

## Salanghae

“Salanghae!” I yelled to Eun Young as I waved goodbye. She needed a ride to the airport, and my floormates happily volunteered to drive a three-hour round trip at eight in the morning during finals week for her. That afternoon she would fly to New York to meet her family, then she would travel the country for the next few weeks before returning to South Korea.

There were at least a dozen international students that brought tears to my eyes as I saw them leave. There was Aoi who taught me the basics of Japanese and the beauty of her culture, Eduardo whose insight and outlook on life was truly awe-inspiring, and Hidayat who will travel the world against all odds and expand his vast language portfolio. And those were just a few of the most impactful students I met. International students provide a diverse perspective on life, a unique set of cultural values and experiences, and speak incredible languages.

The catalyst for meeting all of my life-changing friends was an organization called GIVE—Getting Involved in Volunteering in Emporia. In my first semester as a Community Hornet, I was assigned to help lead it with no prior knowledge of the true power of the organization. It is mostly comprised of international students working on their volunteer hours for their programs; however, volunteering together becomes more than scribbling down a few hours in a community service log: It becomes the highlight of their week and some of their fondest memories.

I can imagine no better way of connecting with students than GIVE. There is no typical meeting as we are always working on a different community project or spending time serving in a different area of the community. GIVE also provides a chance to learn more about each other’s cultures and languages. GIVE unites students from across the world by one common value: compassion. This value exists everywhere in the world, and in the selfless volunteer projects, we find common ground with each other beyond attending the same university.

The students I met in GIVE changed my vocation and the course of my life. I have always been fond of different languages. Learning language—whether foreign or native—has truly been one of my biggest passions since my childhood, but when deciding on my future, I denied myself the opportunity to learn new languages out of a fear of failure. Seeing so many international students thrive in not only their native languages but also English and many other languages simultaneously inspired me to refocus on what I want my career to be. I added Political Science to my English major, decided to study abroad within the next few semesters, achieve a Spanish minor, and eventually serve as a United States Foreign Ambassador. I would serve my country by representing the President and America and its values in foreign nations.

Through understanding and building relationships with international students, my life drastically changed, and I no longer felt restrained by my false presumptions of language being “too challenging” or “time-consuming.” Big dreams require hard work, and these students were right in front of me, pursuing their dreams and becoming educated in a foreign country. Their diligence in making their dreams tangible rekindled my desire to learn language.

At the final meeting of GIVE for the semester, nearly twenty of us stood in a circle, sharing our favorite GIVE memories. We tossed a ball of yarn around to “call on” the next person to share. One student—Aoi—had been studying in Emporia for the past four years and had attended GIVE since her first semester. She choked up and was at a loss of words for all

of the profound and unforgettable moments she experienced in GIVE. It wasn't much later that everyone in the circle had tears streaming down their faces as they shared their own remarkable memories. Even students who had only been a part of GIVE for a semester such as myself couldn't help but tear up.

After everyone had shared, a beautiful and intricate web was weaved between each of the "Givers" from the yarn we held and tossed to each other. It was a reminder that no matter how far apart we are or where we are in the world, we will always be connected.

My experience in GIVE changed my life and my vocation. Building relationships with our Givers has Given me life-long friendships and connections from all across the globe. As only a freshman in college, my worldview drastically expanded, and I have Community Hornets, Emporia State, GIVE, and all of the amazing international students to thank for that. So, to every international student that changed my life last semester: Salanghae—I love you.