

## A Message to new students

I, Takafumi Sakai, am honored to introduce myself as the new president of Saitama University. As President, I would like to send a message to all of our new students.

First of all, congratulations on your admission to Saitama University. I am sure you have various aspirations and anxieties as you begin your new life. We, the faculty members and staff, sincerely welcome you to the university and are committed to supporting you in your future studies.

I was willing to tell you at the entrance ceremony about the significance of studying at university. However, as a result of the global outbreak of the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19), we have had to give up holding this year's ceremony. Although, the entrance ceremony serves not only as the entrance to university life, but also a time of fresh resolve for new students, after careful consideration of the national infectious disease control policy and the spread of the infection, we have decided to cancel the ceremony in order to protect the health and safety of our new students and the university community. It is with deep regret to decide the cancellation of this important ceremony when thinking about the feelings of new students and their families, we hope you would understand this decision as positive action to end this pandemic.

For the above reasons, classes have been postponed for two weeks and will start on April 27. All lectures will be conducted via remote learning, and preparations are underway. The orientation given before the start of classes will also be conducted using video streams. Please set up your internet environment in order to view them. In addition, medical examinations, tests, and various information sessions for new students will be postponed or canceled. Details will be announced on the university website, so please make sure to check.

You may feel unsettled or anxious in a new environment without an understanding of how the university works. In order to ensure that you have a smooth start to your university life, our faculty members will contact new students directly by phone. If you have any concerns or questions, please ask them anything. The Q& A Chatbot is also available.

We would like to make a request to you. One of the characteristics of the novel coronavirus disease is that there are many of the infected people show few symptoms. I particularly want to emphasize that this asymptomatic infection is more prevalent among healthy young people. Because they show almost no symptoms, they are prone to go out thoughtlessly, and this is one of the reasons behind the spread of the infection. Now, we are at a critical moment whether we can avoid a mass outbreak or not. If mass outbreak occurs, the healthcare system will collapse, and many people will die who could have been saved under normal

circumstances. In addition, there have also been many reports recently of infected young people becoming seriously ill. I strongly urge all new students to take this situation seriously and act in a sensible manner, making it your first priority to avoid becoming infected or infecting other people. This includes not going to places where large groups of people gather and not moving around for any unnecessary reasons.

Now, as a new student, you may be surprised that unlike high school, studying at university requires a great deal of initiative. At high school, students follow the goals and contents of their respective subjects as set down in the curriculum guidelines. On the other hand, university studies are designed to students discover problems on their own, use their creativity to solve problems, pursue the truth, and develop their attitudes and abilities. This also leads to disciplining oneself and thinking about one's own way of life. However, in order to reach that point, you must first acquire the knowledge and wisdom that others have built up before you. There is a favorite motto of mine that I often used to tell the students about in my laboratory. It is a passage from the Analects of Confucius and can be translated as “learning without thinking is a waste, thinking without learning is useless.” This refers to the importance of learning and thinking for oneself. Without both of these things, you will not be able to put your knowledge to use, or you will become stuck in your own way of thinking. In order to learn, it is necessary for learning to have an open mind and humility, as well as solitary time to think. I hope you will keep in mind the importance of thinking while learning and thinking while learning as you begin your studies at university. A list of books recommended by faculty members for Saitama University students to read has been posted on the website. With the postponement of the start of classes, I encourage you to use the free time you have now to read and reflect on those books following-our interests.

I am sure that you will experience a lot during the life that you are about to embark on. Each moment will nurture your zest for life and make your life colorful. I sincerely hope that you have an enjoyable and enriching time as a student.

The coronavirus disease that is now running rampant will be brought under control through human wisdom and cooperation, as infectious diseases prevalent in the past. Although this inconvenience will continue for some time, I believe that you can keep your hope and start your university life. We, the university’s faculty member and staff, will do our best to support you.

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Takafumi Sakai, Ph.D.

President, Saitama University