

2020
President Vision

April 2020
President Yoshihisa Baba

2020 Soka University President's Vision

This academic year started with a global crisis caused by the outbreak of the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19). The university attaches its highest priority to the wellbeing and safety of students, faculty, and staff and has taken measures such as cancelling the entrance ceremony and deferring the start of face-to-face class sessions to reduce the spread of COVID-19. We will face and overcome this hardship together with all of you when we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the university's founding on April 2, 2021.

This academic year, Soka University will undergo its second interim assessment for the Top Global University Project. At this time, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the many individuals making steady efforts to achieve the goals of this project. As the final year of the Acceleration Program for University Education Rebuilding (AP) has ended, the university will continue to promote and improve upon its initiatives for active learning and operationalize learning outcomes based on the results of AP to ensure the quality of education.

In terms of research, this is the final year of the Project for Continuous Operation System for Microalgae Production Optimized for Sustainable Tropical Aquaculture (COSMOS) of the Science and Technology Research Partnership for Sustainable Development (SATRPS) program selected by JST-JICA in FY 2015. In addition, the PLANKton Eco-engineering for Environmental and Economic Transformation (PLANE3T) adopted by the Private University Research Branding Project in FY 2017 will continue its operations in Ethiopia, Africa.

In university rankings, Soka University has been highly recognized. It was ranked 4th among Japanese universities in a global ranking that assesses initiatives towards the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. It has risen to 16th place under the category of "Environment" (in the Japanese edition, it is described as "internationality") in the Times Higher Education Japan University Rankings 2019. It is also ranked between 401st – 450th in the QS Asia World University Rankings. I would like to ask faculty, staff, students, and all other concerned individuals to continue their best efforts to enriching education and research at Soka University.

Noteworthy is the great achievements of students from the last academic year similar to previous years. From January 2 to January 3, 2020, the University participated in the Tokyo-Hakone

Intercollegiate Ekiden Road Relay, for the first time in 3 years and the third time overall. Soka University placed 7th in the first half of the race and 9th in the second half. Overall, the University finished 9th and was seeded for the next year's race for the first time in the university's history. This also resulted in an invitation to the Izumo Ekiden Road Relay scheduled to be held this October for the first time. We have high hopes for their greater achievements.

In addition, the Soka University Economics Theory Study Group (working title) won first place in Japan for the 14th time overall and for the third consecutive year at the Economics Record Examination (ERE) University Contest. Moreover, sixteen students passed the national bar examination in 2019, placing Soka University 6th among private universities. Furthermore, seminars from many faculties and departments received excellence awards in a variety of business contests, and students demonstrated their skills and abilities honed in their daily activities at a number of international conferences, competitions, qualification exams, job placements, and communities. I would like to pay tribute to their efforts.

This academic year, we will formulate the Soka University Grand Design Initiative 2030 aiming to become “the university that fosters global citizens who embody value creation” towards the next 50 years. As part of the Soka University 50th Anniversary Commemorative Project announced in April of last year, researchers will be invited from all over the world this fall to participate in the 11th International Academic Symposium on the Philosophy of Daisaku Ikeda and give presentations on the founder's ideas, philosophy, and education.. We will duly implement projects related to the Soka University 50th founding anniversary.

In order to make the year 2020 fulfilling and full of hope as we progress towards the 50th founding anniversary, I would like to conclude my vision for this year by asking all the faculty, staff, and students for their continued support and understanding with the aim of becoming a university that fosters creative global citizens.

1. Academic management

(1) Further efforts to ensure the quality of education

Last academic year, the Internal Quality Assurance Committee was established as an organization to promote a PDCA (Plan, Do, Check, Action) cycle for ensuring the quality of education in cooperation with the IR Office, which analyzes academic data. The university further encourages student

participation in this review and assessment cycle at both a faculty/department level and a university level. Moreover, the university as a whole will implement self-study initiatives this year for the 3rd term accreditation assessment to be conducted next April.

(2) Promote an external evaluation system

The university has conducted external evaluations by individuals affiliated with the university on matters related to the quality of education of the entire university. Starting from this year, the university will establish an external evaluation system inviting representatives from the local community and industries. We will receive an evaluation from a wide perspective regarding the university's education and its Three Policies including the Diploma Policy.

2. Educational strategies

(1) Advancement of data science education

Amid calls for the development of education that integrates arts and sciences in response to Society 5.0, the University established a Data Science minor in the last academic year. Students who enrolled in 2019 are now 2nd year students who can be the first to register for this minor. The University will further develop the program by establishing new courses and by incorporating more courses to be approved in this minor in order to make a full-scale start this academic year.

(2) Enrich the content of new curricula

A combined degree program for the Faculty of Law and the Law School will be starting from this academic year. In the Faculty of Education, programs to foster certified public psychologists and social education coordinators will begin. Both programs have been established to respond to the needs of society. In the Graduate Schools, the Graduate School of Engineering will be transformed into the Graduate School of Science and Engineering, and the Department of Biosciences will be launched enabling students to obtain a Master's Degree and Doctoral Degree in Science.

