LLRC Spotlight

From Heritage Speaker to Inspiring Language Educator: Rachel Kim joins SBU’s Korean Studies Program

The Korean Studies Program at Stony Brook University is pleased to welcome its new Korean instructor, Rachel Kim, with special sentiments. The Korean Studies Program is especially proud of Rachel Kim as she returns to Korean Studies as an experienced Korean language instructor after graduating from its Korean Teacher Education Program and gaining experience teaching Korean in the public school system. The Korean program has always prided itself on its strong team of knowledgeable and passionate instructors. Rachel Kim shares that same passion for the Korean language, and she also brings a unique perspective as the program’s first Korean-American language instructor.

Ms. Kim was born in the USA to Korean immigrant parents and identifies herself as a heritage speaker of Korean. While she was speaking Korean at home, she only began to formally learn the language in high school. As a result, she has an understanding of Korean as both a native speaker and a language learner, and she is able to understand the specific hurdles Korean learners may face when learning the language. Her Korean-American background also lends itself to her own distinct perspective on Korean culture, that may differ from instructors who speak Korean as their first language, as she sees both cultures through the lens of the other.

Ms. Kim has worked with diverse groups of students in her teaching career so far. While pursuing her degree in the Korean Language Education Program offered by the Department of Asian and Asian American Studies at SBU, she worked with high school students from all over the U.S.A. as a teaching assistant for the NSLI-Y program which brings students to South Korea for critical language study through linguistic and cultural immersion. She taught at Bayside High School, to both heritage and non-heritage students. Most recently, she taught Korean at Harlem Prep High School, located in East Harlem, where all the students were non-heritage learners and had little to no experience with the language and culture. Many of the students were wary of learning a foreign language, but through patience and dedication, Ms. Kim was able to bridge the divide and many left her class excited to learn more about the Korean language and culture. Ms. Kim says of her experience there, “it was incredibly challenging yet equally rewarding, and I will always look back at my time and my students there fondly.”

Diversity in language instructors is essential to addressing the diverse needs of students. Ms. Rachel Kim’s addition to the team represents the university’s continuous efforts to create enriching language learning environments taught by language instructors with diverse backgrounds who can work together to bring their collective strengths to the table.