“My secret was to always surround myself with positive people. I believe with the help and encouragement of others, anything can be achieved.”
Hun Jung Yun traveled half way across the globe to go to college. She had never been to America in her life, but she knew it was where she belonged. Little did she know she would soon make history.

Two PhD’s later, Yun is now an assistant professor of political science at Texas State. While she may miss Korean food and her family, she is sure about one thing: She loves living in the United States.

Her life started humbly 7,000 miles away in Daegu Kyungbook, where she grew up in a traditional South Korean home. Her father ran a construction company and golf course, while her mother stayed home to care for her younger siblings. Yun said she knew from a young age that she was different from her brothers and sisters.

“I always wanted independence when I was young,” she said. “In South Korean culture, women typically stay home and care for their families. My dream was to be president, while my sister dreamed of being a house mom. I knew that I was different; I just didn’t know how to express my individuality. I guess you could say I was the rebellious one.”

After graduating from high school, Yun studied politics for three years in her hometown at Ajou University. She said college was an integral part of her life.

“I never thought about the world outside of South Korea,” Yun said. “My professors exposed me to new ideas and the concept of a globalized world. My secondary education was so homogenized and strict that I had never considered these foreign ideas or explored my individuality. College was really an eye-opening experience.”

Near the end of her junior year in college, Yun received a scholarship that would allow her to travel to the U.S. to complete her undergraduate degree. Although Yun’s parents were apprehensive at first, they eventually agreed to allow her to go.

“My parents were very worried about me traveling alone to a foreign country,” Yun said, “but I knew it was the best thing for me to do. I wanted to prove to myself that I could be independent and do things on my own.”

Yun finished her undergraduate degree at the University of Florida-Gainesville and began her master’s work. She made history there on May 3, 2007, when she became the first person in the university’s history to complete two PhD’s at the same time, defending both dissertations within a month of each other. Her success attracted local media attention and special recognition from the university’s president.

“It wasn’t something I planned in the beginning,” Yun said. “I had a research idea that crossed two different disciplines. My advisors said they thought it was important for me to understand both fields and help fill in some discrepancies between them.”

Yun’s PhD’s are in political science and in journalism and mass communication. Her research is focused on public opinion, geo-politics and political communication related to campaigning. She said studying in a foreign country was not an easy task. Although she had begun to learn English when she was 13, she was not fluent when she arrived in Florida.

“At first I had trouble understanding my professors,” Yun said. “My first semester I would usually understand only about 50-60 percent of what the professor was saying. I would tape my professors and study them when I got home.”

Through perseverance and intensive studying, Yun was able to learn English quickly. By the time she entered graduate school, she was fluent. She said the support she received from her peers motivated her to succeed.

“My secret was to always surround myself with positive people,” Yun said. “I had very supportive family members and faculty members. They always focused on my strengths and never on my weaknesses. I believe with the help and encouragement of others, anything can be achieved.”

During her first semester at Texas State, Yun taught media and public opinion and a graduate seminar in program evaluation. She plans to continue her research in Texas by focusing on minority political communication.

“I want to use some of the resources here in Texas to expand my research,” Yun said. “I would like to focus on political communications in the Hispanic culture. This culture is growing in size and is an increasing segment in political communication.” So far Yun has published four peer-reviewed journal articles, two book chapters and nine encyclopedia entries and has been involved in grant-supported research.