

Final Internship Report

Hannah Seulgee Jung '15
Dickey Intern, Winter 2014
People for Successful Corean Reunification (PSCORE)
Seoul, Republic of Korea

At a glance

My internship at PSCORE, a North Korean human rights NGO based in Seoul, largely involved managing the Education Program and interpreting for Founder and Director Young-il Kim, a North Korean defector. As a Creative Writing major with a Sociology minor, I had the unique opportunity to engage in bilingual work at a small yet international organization. I taught English to defectors one-on-one at Wednesday English Classes, and served as the director's Korean/English interpreter for presentations at international schools in South Korea—Dulwich College Seoul and North London Collegiate School Jeju. In special consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council, PSCORE attended the 25th Session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva. For the Commission of Inquiry on human rights in the DPRK, I translated and drafted the director's oral statement in English. I served as the director's interpreter for TV and radio BBC interviews, the GlobalNet21 webinar, the parallel event with Human Rights Watch, and the film screening of *The Apostle*. I also traveled to the UK with my team to give translated presentations at Oxford University and Radley College.

Overview of the Internship

My internship experience at the office in Seoul mainly involved running the Education Program, which offers free one-on-one tutoring for North Korean defector students in the Seoul area by pairing them with volunteer tutors. Because much English has been absorbed into the (South) Korean language over nearly seventy years of separation, North Korean defectors find this linguistic difference a major challenge in their transition. To help with defectors' practical needs, the Education Program is designed to provide not only academic support but also emotional support through mentorship. Outside the office, I translated for the director at meetings with other organization heads and at international school presentations, on his life story in relation to human rights, reunification, and the international community.

My work in preparation for the Geneva trip included translating and drafting the COI oral statement, the GlobalNet21 webinar speech, and BBC interview, in addition to facilitating the director's English speech training. At the UNHRC, I served as the director's translator, Korean to English, for the BBC interviews, and translated the Q&A panel for our film screening event of *The Apostle*. I also translated for the director during the live GlobalNet21 webinar Q&A session entitled "Human Rights, Civil Society & North Korea." My internship concluded with our final trip to the UK, where I gave translated presentations and answered audience questions at Oxford University and Radley College with the director.

Projects + Types of Work

For the Education Program, I reviewed applications and CVs from volunteer tutor candidates, scheduled and conducted interviews, and for those deemed qualified, gave orientations with a deeper introduction to the organization as a whole and the Program in

particular. During my meetings with volunteer tutor candidates I emphasized the challenges of adapting to South Korean society for North Korean defectors, such as academic struggles, emotional instability, culture shock including linguistic difference based in English to provide background information. For defector students, I reviewed their applications and held orientation sessions, highlighting the importance of respect and trust in a learning relationship with a volunteer tutor. I managed the data of all volunteer tutors and defector students in a secure Excel file and a protected online platform. After the orientations, I would re-enter the volunteer tutors' and defector students' information on separate wait list sheets in the Excel. Once on the wait list, I used the filtering function to match a student with a tutor with respect to the subject, location, schedule, and preference specified. Upon finding a potential match, I gave calls to both the student and tutor to ensure both parties were available and interested in working with each other. I also checked in with the student-tutor teams via telephone within a week after the match to see compatibility and progress. In addition to processing tutor and student applications, I managed the Education Program email account and helped redevelop the Program. This project included creating the Volunteer Tutor Guide for English-speaking tutors, implementing more time-efficient methods for student-tutor match making, and writing the Education Program intern manual to ensure successful handover of the role. In mid-February when I needed to focus more solidly on the Geneva trip preparations, I co-interviewed and trained a newcomer intern to take over the role. Though mostly I worked independently, I met with and received valuable guidance from older colleagues who became my mentors.