(3) Continuation and Further Development of the Acceleration Program (AP)

The Acceleration Program for University Education Rebuilding, which ended last year, will be continued and further developed. In AP, students review and self-evaluate their learning. Based on these reviews, faculty members will improve their classes, and faculties and departments will prepare and implement action plans to improve their curricula. In addition, teaching portfolios by faculty members will be promoted and advanced.

(4) Initiatives to improve students' writing skill

Academic Writing courses for freshmen should be further continued and improved for the sake of successful academic writing for reports and graduation thesis papers in the following years. In order to achieve this, measures will be taken such as improving the problem-setting and assessment methods for such reports and enriching the coursework in the Junior Paper.

(5) Admissions Reform

This is the first year to implement a new admissions system, including the implementation of the Common Test for University Admissions. In response to a multifaceted comprehensive evaluation required by the new system, and as indicated through a series of discussions in the university, we will adopt a method to assess whether students are independent learners in all entrance examinations. Open-ended questions on written tests is one of the initiatives to assess students' logical thinking and self-expression skills for the university to seek individuals who conform to its new Admissions Policy.

3. Research activities

(1) Strengthen research infrastructure

With the aim of verifying research resources and widely disseminating research activities outside the University, we will further promote the storing and sharing of research data by researchers on Research map, a research data sharing platform operated by the government. To enhance the research environment, we will consider more efficient ways to utilize a grant for indirect expenses provided upon the receipt of public research funds, etc. In addition, we will take measures for researchers to secure time for research by simplifying the internal administrative procedures and improving the internal research promotion system.

(2) Enhance the support system for acquiring competitive grants

To increase the number of research projects selected and the amount of competitive grants received, including Grants-in-Aid for Scientific Research (KAKENHI), we will enhance the support system for young and foreign researchers, and provide more support when filing applications for large-scale research categories. We will also enhance individual consultations for researchers based on an analysis of acceptance results in past cases.

(3) Improve international competitiveness

The university offers lectures on “How to Write Papers in English”, and the “Fund for Editing, Translating, and Article Processing Charge” to researchers with the aim of increasing the number of internationally-recognized academic papers. We will review the effects of this and other initiatives to make further improvements. In addition, we will consider measures to improve the attitude within the University towards writing international academic papers. Furthermore, we will accelerate the number of research projects carried out across the world to share the benefits of the research results.

(4) Prioritize research fields

We will establish a system to offer prioritized support for the research fields and themes in which the university excels strength. We will also prepare a mechanism to develop research themes directed towards the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

(5) To promote sound research activities

In order to enhance research ethics and to prevent fraudulent research activities or unauthorized use of research funds, we will review the current operation of research ethics education and compliance education, and implement effective initiatives using e-learning materials, etc. We will establish a course to teach research ethics in order for graduate students to thoroughly develop ethical minds for research.

(6) Promote research on the founder’s ideas and practices and on Soka education

Taking the opportunity to rename the Soka Education Research Institute to the Daisaku Ikeda Commemorative Institute for Soka Education Research (working title), we will establish a global hub to widely promote the founder’s ideas and practices as well as Soka education in the academic arena. In the fall of 2020, the university will hold the 11th International Academic Symposium on the Philosophy of Daisaku Ikeda to commemorate the founding of the Daisaku Ikeda Commemorative Institute for Soka Education Research. We will systematically collect, organize, and store the founder’s ideas and practices as well as the applications of Soka Education enabling them to be utilized as research materials.

4. Expand student support

(1) New scholarship programs

A new academic support system at the higher education level will be introduced by the government from 2020 in the form of economic support for students in tax-exempt and equivalent households. Students who are eligible for the University's scholarship programs are expected to be eligible to receive support from this new government system. The University will develop a new scholarship program to provide economic support to ineligible students. The scholarship programs for international students will continue as usual so as to promote an environment where they can learn without any worries.

(2) Further expansion of student dormitories

The domestic and international students' combined dormitory Sunflower Hall (for 40 female students) will open in 2020. There will be a total of four dormitories where Japanese and international students can deepen their mutual understanding by living together and becoming people who will be successful in global society. Other combined dormitories include Takiyama International Dormitory (400 male students), Manyo International Dormitory (144 female students) and Soshun Dormitory (100 female students). In the domestic and international student dormitories, a Resident Assistant (RA) system has been introduced, and the number of applicants for RA positions is double the quota every year. The RAs are putting their efforts into supporting the daily life and learning of freshman and international students. For other dormitories, we will utilize an instructor- and staff-led dormitory advisor system and aim to further expand support for daily life and learning.

(3) Offering appropriate support for and preparation of the needed environment for students with disabilities

The University has made efforts to provide learning and student life support to students with disabilities, including offering note-taking services and making a barrier-free campus. In 2020, we will 1. establish the Committee to Examine Support for Students with Disabilities, 2. create support policies for students with disabilities, and guidelines for appropriate instructor and staff responses, 3. clarify the flow of support, 4. prepare an environment where students can freely consult on necessary matters, and 5. provide more appropriate support for students with disabilities.

