

Educational Exchange via Tele-Link*

— The SNU-UCLA Experience —

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Unprecedented advances in science and technology are giving birth to mind-boggling means of international communication and transportation. Thus the world is rapidly shrinking so that the entire earth is being reduced to a virtual village. In this ever-shrinking world, we are already members of one single global family. If this global family is to thrive and prosper in the years ahead, we need to understand and share each other's culture, tradition, history, and geography. Only by understanding and sharing each other's way of life to the fullest possible extent can we adequately prepare ourselves for the years ahead in which all aspects of our life will have a transnational perspective.

Allow me to point out here that universities have had and will continue to have a pivotal role to play in the promotion of this vital international understanding and sharing. Over the years, university-centered international exchange has focused on personnel, exchanging faculty, staff, and students for purposes of teaching, research, and course work. Such direct exchange of personnel has a number of merits as well as demerits, which I would like to touch on briefly here.

Let us take exchange students for example. Exchange students attend courses at their host institution so that they can benefit from direct on-the-scene teaching and supervision by the host faculty. Thus they can take advantage of immediate feedback and form rewarding human relationships with their host faculty. Exchange professors can also benefit from direct person-to-person contact with their host colleagues and students, which

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will help upgrade the quality of both their teaching and research.

Good as it is in such respects, direct exchange of personnel suffers from a number of drawbacks. The major drawback is that it involves a large expenditure. Another problem, which is equally daunting, has to do with the fact that exchange personnel must go through a painful process of getting accustomed to an alien culture and climate for the duration of the exchange program in question. Still another problem relates to the fact that direct faculty-to-faculty exchange has the inherent disadvantage of areas of specialization being heavily constrained. This implies that we have to invite large numbers of professors if we are to involve many specialties in a faculty-to-faculty exchange program.

In spite of problems such as these, direct personnel exchange has thus far been the mainstream of educational and academic exchange between nations. How to overcome these problems has thus been a problem of major concern to those educators who value such exchange as a means of amelioration education and research in all areas of specialization.

These educators have recently found a ray of hope in the advent of the tele-conferencing system, whereby people at widely scattered locations can simultaneously participate in conferences via television and computer. This revolutionary system can link universities across national boundaries in an unprecedented new era of transnational, educational and academic cooperation. This new era has already been ushered in by the tele-link program recently launched between UCLA and Seoul National University.

I would like to briefly introduce this on-going SNU-UCLA tele-link program in the hope that it will help set a move afoot for the birth of similar inter-university tele-links elsewhere in the Asia-Pacific region.

Prior to the initiation of the tele-link program, our two institutions had a direct exchange-of-personnel program. For three years, UCLA had sent an annual average of 20 students to Seoul National University for ten weeks of Korean studies. One Seoul National University professor had been sent for two years to UCLA to teach Korean language and Korean linguistics. Anything but cost-effective, this SUN-UCLA exchange of the traditional type ran into a number of difficult problems such as the logistic problems of moving the personnel across the Pacific and finding adequate accommodations for them once they arrive at their host universities.

Faced with such problems, the SUN-UCLA exchange program reached a point where it had to undergo a substantive modification if it was to continue in operation. It was in this context that the SUN-UCLA tele-link idea was born. At a cost of some 20,000 dollars, Seoul National University purchased a TV monitor, a video camera, a microphone, a personal computer, an electronic board and pen. In addition, we had two telephone lines installed exclusively for the tele-link program. In our system, communication via voice is instantaneous, as in ordinary telephone communication, whereas communication via image takes 15 seconds for each still frame to traverse the Pacific Ocean. Written messages via electronic board are instantaneously transmitted, however. Thus lively question-and-answer exchanges can take place via voice and electronic board, thereby creating a classroom-like atmosphere.

For the operation of the tele-link program, we need a staff of academic and technical assistants with a functional command of English and an adequate degree of familiarity with the operation of the equipment. The SNU-UCLA tele-link exchange program costs 300 dollars per hour of use, which is very reasonable considering the large amount of high-density information so conveniently exchanged between the two parties. One major inconvenience stems from the big time difference between Seoul and Los Angeles, however. 9 a.m. Seoul time corresponds to 4 p.m. Los Angeles time so that the only convenient time slot for SNU-UCLA tele-link exchange is between 9 and 11 a.m. Seoul time, which is between 4 and 6 Los Angeles time.

During the spring semester of 1990, UCLA provided Seoul National University with eleven 2-hour sessions of Linguistics and English while Seoul National University provided UCLA with nine 2-hour sessions of Korean music, Korean religion, Korean art history, and Korean conversation. The program registered a class attendance rate of 26 per UCLA-to-SNU session and 15 students per SNU-to-UCLA session.

The SNU-UCLA tele-link program made history by making possible lectures telematically transmitted via voice and image across the vast expanse of the Pacific Ocean. It had all of us at Seoul National University quite excited when it became possible for the first time in history for us to engage in a lively discussion with our UCLA counterparts as if we were in the

same classroom.

In the current fall semester, Seoul National University is sending to UCLA ten 2-hour sessions of the history of Korean thoughts and other topics in Korean Studies. UCLA in turn is sending to us nine 2-hour sessions of Shakespeare and other topics. An additional nine 2-hour sessions are set aside for two-way lectures to be attended simultaneously by both SNU and students. Over and above these sessions, one special session will be devoted to a Korean-American video conference on natural language processing.

Building on our experience of the past 8 months, we are doing our best to bring our tele-link exchange program up to an even higher level of quality. The total attendance is expected to rise from about 400 in the spring semester to upwards of 660 in the current fall semester.

The main attraction of tele-link exchange of the sort under discussion here is that it makes possible lively and instantaneous communication between parties separated by thousands of miles of space and by many time zones. It is true that the educational effectiveness of our tele-link exchange program should be judged on the basis of thorough research and evaluation. Our interim verdict, however, is that our tele-link is highly effective. In support of this contention, we may point to the fact that student interest in the program is steadily rising both at Seoul National University and UCLA.

Admittedly, a tele-link exchange program takes a period of "getting used to". Participants need to familiarize themselves with the operation of personal computers and other pieces of equipment comprising the tele-conferencing system being used. A few may experience something akin to intense stage fright when they first use these rather novel pieces of equipment. For all these getting-used-to pains and other problems, international educational and academic exchange through the tele-link is definitely the wave of the future. With such advances in tele-communications technology as are taking place all the time, the tele-link between universities all over the world is and will surely continue to be the most convenient and most cost-efficient way of keeping abreast of the latest developments in all disciplines of major concern to academia.

We at Seoul National University are in the process of exploring the possibility of setting up additional tele-links with the University of Hawaii and other universities in the Asia-Pacific region. We are hoping that in the

not too distant future we will be part of a tele-link network whereby a number of institutions may simultaneously participate in major international seminars, symposiums, colloquiums, and conferences on a wide range of topics of common concern to the Asia-Pacific region.

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