

# ISUS NEWSLETTER

INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF URBAN SCIENCES – UNIVERSITY OF SEOUL



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# Transforming Learning into Action

## The Global Project Development (GPD) Fair 2026

The GPD programme is a hands-on course where government officials from around the world turn their learning experiences in Korea into practical and meaningful policy proposals. Through lectures, discussions, and field visits, participants tackle real governance challenges and design solutions they can implement in their home countries.

The programme culminates in the annual GPD Fair at the University of Seoul, a vibrant space for collaboration and inspiration. Participants present their projects, exchange ideas, and receive feedback from peers and international experts. More than a showcase, the Fair emphasizes actionable solutions and encourages the sharing of diverse perspectives to shape better policy outcomes.





In her Dean's Message, the Dean highlighted the GPD's role in strengthening the International School of Urban Science (ISUS) as a global platform for knowledge-sharing and networking. The programme showcases outstanding collaborative projects by ISUS students both Korean and international across urban development, infrastructure, and construction, creating opportunities for academic collaboration and real-world impact.

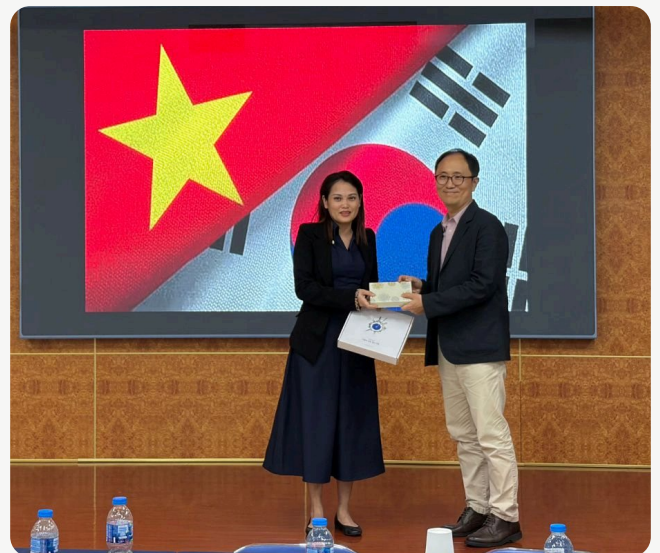
On February 6, 2026, representatives from KOICA, Korea Exim Bank, Korea Green Growth Trust Fund (KGGTF), World Bank attended the Fair, presenting opportunities for international collaboration, funding, and capacity-building programs, and serving as expert panelists for final project presentations. Four standout projects included solutions for urban regeneration in Islamabad, e-waste recycling in Jakarta, sustainable e-mobility in Kenya, and ecological initiatives in the Amazon. Panelists provided practical feedback, giving ISUS graduate students a unique learning experience that bridges classroom knowledge with real-world policy implementation. (N.J. Nash).





## From Learning to Living: Expanding the ISUS Global Urban Network Through The 2026 Global Internship Experience

Through the International School of Urban Science (ISUS), the University of Seoul (UOS) continues to position Seoul as a leading urban knowledge hub, strengthening collaboration and expanding its international network across three key cities in Southeast Asia. This initiative reflects Seoul's commitment to serving as a benchmark for urban expertise while fostering meaningful and sustainable partnerships.



As part of this effort, ISUS together with Korean students and professors had the privilege of participating in the 2026 Global Internship Programme. The programme was conducted from 11 to 17 January 2025 in Vientiane and Ho Chi Minh City, followed by a session in Bangkok on 3 February 2026.

Through this global engagement, ISUS continues to translate academic knowledge into real-world urban collaboration, strengthening ties between Seoul and Southeast Asia while nurturing the next generation of urban leaders.

## Vientiane, Lao PDR: Strengthening Future Urban Expertise

Beginning in Vientiane, the first delegation visited the Public Works and Transport Institute (PWTI), which operates under the Ministry of Public Works and Transport. PWTI is a leading research and training institution in Laos, focusing on infrastructure development, transport systems, urban planning, and environmental engineering. The institute plays a key role in supporting sustainable urban growth and strengthening technical expertise across the country.

