



Aerial view of Sahmyook University campus in 2020

Photo courtesy of Sahmyook University.

Sahmyook University

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Kuk Heon Lee graduated from Sahmyook University (B.A.), Newbold College (M.A.), and Sahmyook University (Ph.D.). From 1990 to 2009, he served as a pastor at Korean Union Conference. In 2010, he joined Sahmyook University as a lecturer and professor at the Theology Department. His research and teaching interests are in Church History. He wrote several books and published several papers on the subject. Currently, he is also the Dean of Planning at Sahmyook University.

Sahmyook University is a university that is operated in Korea according to the educational ideals of the Adventist Church. The university is located at 815 Hwarang-ro (200 acres), in Nowon-gu, Seoul, and is operated with 5,600 students, 204 professors, and 246 employees as of the end of 2019.

Developments That Led to the Establishment of the School

It was in 1904 that the Seventh-day Adventist Church was established in Korea. Heung-jo Shon and Eung-hyun Lee were baptized at Kobe Adventist Church in Japan and became the first Korean Adventists. Among them, Son Heung-jo set up the Adventist church in South Korea in cooperation with Gi-ban Lim. William Smith visited Korea in 1905 as a first missionary. After establishing his headquarters in Soonan, South Pyongan Province, in 1906, he planned to establish a school to train ministerial workers. Smith, along with Mimi Scharffenberg, who visited Korea as a first female missionary, founded the School of Education in Soonan in 1907.¹

Founding of the School

In 1907 William Smith received free educational sites from the governor of South Pyongan Province and promoted the establishment of the school in earnest. He wrote letters to his parents and relatives in the United States to help establish the building. The General Conference also subsidized 200 yen for building construction. The school building was built with 693 yen collected. After constructing the school building, Smith submitted a letter of permission to establish a gospel worker training school and was authorized to operate the school on September 12, 1907. It was on December 9, 1907 when the education project officially began at this training school. At the time of its opening, the number of students enrolled was 11 (five male students and six female students), while teachers were Smith, Scharffenberg, Lim Ki-ban, and Ha Dong-hyeop. The curriculum included the Bible, arithmetic, Chinese characters, English, and world history.²

History of the School

Sahmyook University, the center of Korea's Adventist education project, has its origins in the Ministry of Education, which began in 1907 in Soonan, South Pyongan Province. Smith, the first Korean Adventist missionary, founded the Soonan Training Institute or Workers' Institute with Schaffenberg, the first female missionary, and began classes on December 9, 1907.³ The school was approved as a three-year junior high school after it was named Uimyung School in 1909.⁴ In March 1913 six students were nurtured as the first graduates of the school, four of whom came to work as ministers.⁵

To train qualified workers for the Korean Conference (established May 1917), a two-year ministerial course for older students was introduced in September 1917. Classes were conducted in one of the classrooms of the Chosen Industrial School (Uimyung Hakgyo) in Soonan. Classes in theology were taught by C. L. Butterfield, the conference president.⁶

After the formation of the Chosen Union Mission in 1919 (with headquarters at Seoul), the Chosen Industrial School became the Chosen Union Training School. During several years in the next decade, some course work was given beyond the twelfth-grade level, but in general, the school operated on the secondary level. In the fall of 1928, Clinton W. Lee joined the faculty and began preparing college textbooks and syllabi.⁷

In the spring of 1931 the ministerial school was separated from the Chosen Union Training School (which appears in the Statistical Reports through 1936, then replaced by the Soonan Academy in 1937, 1938). The ministerial school moved to Seoul, at the headquarters of the Chosen Union Mission; but because of financial problems, it did not operate from the summer of 1932 until May 1937. During this interim, the students and some of the workers studied correspondence courses conducted by Clinton W. Lee. The reopened school at Seoul was called the Chosen Union Workers' Training Institute. The faculty was increased, and Clinton W. Lee served as principal of the school.⁸

When World War II forced the overseas personnel to leave Korea in 1941, the work at the training institute was carried on for a year by principal Seongui Lee and national teachers. However, because of pressure from the Japanese police, it was closed in May 1942.⁹ Up to this point, the school had produced more than one hundred graduates, many of whom became pillars of the work in Korea.