Outside the Education Program, my work involved simultaneous oral translation for the director during all-staff meetings, business meetings with other organization heads, and presentations and workshops at international schools on human rights and reunification. Before

the Geneva trip, I translated the COI Report into a concise summary from English to Korean for the director's review. I also translated his oral statement draft from Korean to English and co-edited for the final version. For the GlobalNet21 webinar—the new concept of a web seminar—I translated and edited the director's presentation draft on the topic of North Korean human rights and civil society into English, and facilitated his speech training with the focus on enunciation. Until my final week, I volunteered my Wednesday evenings to teach English to defector students one-on-one at Wednesday English Classes.

From March 13 to 20 my NGO team and I were in Geneva, where I served as the director's translator for the BBC World Service radio interview with Dan Damon and BBC World News TV interview with Geneva correspondent Imogen Foulkes.¹ It was a very hands-on experience, assisting in video editing with the translation from Korean to English and helping transcription for the voice-over. Also, following the film screening of *The Apostle* on the persecution of Christians in North Korea, there was a Q&A session with the director and a female defector representing Justice for North Korea as panelists, whom I introduced and interpreted for. In addition, I interpreted for the director during the live Q&A session of the webinar. These questions were more politically informed, as the audience constituted highly interested individuals in the UK. On March 20, the director and I gave a translated presentation at Oxford University Oriental Institute to undergraduate and graduate students. On March 21, I gave my final translated presentation at Radley College for the entire school community, and facilitated the director's discussions with Politics and History sixth form students.²

¹ The BBC World News TV interview can be found at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-26607333>. Aired March 17, 2014. The BBC World Series Radio interview can be found at http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/podcasts/worldservice/worldupmc/worldupmc_20140322-0800a.mp3 from 5:20 to 8:34. Aired March 22, 2014.

² Radley College news article about the presentation can be found at <http://www.radley.org.uk/NewsArticle.aspx?id=503>.

Expectations vs. Experience

My expectations greatly differed from my experience. On the broader level, I was deeply disappointed to find that the majority of South Koreans are unaware and apathetic to the issues of North Korean human rights and of reunification. Before my replacement intern came, I was the only South Korean intern in the office, and whenever we had petition campaigns at train stations the interest level was visibly low. On a more work-specific level, I was not expecting to be managing the Education Program, as my initial preference was in grant writing and editing.

The final week I was in office, the director called an all-staff crisis meeting in which I interpreted. My colleagues and I were in great shock as we learned that the organization is at a financial collapse after funding cuts since last April. This was a symbolic moment in which my careful observations became, despite my desire to believe otherwise, substantiated—the inefficient communication, incompetent leadership, and unprofessional operation that led to such financial predicament.

Work Environment + Work Life Balance

- The work environment at the office was a hybrid of Korean hierarchy and Western approaches.
- Because international English-speaking interns outnumbered Korean bilinguals, there were major communication issues on the part of the regular staff, at times failing to be transparent and direct.
- Though I commuted a total of four hours to and from the office, I lived at home. Having my family there for support helped me to cope, especially through conversations.
- Midway into my internship, I got to connect with Greg Pence D'06 who has been actively involved in the North Korean human rights issue, and am grateful for his encouragement and words of wisdom.

Personal Growth, Skills Learned + Cultural Differences Encountered

Despite the currently negative prospects of the organization, my internship was nevertheless an enriching experience. I learned to translate at a professional level not only

language but also culture as the bridge of communication for others. Teaching English to defectors was uniquely empowering, as I got to engage with students one-on-one where they are. Spending time with the director was also instructive, as I listened to his first-hand account of the horrors committed by the North Korean government yet his unwavering love for his home country. Our conversations taught me empathy at a new level, and I believe that there must be social healing among the people for the successful reunification of the Korean peninsula. Though I encountered challenges based in the organization's leadership, which is dichotomized between the Director and his Secretary General, attending the HRC was an immense honor, as I got to see the inner workings of the UN. The international interactions I got to have with the people I met there and with my colleagues were fruitful and humbling, as some of them have become my mentors and friends.

Lasting Impact

My internship spilled into my academics this term, as I am taking a history course cross-listed with government entitled "International History of Human Rights." Though my experience at PSCORE leaves me with question marks, I still plan on pursuing law school to study international law and/or human rights advocacy.