This visit provided an important platform for knowledge exchange, allowing both sides to share experiences and explore future collaboration in advancing sustainable urban development.

During the visit, meaningful exchanges took place, highlighting Seoul's experience in integrated urban management, waste governance, and water infrastructure systems. These shared insights offered practical ideas that could support Laos in strengthening its urban systems and improving the efficiency and sustainability of its city landscape in the years ahead.

The PWTI also expressed strong interest in continuing collaboration with the SMG and the UOS. Future cooperation may focus on technical training programmes, knowledge exchange, and long-term institutional capacity building to ensure sustainable and lasting impact.



## Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC): Building Future-Ready Cities Through Shared Urban and Digital Insights

In Ho Chi Minh City, the delegation met with the Department of Planning and Architecture of Ho Chi Minh City, the agency responsible for guiding urban development, zoning, and architectural management. The department plays a central role in transforming the city into a modern, sustainable, and

innovative urban centre. Its work includes managing the urban landscape, promoting green infrastructure, and preserving valuable heritage assets. During the visit, comprehensive briefings were delivered to provide an overview of the city's current urban planning framework, ongoing initiatives, and long-term development strategy. Special attention was given to Ho Chi Minh City's aspirations for digital transformation and smarter urban governance.

In response, representatives from Seoul shared practical insights from their own digital journey. This included experience with digital twin technology through S-Map, Urban AI applications for data-driven planning, and open knowledge-sharing platforms such as Seoul Solution.

Looking ahead, both sides discussed potential collaboration in district-level conservation strategies, particularly for pre-1975 historic villas. Seoul's experience in preserving traditional neighbourhoods, including the Bukchon Hanok Village model, was introduced as a possible reference for balancing heritage protection with modern urban development.



## Bangkok, Thailand: Shaping Future Urban Growth Through Innovation and Professional Excellence

Thailand's partnership with Seoul is well-established by building 20 years of Sister City relations and celebrating with this collaboration reached a new milestone as a UOS delegation spearheaded a pioneering urban policy initiative, sharing expertise and best practices.

On February 3, 2026, a UOS delegation comprising Professors Chunho YEOM, Hyemin PARK, and Seung Beon SEO, alongside ten ISUS graduate students visited the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA) to advance actionable projects in urban regeneration and environmental management.

During the visit, several key collaboration areas were explored. Urban regeneration was highlighted through the exchange of case studies and policy experiences, while Dohwa Engineering, a Korean firm with international infrastructure expertise, presented potential opportunities for joint projects. The delegation also introduced the International Urban Development Program (IUDP), a capacity-building initiative designed to strengthen the skills of government officials from developing countries. In addition, discussions were held on potential academic cooperation between Navamindrachiraj University and UOS, including joint research, exchange programs, and capacity-building activities focused on urban science and sustainable city development.



### **Moments of Connection: Meaningful Gatherings Beyond Borders**

Beyond the formal programs, the delegation engaged in informal exchanges with Lao, Vietnam, and Thailand alumni of UOS (ISUS Korean Students, MUDSIP, MUAP, MIPD, and MGLEP) over a networking session. These interactions reinforced the enduring relationships fostered by ISUS, highlighting the role of academic collaboration as a sincere and transparent pathway for strengthening diplomatic ties.

This engagement not only benefits the selected cities but also demonstrates the power of academic initiatives to transform knowledge-sharing into meaningful, long-term international cooperation. (N.J.Nash)

From December 29, 2025 to January 9, 2026, students from MUAP program participated in an 8-day Winter Class designed to support both academic and professional development during the winter break. Although the program was not mandatory, it provided valuable learning opportunities thoughtfully tailored for international students seeking to strengthen their skills beyond the regular semester. The program included Academic Writing Tutoring, Korean language classes, and a special visit to Microsoft Headquarters, where students attended a lecture and explored how Microsoft Office integrates AI tools for academic and professional use.

