be not so far from the western one.

In conclusion, my exchange period semester in KAIST has been really satisfying on the study point of view, and even more on the personal side. As I already stated I would definitely suggest an exchange semester in KAIST, especially to whom is concerned in interaction design and prototyping and of course in getting in touch with asian culture.