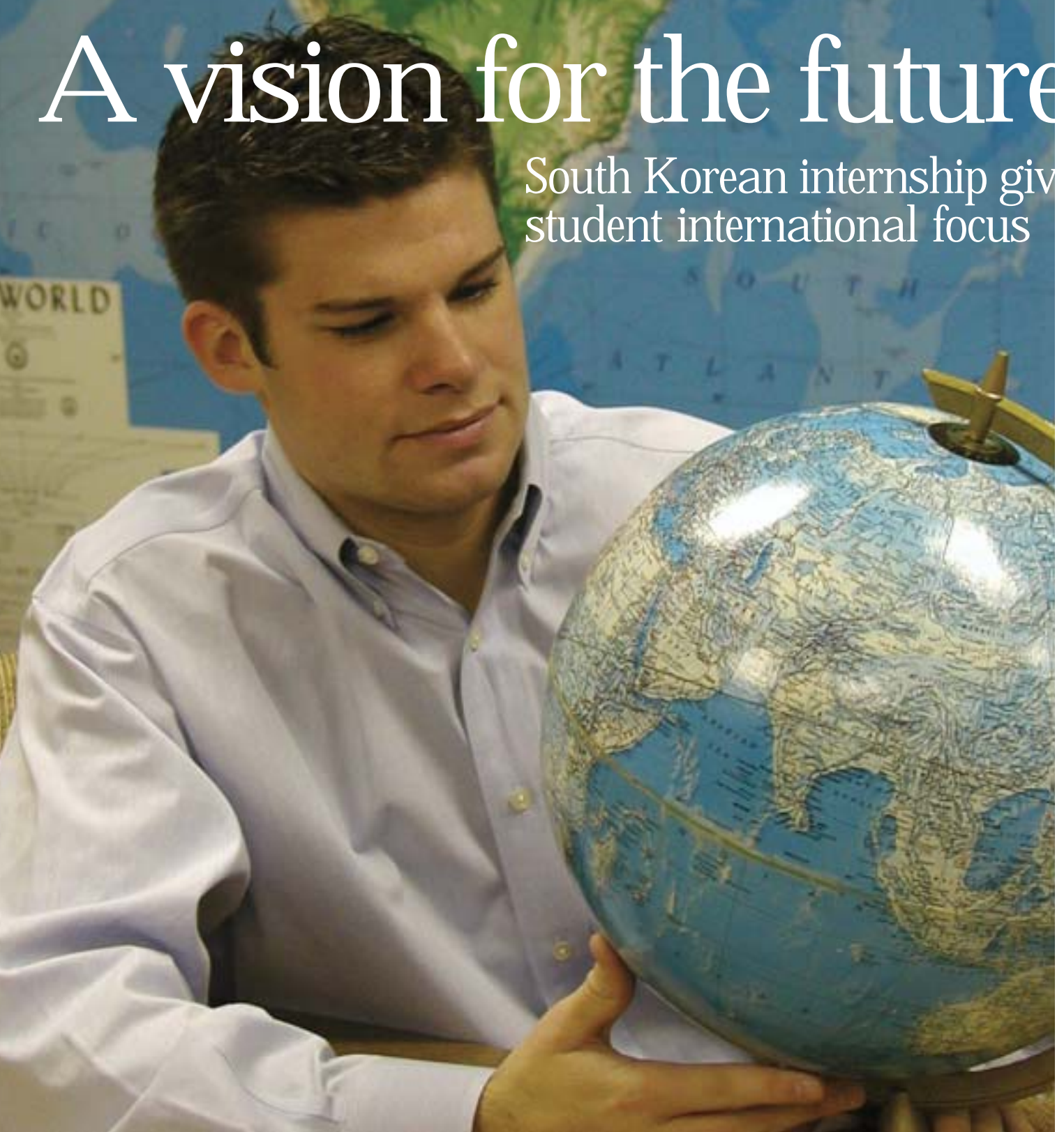


A vision for the future

South Korean internship gives student international focus



"I am the master of my fate; I am the captain of my soul."

This William Henley quote reflects the heart and character of Brady Sidwell, an Oklahoma State University junior, whose goal is to help link international and American students together.

Even from the small hometown of Goltry, Okla., population 300, Sidwell proves the best of the best still make their way to the top. For this agribusiness major, a recent internship experience overseas broadened his perspective on the world and changed his career goals.

The summer after his freshman year, Sidwell began to lay the groundwork for his future by working as an intern for Sen. Don Nickles in Washington, D.C.

This internship gave Sidwell the experience he needed to be involved in international relations. By the end of the summer, his interests were redirected to the overseas business world.

As a result, Sidwell began asking Steve Moffitt, legislative director in Nickles' office, about international opportunities. Moffitt encouraged Sidwell to start networking and connected him with people who could help.

"Mr. Moffitt was my inspiration," said Sidwell. "I had no idea how many opportunities were available. He opened the doors for me."

After his internship, Sidwell began working for the Foreign Agriculture Services division of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The

connections he made during his time in Washington, D.C., along with help from the FAS and a lot of footwork, led him to an internship in Seoul, South Korea, where his dream of working as an international intern finally came true.

