

Greetings from the President to Current Students

With the start of the new academic year, I have a message that I would like to convey to students at Saitama University.

Although it was for the sake of preventing the spread of COVID-19 infections, I deeply regret that we had to impose various inconveniences as well as anxious circumstances on you during the last academic year, including prohibiting nonessential entry to the university campus and adopting online, remote classes. In particular, it was heartbreaking that we were unable to carry out an entrance ceremony for those of you who have just become sophomores.

For the 2021 academic year, our policy is to increase in-person classes as much as possible. During the first semester (first term and second term), 50 percent or more of the classes will be carried out as in-person classes. This will include hybrid-flexible (HyFlex) courses, which will offer in-person and remote class participation at the same time.

However, as you are aware, we are still not seeing COVID-19 infections being contained in the Tokyo metropolitan area at present, and there are even concerns of the arrival of a fourth wave. In regard to in-person classes, we will be adopting measures to prevent the spread of infections, including the following: 1. Wearing face masks, 2. Sitting at a distance from each other in class, 3. Ventilating the classroom, etc., periodically, 4. Disinfecting the area around where students sit, 5. Introducing a seating location confirmation system (through an app that we will ask each student to register on their smartphones) that will enable a prompt grasp of the students who were seated near another student should that student be confirmed as being infected with COVID-19. I ask for your cooperation with these measures.

Furthermore, we will permit extracurricular activities on and off campus, although with conditions. However, because we have confirmed infection even at our university through activities held in a closed space with poor ventilation, please make sure that you also take sufficient preventive measures, not only by avoiding the Three Cs but also by ensuring the adequate ventilation of the location where the activity is held, avoiding circumstances in which you vocalize close to each other, and so on. I would also like to ask you to strictly refrain from eating or drinking as a group before or after the extracurricular activity. I ask again that you execute the infection prevention measures that have been established by Saitama University so that we can ensure the safety of you, your families, and the people of the community as well as prevent infection clusters from arising at SU.

There have been attempts from before to boost educational effectiveness by combining remote and in-person classes, such as through flipped classrooms but there had been almost no such attempts actually being made at our university. During the last academic year, however, circumstances forced us to prohibit entry to the university campus, and we were pushed into adopting remote classes. In the beginning, there were many things that sometimes confused not only students but also teachers due to an unfamiliarity with the equipment being used. However, with your cooperation and after making various tweaks, we were able to carry out the lectures much more smoothly than initially thought. During the process, we began seeing that there were different advantages to remote classes as compared to in-person lectures. Discussions in small groups became possible through utilization of the breakout room, and asking questions became easier using the chat function. Our questionnaire survey showed that 70 percent of students evaluate remote classes in a positive light. Going forward, we will probably be considering new class formats that incorporate the advantages of both in-person and remote classes. Meanwhile, it is said that the various measures taken to stop the spread of COVID-19 or to lessen its impact on society have accelerated a transformation, which had not been progressing before this, by ten years. While the COVID-19 pandemic will be leaving many negative legacies, it will also be creating new movements. Let's adopt the attitude of "taking everything to good account" and live the post-pandemic age robustly.

Lastly, one of the characteristics of COVID-19 is that healthy youths are often asymptomatic even if infected with SARS-CoV-2. The possibility of their unknowingly spreading the infection to friends, the elderly, and people with pre-existing conditions has been pointed out. I ask SU students to remain acutely aware of this and think foremost of not becoming infected themselves and not infecting others. Please behave with moderation.

The 1918 influenza pandemic (Spanish flu) raged the world and caused enormous damage in the past. Today, it is a commonplace influenza. The COVID-19 pandemic that is now raging will most certainly end through the wisdom and efforts of humans. Inconvenient times will most likely continue for a while longer, but let's start the new academic year with hope in our hearts.

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