(4) Expand career support

In order to respond to internships that are starting earlier, the timing of offering the Career Vision II course was changed to the first semester in the junior year. In 2020, we will provide more detailed

support for job hunting at an earlier stage by further expanding the number of classes offered per week from 3 to 7 and by optimizing the number of students per class. Also, we will initiate the expansion of services by utilizing IT, such as offering online appointments for consultations, with the aim of promoting the effective use of the Career Center by students.

(5) Further expansion of career support to international students

Last year, the University worked to provide career support to international students, such as offering special career courses for them, and summer internships both in Japanese and English. In 2020, with the aim of further developing foreign students' outlook towards employment and the ability to find employment in Japan, the University will offer short, intensive problem-solving internships in a tie up with private companies during the summer break.

5. Global strategies

(1) Towards the second interim evaluation of the Top Global University Project

Although the target figures were expected to be mostly achievable for the second interim evaluation through the university-wide initiatives led by the Global Core Center, the status of dispatching and accepting students changed due to the novel coronavirus infections around the world. However, through managing this crisis, it can also be said that it is now the time to deeply realize the fact that the governance of the university responding to the various issues arising due to globalization, is being evaluated. We will increase awareness of the issues among instructors, staff and students, and address these issues. I would like to express my deepest sympathy to the people who have been affected by this disease all around the world. I hope the novel coronavirus outbreak will be brought under control as soon as possible.

We will pay attention to the fact that the interim evaluation will be conducted to “evaluate in relation to the initial outcome of the university’s logic model; a model which systematically illustrates the hypothesis of the causal correlation with the achievement of each university’s concept (business purpose),” and will report the results of the university’s efforts based on outcomes such as “how the study abroad experience is reflected in the learning outcomes.”

(2) Outcome of learning from study abroad experience (BEVI-j)

BEVI-j is a measurement to evaluate the study abroad experience and its full-fledged use will begin this year. Before and after each program of long-term study abroad, short-term study abroad,

internship and volunteer experience a test will be conducted. The data will be collected and analyzed to create better study abroad programs.

(3) Initiatives related to SDGs and the “THE University Impact Rankings”

Achieving the ranking of 101-200 in the world for “THE University Impact Rankings 2019” is recognized as one of the key results of SDGs efforts driving globalization. Initiatives at the “Soka University SDGs Promotion Center”, launched last year, are now evolving into university-wide initiatives with the participation of students. We welcome all of the students' active participation in initiatives such as the reduction of plastic and paper waste, which will help contribute to the development of global citizens who act to solve problems on a global scale.

(4) Formulate global strategies in relation to the Soka University 50th Anniversary Commemorative Project

Regarding the Soka University 50th Anniversary Commemorative Project, related projects such as to “establish a hub for global citizenship education” will be announced, and donations for these projects will be solicited from April 2020. Under the umbrella of this donation project, a portion of the donations will be allocated to establish a fund for the Top Global University Project in order to prepare a financial foundation for the self-operation of the project. I would like to extend my gratitude to everyone who has greatly contributed to the Top Global University Project, including the Soyukai (alumni association) and Kaiyukai (parents/family members of Soka University students or graduates) nationwide, and we will continue to faithfully meet their expectations.

6. Correspondence Education Division Initiatives

(1) Expand online courses

Twelve new online “media class (on-demand) courses” will be added this year, bringing the total to 32 courses that are mainly specialized courses in the Faculties of Economics, Law, and Education. Through this, credits required for graduation can be acquired through online classes in the above-mentioned faculties.

In addition, these classes can be taken using a smartphone or tablet, including the final exam. Online classes (classroom schooling) will provide an easier-to-learn environment using subtitles in some courses.

(2) Offer online guidance sessions

Guidance sessions for freshman orientation, course registration, etc. will be offered online, enabling students to attend from anywhere such sessions that were previously held far from their homes. Attendance will be possible using a smartphone or tablet as long as the internet is available, and the ability to have interactive questions and answers will also be possible. We hope that freshman students with learning-related concerns will utilize this online guidance.

(3) Acquire the qualification of social educator

We will make it possible to acquire the qualification of “social educator,” which has been newly established with the hope of playing a role in social education activities not only within the government but also at NPOs, private companies and local communities. This can be acquired together with the qualification for social education supervisor, so there will be significantly more opportunities to find success.

(4) Expand support for learning sessions in each prefecture

The university has been working on establishing and expanding learning environments where students can learn from home by utilizing ICT. As a place to have “exchanges with other students,” which is one of the attractions of learning in the Correspondence Education Division of the University, initiatives to support learning sessions by the “Koyukai,” student organization in each prefecture will be enhanced. The University will improve the environment where students can learn while making new friends, improving themselves through mutual competition and encouraging each other, without making students feel alone, which is a tendency of learning independently in a correspondence course.

