

Greetings from the President to Newly Enrolled Students

Congratulations on entering Saitama University. I and the faculty are very pleased to welcome you to SU.

During the last academic year, not only were your lives and study environment greatly impacted by the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, including the need to stay at home and temporary school closings, there was also confusion related to the introduction of the unified university entrance exam and entrance examination reform. It must have been an anxious time for you. I applaud your efforts to overcome such difficulties and dedicate yourself to studies, resulting in your enrollment to SU.

At present, we are still seeing any containment of infections in the Tokyo metropolitan area, with the number of new daily infections remaining at a high level. With Saitama University located in the Tokyo metropolitan area, from the aspect of protecting the safety and health of new students, their families, and people of the community, we had no choice but to cancel the university entrance ceremony. For newly enrolling students and their guardians, a university entrance ceremony celebrates and marks the beginning of university life. For this reason, it is indeed disappointing that we could not hold the ceremony. However, I hope that you will understand that it was a decision taken to protect lives and people's health by preventing the spread of infection.

A video of the message that I had hoped to convey to you directly at the entrance ceremony will be distributed online. In the address, I primarily talk about the "Cultured learning" that is an important part of university studies. In it, I speak of how 1. Cultured learning is needed in order to respond creatively to major transformations of society of the future, 2. University studies require that you discover issues on your own, make the most of your creativity, and reach after the truth through issue resolution, and the ability to resolve issues that were gained through the process is also a part of learning, and 3. Learning is not only acquired by obtaining knowledge but also through the process of thinking on the basis of acquired knowledge, digesting the knowledge in one's own way, and making it one's own. I hope that each of you can watch the video and think about my words.

After implementing measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19, 50 percent or more of the classes carried out during the first semester (first term and second term) of the 2021 academic year, will be in the form of in-person classes. This will include hybrid-flexible (HyFlex) courses, which will offer in-person and remote class participation at the same time. Preventive measures taken for in-person classes will include 1. Wearing face masks, 2. Sitting at a distance from each other, 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 a student be confirmed as being infected with COVID-19. I ask each one of you for your cooperation with these measures when participating in in-person classes while also taking note of the dos and don'ts.

Being in a new environment and lacking familiarity with the workings of SU, there may be matters that confuse new students. We will take various response to help give you a smooth start to your life as a student of SU. If you experience any problems or there are any things that are not clear to you, please do not hesitate to ask a faculty member or consult the Counseling Room for all matters “Nandemo Sodan Shitsu” on campus. We faculty will do everything that we can to support you.

As you know, one of the characteristics of COVID-19 is that there are many infected persons who are asymptomatic and experience almost no symptoms of COVID-19. This is often seen among healthy youths, and since they experience no symptoms, the possibility of their unknowingly spreading the infection to friends, the elderly, and people with pre-existing conditions has been pointed out. I ask our new students to remain acutely aware of this and think foremost of not becoming infected and not infecting others. Please behave with moderation.

The 1918 influenza pandemic (Spanish flu) raged the world and caused enormous damage in the past, but history has shown us that the pandemic ended. The COVID-19 pandemic that is now raging will most certainly be contained 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.

April 6, 2021

Takafumi Sakai, President, Saitama University