## MUAP Winter Class



The Winter Class became more than just an additional course, it was an investment in growth. Through one-on-one academic writing tutoring sessions, students refined their thesis-writing skills and prepared more confidently for future internships and research opportunities. Korean language classes offered practical communication skills that increased confidence in everyday interactions, helping students feel more connected to life in Korea.

A highlight of the program was the visit to Microsoft Headquarters, where students gained firsthand insight into the real-world applications of technology and AI, tools that are becoming increasingly essential across disciplines. Witnessing how AI can enhance productivity and innovation left many students inspired and forward-looking. (R.R)



Choosing to spend the winter break developing practical skills rather than simply resting proved both productive and motivating. As shared by Angelica Veloso, activities like the MUAP Winter Class are rare and meaningful, making a genuine difference in supporting students' academic progress and professional readiness beyond the classroom.





With its vibrant coastline, dynamic skyline, and rich cultural atmosphere, Busan offered the perfect setting for learning beyond the classroom. Held from January 4–6, 2026, the MUDSIP Busan Field Trip provided students with a meaningful opportunity to combine academic insight with firsthand urban experience outside Seoul.



Fatima Layme reflected on how the journey began at Haedong Yonggung Temple, where she observed how the temple harmoniously blends into the breathtaking coastal landscape of Busan. The next stop was a small port, where the group boarded a yacht to explore the city from the sea. She described the experience vividly:

*“As it moved forward, the relaxing music and the beautiful sea of Busan merged; between laughter, we danced and watched the immortal sunset as if it were going to last forever. Continued by fireworks that not only illuminated the sky, but also our eyes; and for a moment, time stood still.”*



She also shared her reflection on the visit to Gwangan Bridge Promotion Center and the Busan Metro Promotion Center:

*“It was an enriching experience to visit Gwangan Bridge Monitoring Center, where we learned about the structural design used, the operation, the maintenance, and especially the monitoring, which is essential to ensuring safe infrastructure for the population. At the Busan Metro Monitoring Center, we discovered how the metro has developed over the years into a modern and high-quality system. The technical staff explained the technology behind the metro, as well as how the monitoring center functions, where safety and efficiency are supervised in real time.” (R.R.)*

# Lights Above the Skyline

## A Shared New Year Celebration in Seoul



Welcoming the New Year in Seoul became one of the most unforgettable moments for ISUS students. As midnight approached, many gathered at iconic landmarks such as Dongdaemun Design Plaza (DDP) and Lotte World Tower, joining thousands of people in anticipation of the countdown. Both locations transformed into vibrant celebration

hubs, filled with dazzling light displays, festive performances, and the electric energy of a city ready to turn the page. At DDP, live music and DJ performances amplified the excitement, creating a lively open-air celebration in the heart of Seoul. Meanwhile, Lotte World Tower stood tall against the winter sky, providing a breathtaking backdrop as fireworks illuminated the skyline and marked the arrival of a brand-new year.

The cold air only made the midnight moment feel more powerful, as cheers echoed across the city and strangers embraced like old friends. For many ISUS students, welcoming the New Year in Seoul was more than watching fireworks burst across the sky. It was about standing far from home yet feeling deeply connected, to the city, to the moment, and to one another. As the clock struck midnight, the sparkling skyline reflected not only a new calendar year, but also new hopes, new goals, and the quiet promise of another chapter to be written together. (R.R)





## AI Seoul 2026 The Transformation Era: Beyond Adoption

In 2025, South Korea reaffirmed its ambition to become one of the world's top three AI powerhouses by 2030, designating artificial intelligence (AI) as a core national strategic industry. The government established a coordinated national framework to advance research, infrastructure, and talent development. Its comprehensive National AI Strategy focuses on strengthening high-performance computing, expanding domestic AI semiconductor and software ecosystems, and nurturing a skilled workforce capable of driving both innovation and ethical AI governance (World KBS, 2025). In January this year as most mass media reported, South Korea also became the first country to fully implement a comprehensive, legally binding framework for AI, known as the AI Basic Act.

