

Making connections from around the world

an Introduction to SNU Buddy

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As for my personal highlight in my two semesters in SNU Buddy, the weekly pub was by far my favorite event. Not only has it taken place around the corner from my house, but it has also always been a weekly event to look forward to. You play drinking games, see your friends, and always have the possibility of meeting new people since there are so many members in the organization. The nights have often ended with karaoke or getting some food, so it is always a good time. Other highlights for me have been the temple stay and definitely the MT. For the temple stay, we stayed overnight at Guinsa temple, experienced what it is like to live there as a monk, and learned a lot about Buddhism and Buddhist rituals and customs. As for the MT, it was very fun as it marked the end of the semester, with all buddy groups coming together to play different games, drink and eat Korean barbecue.

In August 2022, I flew to Seoul for my exchange year at Seoul National University (SNU). I was full of excitement and nervousness—I was moving across the globe to a country I had never been to, where I did not know the language or anyone there. Yet, these nerves quickly subsided when I arrived and made connections with amazing people who made Seoul feel like home almost immediately. Part of the reason for that was SNU Buddy—the organization on campus that pairs exchange students with Korean students at SNU and hosts different events throughout the semester for exchange students to get to know SNU and by extension, South Korea.

From visiting landmarks, such as Namsan Tower and Gyeongbokgung, to eating group dinners at Gwangjang market and Korean barbecue spots, to taking trips such as temple stays and Membership

Training events (MTs), the SNU Buddy programme truly gives you the full experience of exploring Korea. As a buddy (a fulltime student at SNU that helps out exchange students), you can meet people from all around the world. It has been a major part of my year at SNU, so I thought—for those who may not know about it—to introduce it by interviewing two buddies, Donghyeok and Jihee.

The organization works as follows—when exchange students sign up, they can peruse the uploaded buddy profiles on the sign up system and pick a personal buddy on a first-come-first-served basis. Each Korean buddy is assigned a handful of exchange students and they proceed to form a small buddy group. Then, several of these small personal buddy groups are put together into bigger groups that are assigned a specific arbitrary number—last semester, I was in

group 1, and this semester I am in group 8. These groups do various activities together, and for certain occasions, all groups do activities together, including the weekly pub, the MT, the Olympics, the Amazing Race, and more. So, there are several layers to the SNU Buddy organization, and aside from being buddies, the Korean buddies also work in one of the four teams which organize the different events.



The winners of SNU Superstar

Now onto the interview: I am interviewing Donghyeok and Jihee, two Korean buddies partaking in SNU Buddy. Donghyeok is a group 8 buddy; he is a classical composition major in the College of Music and is in his 5th semester at SNU. Jihee is the team leader of group 8 – she is in her 3rd semester at SNU and majors in computer science and engineering.



SNU

Q: What is SNU Buddy?

Donghyeok: SNU Buddy is a volunteer non-profit organization. We help foreign exchange students adjust to life at SNU and life in Korea through different events and activities.

Jihee: SNU Buddy is a student body affiliated with the Office of International Affairs (OIA) of Seoul National University. It started in 2005 as an organization called "Foreign Student Helper" under the Foreign Cooperation Headquarters, but in 2009, it was converted to the current student autonomy system "SNU buddy" and is operated by student management.

Q: How long have you been a member, and why did you join SNU?

Donghyeok: I joined SNU Buddy in the first semester of last year (2022). So, this semester is now my third semester with SNU Buddy. I joined SNU Buddy because I had a friend who was in SNU Buddy before me, and he told me to join because it would be really fun. So I wrote my application, sent it to SNU Buddy during the recruiting period, had an interview and then officially joined! I also wanted to improve my English skills and thought it would be fun to meet foreign exchange students. Now my English has improved very much, and I have many exchange student friends!

Jihee: SNU buddy recruits its members every semester and this is my first semester joining SNU buddy! As to why I joined SNU buddy, it's a personal story — but last semester I was in the taekwondo club of SNU and met many foreign students. It was my first time encountering so many foreigners. Having such long and meaningful conversations in English was a big deal to me. I had never had the chance to exchange opinions and thoughts, and just get to know people who were raised in different environments than those already around me. I had such a great time in the taekwondo club, and one of the members told me about SNU Buddy and recommended me to join. So, after that semester I decided to join, and here I am! I am so grateful that I made a move out of my comfort zone. I literally just created a new comfort zone — SNU buddy means that much to me. It is full of opportunities to interact with so many amazing people from various backgrounds.

Q: In SNU Buddy, you have the buddy groups, which consist of exchange students and Korean buddies, and also different teams, which organize the activities throughout the semester. What different roles have you had experience with in SNU Buddy, and which one has been your favorite?

Donghyeok: So, there are teams and Buddy groups. When it comes to the teams, there are four teams in total: the entertainment team, the leisure and sports team, the planning team and the cultural exchange team. In addition to being a buddy each semester, I have only ever been in the entertainment team. During my first semester at SNU Buddy, I was a junior member of the entertainment team. In my second semester, I was a senior member, and now I am very experienced, so I can help the team leader or give advice to other team members.

