
ALUMNI FEATURE, OCTOBER 10 2017

SHEARIAH YOUSEFI, '13



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Major: Music Education

Current title: Private Academy Instructor for the Korea Nazarene University, Nazarene Foreign Language Institute, South Korea

Last week, Sheariah Yousefi sat down to celebrate the Korean Thanksgiving and Hangeul Proclamation day, a celebration of the national alphabet of South Korea, with her husband in South Korea. Lucky for us, she also made time to sit down for a Google Hangouts video call with the Honors College.

As a recent transplant to South Korea from the D.C. area, Sheariah has settled with her husband in the city of Cheonan. Prior to the big move, Sheariah was a Legislative Assistant for the House Committee on Education and the Workforce. Her journey from Capitol Hill to the hillsides of South Korea all began with Honors College courses and programs.

In her senior year at Towson, Sheariah found herself in the “Four Questions for Musical Thought” course taught by the Department of Music’s Dr. William Kleinsasser. She credits Dr. Kleinsasser with teaching the most interesting and challenging course of her college career, being that he expected students to analyze and interpret music any way they wished, using any word-count, so long as they could support their argument. And he must have been impressed with Sheariah’s interpretations because he personally recommended her to the then Assistant Dean of the Honors College for some competitive program interest meetings the Honors College was hosting in the upcoming months; one being for an internship with The Washington Center in D.C. and one for a South Korean Ministry of Education program. As luck would have it, Sheariah was offered a position with both organizations.

Although her music education degree might fool some as to her interests, Sheariah always had politics in the back of her mind. The daughter of an Iranian immigrant, she was taught to always pay attention to what is happening in the world and to be an active, vocal member for what is right in society. But, while at Towson, her love of working with students was cemented. The Washington Center Internship gave her a way to exercise both passions.

Her time at The Washington Center internship was spent with a nonprofit called the National Association of Federally Impacted Schools, an organization that supported K-12 schools located on government property, such as military bases, that therefore don't receive any local tax dollars. It was here that Sheariah made valuable connections and learned more about educational policy. She worked with the Executive Director of the organization to research the federally impacted schools and conduct an independent policy project. She also had the chance to attend congressional committee education forums where she prepared reports and assisted with the presentations.

Just three weeks after the D.C. internship was completed, Sheariah found herself on a plane to South Korea to start her position as a Government Scholar and English Language Teacher for an elementary school, with very limited knowledge of the Korean language. This distinguished program provided the scholars with an intensive language institute for the first month and then placed them in rural K-6 schools to provide language instruction to groups of students. Sheariah also assisted with city-held political education forums and conducted her own independent educational and political research during her time there.

After a year in South Korea, Sheariah used her connections that she had made during her prior internship and her knowledge of educational policy to land another internship in D.C. with U.S. House of Representatives Congresswoman Mimi Waters. From there, she worked her way up to a Staff Assistant, and finally a K-12 Legislative Assistant with the Committee on Education and the Workforce. With one experience building on another, Sheariah crafted her journey through Washington and became a lead policy staffer for issues relating to foster children in schools and students who are experiencing homelessness.

Sheariah says it was an extremely tough decision to leave her rising career in D.C. to move back to South Korea, but she "desperately wanted to get back to the heart of directly helping students." She went on to say, "there is a lot of work to be done and I want to be on the ground for it." Now that she is back on the ground, Sheariah is a lead English instructor for a prestigious foreign language academy.

But that isn't all that she has planned for her time in Korea. She's already made contact with a local orphanage and is in the beginning stages of volunteering for them. In addition, she plans to start working with a nonprofit whose mission is to help North Korean refugees. Nearly all North Korean refugees need

assistance getting settled into a new environment, and for many of them, she will be the first foreigner that they have ever interacted with. Her altruism is clear when she says “to be trusted with someone’s children and those most in need is a huge responsibility; it can’t be taken lightly. Especially those who desperately need love.”

When asked about her future, Sheariah says that she plans on moving back to the U.S. in a few years, using her experience from Washington and South Korea to serve in a high-level organization that helps orphans and/or refugees. Throughout Sheariah’s journey, her heart for serving others and her passion for education are always at the forefront of her decisions.

Sheariah will be writing the Alumni Feature going forward and wanted to take on this project because she believes “there is so much to learn from those who went ahead of us.” She states that she wanted to “pay tribute to what the Honors College has done as a whole and to those who have gone through the college’s program, and to highlight the wonderful things alumni have done.”

We wish Sheariah and her husband well as they begin their new life in Korea serving others and we thank Sheariah for taking on this project to honor and highlight our alumni from halfway around the world. Sheariah truly embodies the Honors College core values and we are proud to have her as an alumna, Alumni Council member, and creator/writer for the Alumni Feature.

By: Rhiannon Napoli, Director of Co-Curricular Programs and Constituent Relationships, Towson University Honors College