These priorities were on full display at AI SEOUL 2026: The Transformation Era – Beyond Adoption, held on January 30 at COEX Grand Ballroom. The event brought together global AI leaders and policymakers to explore “the era of transformation beyond adoption,”

showcasing Korea's strategic direction in AI deployment, highlighting international partnerships, and reinforcing Seoul's role as a hub for AI innovation and discourse. For ISUS students, this event provided invaluable exposure, linking their academic studies in urban development, infrastructure, and environmental planning with cutting-edge AI applications. By observing real-world AI deployment and strategic policymaking, students gained firsthand insights into how AI can support sustainable urban strategies, enhance infrastructure planning, and strengthen governance frameworks.

This experience underscores the importance of integrating emerging technologies into graduate education. By bridging theory and practice, ISUS equips students not only to understand current trends but also to contribute meaningfully to AI-driven urban development and policy implementation, preparing the next generation of leaders to navigate a rapidly transforming world. (N.J. Nash)

# Frozen Days, Warm Hearts:

## A Winter Break Full of Adventure and Friendship



Winter in Korea transformed the break into something far more than time off, it became a season of adventure, reflection, and togetherness. The cold air did little to slow anyone down; instead, it brought students closer, encouraging them to step outside and create memories that would warm them long after winter faded. At Ttukseom Hangang Snow Sledding Park, laughter echoed across the snow as friends raced down icy slopes. At Seoul Plaza Ice Rink, hesitant first steps on the ice often turned into confident glides, followed by shared smiles and playful falls that made the moments even more unforgettable.

In quieter corners of the city, winter revealed its gentle beauty. Walking through Eunpyeong Hanok Village, students found peace among snow-covered traditional houses, where time seemed to slow and the scenery felt almost like a painting. For those seeking a challenge, hiking Acha Mountain in the crisp winter air offered not only breathtaking views of the Han River and Seoul skyline, but also a quiet sense of accomplishment at the summit, a reminder that growth often comes from stepping beyond one's comfort zone.

The season also invited students to experience Korea's vibrant winter festivals. Trips to Gangwon Province for the Hwacheon Sancheoneo Ice Festival brought excitement and curiosity, as students tried ice fishing on frozen rivers and enjoyed the festive atmosphere together.

For many, winter felt incomplete without time on the slopes. At Vivaldi Park Ski World, snowy hills became places of courage, excitement, and celebration. Some learned to ski or snowboard for the very first time, standing nervously at the top before gathering the confidence to glide, or ride, downward. The shared adrenaline, the crisp sound of edges cutting across fresh powder, and the comfort of hot drinks afterward created moments that will forever define their winter in Korea.

More than seasonal activities, this winter break became a chapter of connection. In the coldest season, friendships grew warmer. Through shared adventures and quiet reflections, students not only explored Korea's winter, but also strengthened the bonds that will carry them long after the snow has melted. (R.R)



# The Falcon's Shadow JangSan-Gotmae

As a UOS graduate, have you ever paused for a moment in front of the Centennial Memorial Hall or the University Center and felt something quietly powerful? Perhaps it was just a glance through the clear car window as you entered the main gate, yet somehow that symbolic animal standing proudly there stirred a sense of belonging. It is more than prestige. It is a feeling, a gentle rush of pride, even goosebumps as if the university itself is welcoming you home.

In fact, not everyone once understood what the University of Seoul's symbolic animal truly was. As reported by Sim (2020) in *The UOS Times*, the UOS Press found that many people, including students, were not fully aware of the university's mascot due to the absence of a clear visual identity in the past. Yet behind that symbol lies a thoughtful legacy. The mascot is not simply an image; it represents the university's character, history, and aspirations. It reflects the spirit carefully chosen by those who envisioned how UOS should be remembered and represented.



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Let us travel back to where it all began. The symbolic animal, Jangsan-gotmae commonly known as the hawk is often mistaken for an eagle. But it carries its own distinct meaning.

