

Hyung Sun Kim

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Looking back from the half way

. University of Illinois has had an Institute of Aviation since 1945, and there is a national aviation fraternity called Alpha Eta Rho(AHP) in campus. The club is consisted of students who are willing to pour their energy into aviation for the rest of their lives. I have been observing and studying the club members to understand their perspectives on aviation and compare it to my own understanding. I still have six more weeks to research, and the lack of information makes judging difficult at this point. However, I was able to gain a general idea of how the club operates and who they are through two months of research, including the online research and archive findings.

It has always been a challenge for me to find something new at the fieldsite and put special meanings on something that appears to be tedious. At the beginning, the AHP meeting had been just really boring and I could not have gotten impressions on anything. However, fortunately, I, soon, learned how to solve the problem by constantly asking myself why is he or she doing that? Would I do the same thing if I'm in his or her situation? Answering the questions clarified my stereotypes and helped me find the things that I could not have noticed before. When I first met the club members at AHP's official meeting held on every other Thursday, I was not able to see their usual participation at the meeting due to the guest speaker, a pilot from Delta Airline. He shared his experiences in military and commercial airlines with the club. However, I tried to observe something else and I noticed the seriousness of the crowd in listening to what the guest said; none of them joked around or looked bored. The atmosphere derived not only out of respect and thankfulness but also out of genuine sincerity toward aviation.

The interview with the head of the club, Dan Skelsky enabled me to take a closer look at the lives of aviation students. The mandatory classes that aviation-major students have to take require relatively more effort and time than other classes that have the same credit hours as aviation classes. Dan described the disadvantage as a “crime” in a grumbling manner, but I felt that Dan did not hate it as much as he sounded since he studies what he has wanted to do from childhood.

The joint meeting between WIA(women in aviation) and AHP brought up an incomprehensible question: why are they so passionate in doing all this kind of stuff? The main issue at the meeting was fund-raising, and the students eagerly participated in giving their opinions. They volunteered themselves to take care of bake-sale at Champaign airport. I could answer to neither the question nor the reason for their eager behavior since I had never played an important role in such clubs and never even felt the desire to do so. In high school, I had joined several clubs, but honestly, I joined most of them hoping to make my extracurricular fancier. After pondering over the question, the only answer I could come up with was that they really love what they do, and they love it because it is about aviation.

Sometimes, my fieldsite observation enabled me to realize the existence of a stereotype that I got unconsciously. The next meeting I attended after the joint meeting gave rise to another question: how are students and instructor so close that they drink together? The meeting was an unofficial meeting, called the “hang-out day,” and the aviation instructor was there. His presence was totally unexpected for I had never seen students and teachers associate together at a bar. They were joking and drinking together as if they were close friends, and I seemed to be the only one who looked perplexed. I had never thought such association was unacceptable but did believe that

there was an invisible boundary between students and professors. Professors and TAs are homework, quiz and test givers and students are the takers. Obviously, students get stress from being the inferior end of the relationship, and the inevitable feelings create some distances between them. While, trying to answer the question in aviation students' perspectives, I realized the question was derived from my stereotype I have, not from anything related to aviation students.

The research that I have done for annotated bibliography and archive findings greatly broadened my range of aviation knowledge and helped me comprehend my subculture much better. Literally, I had not known anything about history of aviation except for the fact that Wright brothers contributed a lot to aircraft development. I had not even heard of the word, avionics before I started the research. When Dan talked about avionic systems used in aircrafts that belongs to UIUC during the interview, I was able not to be perplexed since I had read some information about avionics such as ADF (automate direction finder).

I have written several papers about AHP and its members in this class so far and have come up with conclusions for each paper. As I made conclusions, I noticed that the conclusions are always different from what I first thought. AHP members loved what they do much more than I had expected and they had more works to do than I did.

I, however, believe that, I still need more conclusions to judge them. This ethnography project is, perhaps, the biggest assignment that I had not gotten before. I am already half way through and still have around six more weeks to go. I am proud of my self for what I have done. Depending on how I complete this project, the way I remember this assignment will be different. As I always say in almost every essay, I will try my best to finish this strong.