

# CALLED TO SERVE

South Korean student will return home for mandatory military service  
photo by kaylee everly | story by daniel wheaton



Sang-Won Bahng, a freshman chemical engineering major from Seoul, Korea, was drafted into the Korean military and will be serving in August 2012. "You're doing it for your country and paying back what your country has offered you," said Bahng.

Sang-Won Bahng, a freshman chemical engineering major, will be obligated to return to South Korea soon.

He has to complete his mandatory service in the South Korean military.

Standing tall in black Ray-Bans in a Sandoz study room, Bahng discussed his obligations.

Currently, he's taking a heavy course load, and he's also a baritone in the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's men's varsity chorus. Bahng said the activity is a "break" from his other courses.

After this year, his educational plans will go on hold for at least 21 months.

Bahng said he decided to serve his military time now instead of

after college because family and friends recommended it.

"They say it is a place where you really grow up the most," he said.

Bahng said he embraces the idea that he must serve his nation.

Logistically, dealing with military service isn't a complicated matter.

Lori Straatmann, an administrative manager in the College of Engineering, is in charge of dealing with the matriculation of engineering students who defer their schooling for military service.

"Students who must defer their

education due to military service

are currently treated as any other student who must leave the university due to outside obligations," Straatmann said.

Upon his return, Bahng will simply have to reapply for admission. He can then begin classes immediately. He said he plans on being able to finish in two years after returning.

Bahng said one of the greatest differences between South Korea and the United States is the required military service. The Korean War began in 1950 and is still an active war. Both nations

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SANG-WON BAHNG  
FRESHMAN CHEMICAL ENGINEERING MAJOR

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patrol a demilitarized zone at all times.

North Korean dictator, Kim Jong Il hasn't been in the spotlight recently, but the possibility of an attack is still real, according to a Sept. 21 BBC article. The same article said possible nuclear action from North Korea is carefully monitored by China.

South Korean men are required to serve in the military for 21 months between ages 18 and 35, due to the ongoing war.

Because the war is more than 60 years old, the current generation has a different view of the conflict.

"We're getting away from the idea that war will break out," Bahng said. However, South Korean men are required to serve in case of any military attack from North Korea.

Bahng said he accepts the fact that he needs to serve. When talking about his required South Korean military service to Americans, Bahng said the

service is an established part of growing up as a South Korean man. Because the war occurred on the Korean Peninsula, it left a mark on those living there.

He said he plans to serve the next two years in the military, but he isn't dreading this period of his life. Some of his friends are already in the military.

After moving to Omaha, Neb., from South Korea in 2007, Bahng attended Mount Michael High School when he was 14. He said he anticipated having to go back to his native country before being able to complete a degree, but he wasn't quite ready right after high school.

Bahng chose to attend the University of Nebraska-Lincoln for his freshman year of college because of its familiarity.

"I liked Nebraska, and I don't like big cities," he said.

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