

President's Message to All SU Students at the Start of the New Academic Year

AY2022 has begun. I believe that all of you—the approximately 8,500 students at our university, from undergraduate students to graduate students—have your own respective feelings about the new academic year.

Over these past two years, we have continually been at the mercy of the ebb and flow of COVID-19 infections. I think that it became normal for university classes to be taught remotely, and you were unable to do extracurricular activities in the way that you had hoped. More than anything, I am deeply sorry that we were forced to limit the opportunities you had to grow closer to your peers and your teachers. However, we have been able to keep the percentage of infected persons at our school lower than the percentage of infected persons in the community. I would like to take this time to thank all of you for your understanding and cooperation.

Recently, the pre-emergency measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 have been lifted, and the sixth wave of infections has gradually begun to settle down. In general, we will conduct face-to-face classes from April. We will also resume extracurricular activities, although there will be conditions, such as asking students to refrain from holding mixers. The graduation ceremony at the end of the previous academic year was held at the Saitama Super Arena, and for the first time in three years, more than 2,000 students and parents were able to come together for the ceremony. In this way, while we have been moving at a slow pace, I would like us to return the university to the way it used to be.

However, although the COVID-19 infection situation is starting to settle down, in addition to the possibility that the Omicron BA.2 variant will spread or that new variants will appear, we must consider that the infection situation may get worse again. The university will constantly monitor the internal infection situation and respond appropriately. We will post information about the state of infections and each type of response on the university website, so please check it regularly.

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed our lives and inconvenienced us in various ways. I would like to provide some hints on how to cope with such a situation, by quoting some parts of the address I will give at the welcome ceremony for incoming students.

Looking back on my own life, there have been several times when I have been caught up in situations over which I had no control. Over the course of a long life, you have to consider that you will encounter situations that can be described as unfair, such as the current pandemic. At the same time, it is important that you develop the ability to recover from those situations. The word “resilience,” which

expresses “the ability to recover” and “adaptability,” has often been used in recent years. In the field of psychology, resilience means a mindset for overcoming various obstacles and recovering from crises. Now, I believe that a time has come for us when we must build resilience to recover from the damage we suffered due to COVID-19 at both an individual and societal level. The American Psychological Association, listing things which are important for overcoming life's unexpected obstacles, mentions “building connections,” “finding purpose,” and “fostering wellness,” as well as “asking others for help.”

Going forward in your student life, you need to have the resilience and flexible strength to consider what you can do in the face of unfair situations and conflicts, and work on those things. At the same time, it is necessary to ask others for help depending on the circumstances. At Saitama University, the Office of Advising Services and Health Service Center, as well as the faculty members at the Faculties and Graduate Schools, are ready to talk with you. If you have any problems, please do not hesitate to contact us.

If we look at cases in the past, the COVID-19 pandemic will surely come to an end. I think the age of living with COVID-19 will continue for a little longer, but let us have hope and continue moving forward. We, the faculty and staff members of Saitama University, will support you to the fullest.

I would like to offer messages to each grade level below.

[For students in their final year]

This academic year—your last year as a university student—I think that each of you is thinking about what path you will take after graduation. I believe that those of you who would like to get a job are considering how to deal with online company information sessions and interviews. The Student Affairs Section has a great deal of knowledge about support for your job search, as well as information about companies, so if you don't know something or you feel uneasy about something, feel free to ask a staff member or an employment counselor. In addition, those of you who will go on to graduate school are beginning to study in preparation for the tests that will be held from the summer through the fall. There are various restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but I hope that you will think hard about your path going forward, and do your best to face the future head-on.

[For new second-year and third-year students]

For new second-year and third-year students, since the spread of COVID-19 has been happening since your admission to Saitama University, amidst the pandemic, you have still been unable to enjoy university life as it was before, with a ban on entering campus grounds, classes conducted remotely,

and restrictions on extracurricular activities. The entrance ceremony was cancelled, and you may not have been able to get chances to become familiar with your classmates in the same department or major. In addition, some people may not get a sense that they have really enrolled in university. Therefore, although it is a year or two late, we have decided to hold a welcome ceremony for new second-year and third-year students after the entrance ceremony for new students, in order to congratulate you once again on your admission to Saitama University, and so that you will feel that you have truly been admitted to the university. The ceremony will be held at the Saitama Super Arena, with social distancing measures in place. Family members may also enter the venue freely, so we hope that they will attend as well.

[For new students]

I think that our new students have been at the mercy of the spread of COVID-19 since their high school days. I am sure that you must have felt nervous and impatient, especially since the sixth wave, which was the largest outbreak of infections during the COVID-19 pandemic, fell during the entrance exam period. I would like to express my respect to you for your unrelenting efforts to enter Saitama University amidst those circumstances. Normally, in April, the campus would be abuzz with activity, such as recruitment for clubs and club activities. However, since the COVID-19 infection situation has not yet completely settled down, this year, the new semester will once again have a variety of restrictions. Nevertheless, as I said previously, we will gradually return the campus to the way it used to be. I hope that you will devote yourself to your studies, and also take advantage of various opportunities to make friends.

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Sakai Takafumi
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