The school (listed in the Yearbook as Korean Union Seminary¹⁰) was reopened in September 1947, with 42 young people in attendance. Ralph S. Watts, Sr., was the principal, with Seongui Lee as the dean, and four teachers: James Lee, Chang-Uk Park, Leland Mitchell, and his wife.¹¹

In the winter of 1949, the school was moved from the city to its present site about ten miles northeast of Seoul. Here Korean Adventist education has developed in earnest. The church members call this place Sahmyook-dong, and Sahmyook-dong is a cradle of the Adventist education in Korea.¹² When the Korean War broke out in June 1950, it scattered the students and destroyed many of the buildings under construction.

In November of 1951, the school (called Korean Union Training School) opened again with about forty students. Because of damage to the buildings, some classes were conducted in the open air. Secondary work, which had been offered by the Seoul Junior Training Institute (a secondary school established in Seoul in 1939), was now combined with seminary work on one campus.¹³

In 1954 the school received a government permit to operate as a college. During the ensuing years, there was peaceful growth, and college industries prospered. Leading educators in Korea looked to the SDA educational system as a pattern.¹⁴

In February 1961 the Korean Ministry of Education gave Korean Union College a permit to operate as a theological college and to grant degrees in the four year theological course. In 1962 the government approved the addition of an industrial junior college, specializing in agriculture for young men and home economics for young women. In 1964 the General Conference Educational Department recognized the school as a four year senior college.¹⁵

In 1966 the word *theological* was dropped from the Korean name of the college, and it began operation as a liberal arts school, with home economics and agriculture departments added to the curriculum. Also in 1966, the junior college was closed, and by 1967 an English major was offered.¹⁶

The government granted permission in 1973 for the college to begin a four year collegiate nursing course, which was implemented in 1974. In that same year, a two year industrial school at the junior college level was begun with government permission with George Haley as principal. A two year food-and-nutrition course was offered.¹⁷

In 1978 Sahmyook College established the Department of Pharmacy and Business Administration, replacing the Department of Agricultural Education and Home Economics Education.¹⁸ In 1980 the Music Education Department, Nutrition Department, and Chemistry Department were newly established, and a total of eight departments were opened and operated. In addition, in November 1980, it was possible to offer master's degrees in theology by obtaining approval for establishment of a graduate school. Meanwhile, in December 1978, Sahmyook Industrial College was reapproved as Sahmyook Agricultural College. As a result, dairy farming, food and nutrition, horticultural, and food manufacturing departments were opened and operated within the junior college.¹⁹

The 1980s was a time when the Korean Union Mission and Sahmyook College developed astonishingly. The Korean Union Mission established the Union Conference through the General Conference in 1983.²⁰ In addition, five conferences under the Korean Union Conference (East Central Korean Conference, West Central Korean Conference, Middlewest Korean Conference, Southeast Korean Conference, Southwest Korean Conference) all became self-cultivated conferences.²¹ Sahmyook College developed into a large-scale college based on the expansion of departments, the establishment of a graduate school, and the construction of major facilities (a large auditorium, a library, a dairy workshop, lecture halls, etc.). Based on these developments, Sahmyook College was promoted to Sahmyook University in 1992. In 1993 Sahmyook University established and operated 12 departments in four departments (Theology, Humanities and Social Sciences, Natural Sciences, and Medicine).²² In addition, Sahmyook Agricultural College was renamed as a Junior College attached to Sahmyook University in the 1990s. In 1996, after administrative independence from Sahmyook University, it was renamed Sahmyook Uimyong University in June 1998 and expanded to 15 departments.²³

As such, two universities—Sahmyook University and Sahmyook Uimyong University—were operated under an independent administrative system. However, due to changes in the educational environment, the discussion on integration between the two universities was raised. Thus, ahead of the 100th anniversary of its establishment, the administrators of Sahmyook University united the two universities in December 2005, opening the era of unified Sahmyook University.²⁴

Historical Role of the School

As an institution of higher education that is based on the philosophy of Adventist education, Sahmyook University is evaluated by the Accrediting Association of Seventh-day Adventists (AAA) on a five year basis. The most recent year of accreditation was in 2016, and it was recognized as faithfully pursuing educational projects based on the philosophy of Adventist education. In particular, it has contributed to the growth of Korean

Adventist churches based on the training of gospel workers. In addition, Sahmyook University has created a spiritual master-plan and promoted dedicated campus ministry, leading new souls to the Lord every year.²⁵

Sahmyook University, located in Seoul, the capital of South Korea, is carrying out various community service activities based on a community network system. In particular, more than twenty volunteer teams are organized every year to conduct community service activities through special projects of community service. In addition, volunteer teams are actively carrying out volunteer work in Southeast Asia, including Bangladesh, the Philippines, Myanmar, Laos, and India.²⁶

Sahmyook University was selected as the "Project to Support Self-Related Competency Enhancement" (ACE) by the Ministry of Education as part of its education advancement policy in 2017 and established its status as a "well-teaching university."²⁷ As a result, the university received financial support amounting to about \$8 million over four years from the government, which contributes to the development of higher education in Korea.