***“Jangsan-gotmae charges confidently toward its target, its fierce eyes reflecting courage and strong determination.”***

Though its claws remain hidden, it is always ready to act and overcome challenges. Its soft yet colorful wings symbolize a spirit that is gentle but resilient, flexible, brave, and always prepared to grow and embrace new possibilities. Originating from Jangsan Cape in North Korea, a place associated with bravery and strength, the Jangsan-gotmae was elected as the university’s symbolic animal in 1989 through a vote by UOS members. Since then, it has represented the university’s forward-looking vision.

In 2018, the 9th President of the University of Seoul, Suh Soon-tak, officially announced the Jangsan-gotmae hawk as the university’s symbolic animal. This recognition was followed by the ‘UOS Jangsan-gotmae Design Contest’ in October 2019. The winning character, created by Jo Ye-rin from the Department of Industrial & Visual Design (Class of ‘17), was selected through votes by UOS members. This moment showed that the mascot was not only an administrative decision but also a reflection of the student voice.

For international graduates, the story of Jangsan-gotmae feels even more meaningful. Studying abroad is never easy. It requires leaving behind family, hometown, and comfort zones. It demands courage, flexibility, and sacrifice. In many ways, the journey mirrors the spirit of the hawk itself.

***“To move forward like the Jangsan-gotmae is to rise with courage, adapt with resilience, and embrace every challenge as a new horizon.”***

As ISUS and UOS graduates, perhaps the symbol standing at the front gate is not just a mascot. It is a reminder of who we are becoming resilient, brave, and always ready to soar toward new possibilities. (N.J. Nash).

# Smart City Cooperation Center

Bridging Innovation  
between South Korea  
and Indonesia

The Smart City Cooperation Center (SCCC) event was initiated by the National Capital City Authority (OIKN) of Indonesia under the Deputy for Green and Digital Transformation, Directorate of Digital Ecosystem Development, and held on 26–27 January 2026 at the IKN Command Center, Nusantara Capital City, Indonesia. The program forms part of the strengthened Indonesia–South Korea cooperation between the University of Seoul (UOS) and Korea’s Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport (MOLIT), aimed at supporting the development of smart and sustainable cities. Serving as a baseline study for bilateral collaboration, the SCCC adopted a living lab approach, directly engaging stakeholders through surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions.



The event featured representatives from South Korea, including Jina Kim (University of Seoul) and Namcheol Baek (Korea Institute of Civil Engineering and Building Technology). Notably, ISUS alumni Myrna Nathania (MUDSIP Cohort 7) from the Ministry of Housing and Settlement Areas and Rizky Rahmayanti (MGLEP Cohort 6) from the Ministry of Public Works participated in the SCCC within their respective professional roles. Their involvement reflects the continued collaboration between UOS and Indonesian government institutions, demonstrating how ISUS academic partnerships translate into real-world cooperation, particularly in integrating smart city concepts into housing, settlement, and national development initiatives. (R.R)



## The Gift of Integration: How Donating Blood Helps Expats Feel at Home

ISUS students from diverse academic programs recently came together to participate in the Blood Donation for Foreigners Campaign at the Hoegi Blood Donation Center. Their willingness to contribute and show solidarity was warmly welcomed by the center, highlighting the strong spirit of volunteerism and community among the ISUS students. For many, the event was more than a donation, it was an opportunity to connect with the local community and feel a sense of belonging in Korea.

The campaign ensured a smooth and supportive experience for participants, providing translator assistance, snacks and drinks, and even a complimentary Lotte Cinema ticket as a token of appreciation. By offering these thoughtful supports, the campaign emphasized inclusivity and encouraged more expatriates to participate in meaningful acts of giving.

Beyond the personal rewards, events like this demonstrate how simple acts of service can foster deeper social connections and help newcomers feel at home in a foreign country. By stepping

forward, ISUS students not only contributed to an important cause but also strengthened the ties between the international community and local residents, embodying a spirit of compassion, integration, and civic engagement.