Sidwell said when he left Oklahoma to begin his experience at the American Embassy in South Korea, he had no idea how much it would change his outlook on the world.

"I was excited to receive this opportunity. It is not an internship position that is offered every year," he said.

The intern preceding Sidwell was a female student from Harvard, and her visit occurred about four years earlier.

Being the only USDA intern at the embassy, he had a paid position and housing was provided in the embassy compound. His roommate had just completed his graduate degree from Stanford University.

During the week, Sidwell spent time writing market reports and briefs for U.S. exporters and attending meetings with government officials discussing trade. Sidwell also worked with cooperatives who have offices in Korea: U.S. Wheat Associates, U.S. Grains Council, American Soybean Association and U.S. Cotton Council International.

"I learned a lot in Korea," he said. "There is more to Korea than people think. It is a digital world, advanced in technology."

After a busy week, Sidwell used his weekends for sightseeing.

"I would rather travel than anything else," said Sidwell.

From South Korea to North Korea to China, Sidwell took subways, buses and trains to see all he could while he was there. He was able to see more in his two months overseas than many people will see in a lifetime.

"I would go to the train station and ask someone where I should go," he said. "Then I would board the train."

Sidwell had the opportunity to see much of the countryside near Seoul, as well as the demilitarized zone between North Korea and South Korea. He was actually able to cross into North Korea, possible only with the military escort of the U.S. government.

While Sidwell was in Korea, he witnessed the enthusiasm of the Koreans during the World Cup competition.

"It was awesome to see millions of people in the streets supporting their nation," he said.

During his last few days overseas, Sidwell visited China where he saw The Great Wall, The Temple of Heaven and The Forbidden City.

"The Asian culture is different, interesting and beautiful," said Sidwell.

The Asian culture has many differences from the American way of life, because it has a foundation more than 1,000 years old. They have much of the same principles, but differ in many customs and traditions, said Sidwell.

"Asians eat food for the same reasons we do; they just use chopsticks," said Sidwell. "It seems they know more about where their food comes from than the average American. It is also a lot healthier food than what we are used to eating."

Koreans eat spicy food. They fix chicken, pork, octopus and kimichi, which is cabbage with a spicy seasoning, said Sidwell.

"Every time we sat down for dinner, I would say 'this is good,' and they would reply with how good it is for you," said Sidwell.

Another cultural difference Sidwell appreciated was the family orientation of the Korean people. When meeting people in Korea,

they first inquire about your age. If Koreans know how old you are, they will know how to speak respectfully in conversation.

"American people are more aggressive in their communication styles than Korean people are," said Sidwell. "For example, hugging is not a common practice. When saying good-bye to Korean friends, I went to hug them. They backed away as if I was being aggressive."

Although it took him his entire stay to learn many of their values and customs, he quickly gained an appreciation for the Korean culture.

"I appreciated many of the practices I saw in their country," he said. "The children are taught respect at an early age, and they know to obey their parents."

"An open mind is the key to everything; you must realize you are in a foreign country and appreciate the fact that the world has diversity," said Sidwell. "This experience has given me more rationale to my decisions. I think more broadly than before."

Being away from everything familiar, he said it gave him time for reflection. He learned how important it was to adjust, to make friends who speak a different language and to embrace the new culture.

Sidwell learned how hard it is to make new friends

when meeting people from a different culture who speak a different language, he said.

"It's challenging," said Sidwell. "I grew up in a hurry. I have more self-confidence now and a more solid foundation for what I believe in."

Sidwell said he realized just how much he had experienced in a mere two months when he landed at the Los Angeles International Airport. Being back in the states, he now had time to reflect on his experience. His personal goals had changed somewhere along the way, and he said his view of the world now comes from a broader, more informed perspective.

His goal now is to help international students at OSU adjust to their life in America. He wants to give something in return for the warm welcome he received in South Korea.

"I hope to create a 'home away from home' for these students," said Sidwell.

Within just a few months of being back at OSU, he was putting his goals into action. He created the Global Agricultural Organization at OSU, which brings together American and international agriculture students. He had the idea for the organization before leaving for Korea, and his trip helped him shape it into reality.

"This organization's focus is on helping people gain an understanding of multicultural issues," said Sidwell. "I now know how hard it is to reside and work in a foreign country. My goal is to make the transition easier and initiate discussions among students in international agriculture."

Since his return, Sidwell has decided to double major in agribusiness finance and international business. He also would like to earn a minor in Chinese. His next overseas goal is to study abroad in China.

Brady Sidwell's international experience changed his point of view, college path and career goals. He now has taken a much deeper look inside to develop his own opinions and character and is working hard to achieve a greater unity. Sidwell knows exactly how hard it is to transcend from Goltry, Okla., to Seoul, South Korea. He has truly become the master of his fate and captain of his soul.

By Julie Lowe, Lindsay, Okla.

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I am the captain of my soul.**
— William Henley

Left: Brady Sidwell anticipates his next trip abroad. (Photo by Julie Lowe)