Interview with Mr. Sangwon Lee
written by Cheyenne Roy

After the Green and White Gathering, I spoke with one of VIPP’s long-term participants: Mr. Sangwon Lee. Mr. Lee attended a portion of the Green and White Workshop as well as the Homecoming Tailgate and football game. I asked him about his experiences at VIPP, including his participation at the Green and White Gathering, and what his plans are after he returns to his home country.

In South Korea, Mr. Lee works for the Korea Expressway Corporation (KEC), which is a government investing company. KEC is the only company that builds highways in Korea, and it also maintains the roads and operates the tolls. KEC builds new highways with their contractors, and have many supervisors and engineering specialists. The corporation’s main responsibility is to keep the roads in good condition, especially during the strong winter.

How long have you been with VIPP and what program do you participate in? What do you think you gained from your studies at VIPP and MSU?

I have been with VIPP for almost one year. I came on January 4th 2012, and I’m leaving December 18th. I am a participant in the Global Professional Education Program (GPEP). For me, the most important thing I learned about was American culture. VIPP provides classes about American culture and language, and they helped me very much in my understanding of American culture. It’s very important to learn about American culture and customs and learn what Americans think about culture and politics. The most exciting part about this program is that I’m on campus again and back in school again after 20 years.

What has been the most useful course for you at VIPP?

I think the majority of them are very useful for me. I’m very interested in every aspect of the courses VIPP offers. I can’t choose just one, though English courses have helped me a lot. There is a second most important benefit from VIPP and MSU: my son enjoys American life very much and that is one of the benefits this program gave me, because he was able to learn English.

What was your opinion of the Green & White Workshop?

I attended Dr. Hart’s presentation, but I had class so I ended up missing some. It was interesting to learn that VIPP classes started 20 years ago, and that VIPP has such a long history. I think VIPP has changed a lot and will continue to develop. Like Dr. Hart said in the lecture, they employ a lot more people for staff and they are preparing for other programs. In the past, most participants were Chinese, but VIPP is diversifying, which makes the program more interesting and exciting. I’m interested to see what happens in the future.

How did you like the VIPP Tailgate and the Football game?

I am a big fan of football, and I really like the spirit of the game. I played football when I was in college in Korea. In Korea, there are some amateur teams or club teams. I know that football is a very difficult game to play and it needs a lot of sacrifice. I attended the Iowa State game and also the Ohio State game, which I took my son to. I enjoy watching the game itself, win or lose. I even attended some high school football games.
in Dewitt, Okemos, East Lansing, and Everett. My home team is Okemos, but I like to watch other teams as well.

What experience have you brought with you to VIPP?

My company chose this course as a training tool, so I volunteered to attend this course for career development. I wish I could attend the academic courses, but I found that I am not ready to participate in full academic classes because my English skills are not strong enough. I’m satisfied with the courses VIPP suggested. My English has improved very much. The basic English course was very helpful for me. I started learning English in middle school, but after college I didn’t study English that much – I studied much less intensely. After I arrived here, I thought, “What was I doing?” and I need to study more English intensely.

What experiences in VIPP will you take with you?

When I get back to Korea, I’m going to study harder, because I want to learn more about English. Then I can understand more about the American economic, political, and social systems, as well as culture. It helps to learn English in America because I can simultaneously learn about culture and enhance my English skills. They really complement each other.

America is so big, and now I know how big and diverse it really is. Diversity is a new experience for me; in Korea, we are not used to so much diversity. Most things in Korea are small, like our governments and schools, and it was amazing to see how Americans deal with so many different cultures.

It was a culture shock to me and other participants, too. Diversity is a very important thing. In Korea, our society is getting more developed and capitalized, and we will be learning to deal with diversity. I feel like I understand it better.

What has been your favorite event with VIPP?

I enjoyed all of the events that VIPP held over the past year, but I have to say that my favorite event was the Green and White Gathering and the Homecoming tailgate and game. It was the most exciting for me and the most fun.

What was your favorite part of the Green & White Gathering?

The atmospheres of the Tailgate and football game were both very interesting to me. Everyone came together to have fun – including alumni – and to enjoy the Homecoming weekend. Maybe if I’m lucky, I can attend a Green and White Gathering in the future as an alumnus. It’ll be different to be in the Alumni Association in Korea than being in VIPP here.

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