Those interested in participating in future blood donation events or organizing similar campaigns can make a reservation via email at [donateblood@redcross.or.kr](mailto:donateblood@redcross.or.kr) or visit the Hoegi Blood Donation Center directly at Seoul, Dongdaemun-gu, Hwigyeong-dong 319-13. Naver link:

<https://naver.me/Fhfs7yCb>.

(N.J. Nash)



# Alum of The Month:

## Vanida LUANGTHEPXAYAVONG (MGLEP 4)



Vanida LUANGTHEPXAYAVONG (MGLEP 4) is currently serving as Deputy Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Public Works and Transport of Lao PDR. Since completing the MGLEP program at ISUS, she has advanced through key leadership roles, applying sustainable development and policy expertise to national infrastructure and governance initiatives. Through her continued engagement in Korea–Laos cooperation, including support for ISUS student internships, she remains actively connected to the ISUS community.

**Could you briefly introduce your current role at the Ministry of Public Works and Transport and the main areas you are focusing on in your work today?**

I'm currently a Deputy Permanent Secretary of Ministry of Public Works and Transport of Lao PDR, serve as Secretariat to the Minister and Vice Ministers. In this role, I support strategic coordination, policy monitoring, and institutional management across several key departments.



My responsibilities include advancing digital transformation initiatives in alignment with the national Digital Government Strategic Plan, and ensuring transparent dissemination of ministry information to the public. Also, overseeing implementation monitoring and budget compliance of the Permanent Secretary Office.

I also manage international cooperation, working with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, development partners, and embassies. In addition, I support policy implementation in the Department of Housing and Urban Planning, the Department of Railway, and the Public Works and Transport Institute.

Beyond administrative functions, I coordinate cross-cutting national committees related to gender advancement, human rights, disability and elderly affairs, and AIDS prevention. Ensuring that social inclusion and sustainable development principles are integrated into infrastructure projects is also a key priority in my work.

**Since completing the MGLEP program at ISUS, you have experienced several important career transitions. How did your time at ISUS contribute to your professional growth?**

My time at the ISUS was transformative both academically and personally. Studying in a truly international environment broadened my worldview and strengthened my confidence in engaging with global partners. Interacting with classmates from diverse backgrounds enhanced my intercultural understanding and leadership perspective.



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Academically, ISUS strengthened my analytical thinking and policy development skills. These competencies became especially valuable in my work on landslide management research in northern Laos and in supervising environmental and social safeguard components of national road and riverbank protection projects supported by international donors.

I was able to apply sustainable development principles into practical implementation, designing, monitoring systems, developing compensation frameworks for affected communities, and establishing grievance redress mechanisms to ensure fairness and transparency.

ISUS did not only provide knowledge; it provided confidence, credibility, and a global mindset. These have been essential foundations for my career progression over the past five years.

**We heard that you recently supported a global internship program involving ISUS Korean students. Could you share your reflections on that experience, and your thoughts on how cooperation between Korea and Laos could further evolve in the future?**

Supporting the recent internship program with Korean students was a meaningful experience. It reminded me of my own student days and the strong sense of community at ISUS.

The relationship between Laos and the Republic of Korea has deepened significantly over the past 30 years and is now elevated to a Comprehensive Partnership. Korea remains a key development partner for Laos, particularly in infrastructure, digital transformation, and human resource development.

I believe academic exchange and institutional cooperation will continue to play an important role in strengthening mutual understanding and long-term collaboration between our two countries.

**Lastly, is there any message you would like to share with the ISUS community, including current students and fellow alumni?**

I sincerely thank ISUS and all professors who guided and supported me throughout my academic journey. I remain proud to be part of the ISUS community.

To fellow alumni, our shared experiences continue to connect us wherever we are. Let us maintain our network and support each other's growth.

To current students, embrace every opportunity both inside and outside the classroom. The friendships, challenges, and learning experiences you gain at ISUS will shape your leadership in the years ahead.





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