What Remains to Be Done to Fulfill Mission

Sahmyook University is facing internal and external crises stemming from its rapidly changing social environment. The decline in the number of students and the falling employment rate have weakened the competitiveness of our university. The university is also facing a crisis due to a lack of educational finances to prepare for the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Above all, our university is having difficulties in religious education for students due to secularization. The challenge to religious education is becoming a serious challenge, when recognizing that the reason for the existence of the Adventist College lies in the completion of our church's mission. To overcome this challenge, the Education Department of the Korean Union Conference made a policy report for Adventist education in 2019.²⁸ The report was made to rebuild religious education at the educational institutions in Korea. Based on this, Sahmyook University is carrying out its strategic tasks to complete the mission of educational institutions.

Principal/President Chronology

Soonan Uimyung School (1907-1931)

William. R. Smith (1907, 1908); Riley Russell (1908, 1909); Howard Lee (1910-1920, 1924-1930); Charles. L. Butterfield (1917-1920); Jacob E. Riffell (1920-1924); Harold A. Oberg (1931, 1932).

Theological School of Chosen Union Mission (1931-1949)

Clinton W. Lee (1937-1939); Seong-ui Lee (1940, 1941); Tae Hyun Choi (1941, 1942); Ralph S. Watts (1947-1949).

Sahmyook Theological School (1950-1966)

James M. Lee (1950-1953); Dong Shim Chung (1953, 1954); Donald S. Lee (1954-1960); Tate V. Zytoskee (1960-1965).

Sahmyook College (1967-1991)

Rudy E. Klimes (1967-1969); Chong Wha Kim (1969-1973, 1977-1990); Kwon Song (1973, 1974); Ki Dohn Lee (1975, 1976).

Sahmyook University (1992-)

Hong Ryang Kim (1992-1994); Hae Jong Park (1994-1996); Kye Hoon Shin (1996-2000); Dae Geuk Nam (2000-2005); Kwang Soo Seo (2005-2009); Ki Gon Kim (2009-2012); Sang Rae Kim (2012-2016); Seong Ik Kim (2016-2020); Il Mok Kim (2020-).

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2. Kim, Jae Shin, *A History of Sahmyook University: 1906-1996*, Seoul: Sahmyook University Press, 1998, 116, 117.
3. Man Kyu Oh, *History of One Hundred Years of Korean SDA, 1904~1945* (Seoul: Korean Publishing House, 2010), 118, 119.
4. Yung Lin Lee, 146.
5. Ibid., 147.
6. Mrs. W. R. Smith, "The School in Soonan, Chosen," *ARH*, September 1919, 16.
7. Man Kyu Oh, 323.
8. Ibid, 324, 325.
9. Ibid, 325.
10. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1948), 249.
11. Yung Lin Lee, 155.
12. Sookja Song, ed., *The Stories of Sahmyook-dong* (Seoul: Sahmyook University Press, 1996).
13. Jae Shin Kim, 199.
14. Yung Lin Lee, 156.
15. Jae Shin Kim, 290, 325.
16. Ibid., 353.
17. Ibid., 419.
18. Kuk Heon Lee, *History of One Hundred Years of Sahmyook University* (Seoul: Sahmyook University Press, 2008), 446-449.
19. Ibid., 417.
20. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1984), 136.
21. *Church Compass*, September 1994, 11.

22. *Church Compass*, April 1992, 27. Kuk Heon Lee, 523.

23. Kuk Heon Lee, 603, 604.

24. *Church Compass*, January 2006, 76.

25. See, Sahmyook University Self-Study Report 2016.

26. Report of Community Service Center 2019.

27. <http://news.unn.net/news/articleView.html?idxno=173337>.

28. Education Department of KUC, *A Policy Report of Adventist Education in Korea* (Seoul: Sahmyook University Press, 2019).

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