Jihee: Since this is my first semester in SNU buddy, I can't tell you about various semester experiences, but I am now taking on the role of group leader. It means so much to me. It's not just the responsibility, but the group leader position itself that gives me a higher sense of belonging.

SNU Superstar

SNU Buddy Olympics

Pub Night



Q: I know the Office of International Affairs promotes the organization to all exchange students (who have to fill out a form to join) but what is the promotion and application process like for a buddy?

Donghyeok: When I first joined SNU Buddy, I had to fill out an application. The executives then check applications and make their first picks. In the second round, there is an interview where you are asked different questions about your motivations to join SNU Buddy. They also always ask some English questions to test your English level, but it is not the most important thing. After the interview, they then pick the buddies!

Jihee: You submit the application form that includes questions such as 'what is your motive to join,' 'what do you love to do' ... etc. If you pass the first stage, you get an interview and if you pass the second stage as well you get recruited! This happens before the start of each semester, and you begin the matching between Korean buddies and foreign buddies after that.

Q: What have been your favorite experiences at SNU Buddy?

Donghyeok: I have had so many good experiences with SNU Buddy, so I will mention one per semester. During the first semester, my favorite event was SNU Superstar, where I performed and played the piano. That was the starting point to really enjoying SNU Buddy for me. After that, I got very involved and made many foreign exchange student friends. Since then, my English skills have improved very much. In the second semester, SNU Buddy Olympics was my favorite event. I played almost every game - it was hard but very fun. And this semester, I am really enjoying everything! I feel very happy to be part of SNU Buddy.

Jihee: Definitely the people. I never would have met them anywhere else. Such precious relationships!

Q: If you had to pick just one favorite SNU Buddy event, what would it be?

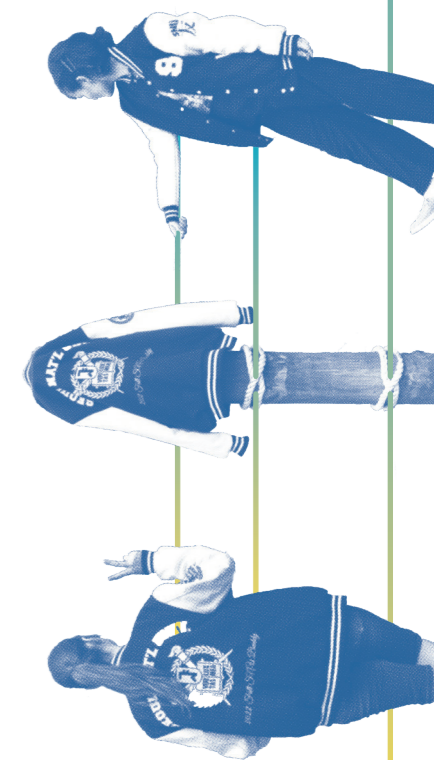
Donghyeok: Only one thing? I would say the weekly pub. It is a great chance to meet everyone involved in SNU Buddy. We can drink, play games and talk, which is so nice. But I also would say the SNU Buddy Olympics. During the Olympics you create teams and can play sports together, so I really have enjoyed every Olympics.

Jihee: Pub night. I really like all the activities like doing sports, or just going out to eat — but pub night gives us the opportunity to talk to each other in a more comfortable environment. As I mentioned above, my favorite thing about SNU Buddy is that there are several opportunities to interact with people from various backgrounds.

Q: Why should students partake in SNU Buddy, and what are the benefits?

Donghyeok: So, first of all, you can massively improve your English skills by joining SNU Buddy. You can also meet students from around the world and do language exchanges! This semester, for example, I put on my profile that I want to study German, so if there are any German students coming to SNU this semester, they can join my group, and we can practice together. That is how I made one of my friends this semester. Overall, you meet people from around the world, learn about their culture, and can get any advice on going to other countries if you want to go on exchange yourself one day! Besides that, you also meet really nice Korean buddies. Everyone is very nice and fun to be around. So, the benefit is really that you meet so many amazing people!

Jihee: It's just a whole different type of experience, like a frog inside a well. You can always talk to people within your own department, Koreans, and enjoy the culture you are used to, but you'll never know what people from other countries think about, like to do, and feel. To me, I wouldn't want to miss out on the opportunity to make memories and be more open to the world around me.



So, as you can see from Donghyeok's experiences, Jihee's experiences, and mine, SNU Buddy truly is an amazing programme to partake in, both as an exchange student and as an SNU student. I will always remember it as having been an integral part of my exchange year in Seoul and am grateful to all the people I have met from it, including Donghyeok and Jihee. If you have any questions about the SNU Buddy programme, do not hesitate to contact SNU Buddy on Instagram @snubuddyofficial.