

President's Message to All SU Students at the Start of the New Academic Year 2024

Last summer saw record-breaking heat, and the unstable weather continued into winter, alternating between mild temperatures and cold waves. Finally, as April arrives, we begin to feel the arrival of spring. This year's entrance ceremony has concluded successfully, and we are delighted to welcome many new students to our campus. Following the reclassification of COVID-19 under level 5 in May last year, this marks the first academic year in five years without constraints. With a fresh start, we eagerly anticipate students returning to campus, lectures beginning, and the commencement of club and extracurricular activities as the new semester begins.

Now, as we embark upon the new academic year, I would like to extend the following five messages to all students.

(1) The Use of Generative AI

The emergence of Generative AI, exemplified by ChatGPT released in 2022, has had a profound impact on society. Because of the emergence of misinformation, dubbed as "hallucinations," it is crucial to exercise caution in its utilization. However, it is also a fact that by crafting thoughtful prompts, valuable insights can be extracted. Recently, following ChatGPT, we've witnessed the release of Gemini (formerly Bard), Claude, and others, intensifying competition among Generative AIs. The advancements made in the past year are truly remarkable. In response to this evolving landscape, our university has formulated guidelines for the use of Generative AI, disseminating them to all. However, here, I wish to reiterate a word of caution regarding its usage.

Students are expected to cultivate not only knowledge acquisition but also (1) abstract thinking skills to comprehend complex concepts, (2) logical thinking skills to structure their thoughts coherently, (3) critical thinking skills to analyze problems discerningly, and (4) creative thinking skills to generate novel ideas. In essence, it is vital to nurture the ability to think independently and generate new insights—a skill crucial for navigating the rapidly changing and uncertain world ahead, commonly referred to as "intellectual acumen."

To achieve this, diligent study and the accumulation of thoughtful reflections, even if seemingly circuitous, are imperative. Relying on Generative AI out of convenience or laziness, thereby abandoning critical thinking, risks squandering opportunities to enhance one's own abilities. Understand that Generative AI is a double-edged sword for students who have much to learn. I urge you to reflect once again on the essence of learning at university and to ingeniously utilize Generative AI to enhance your own thinking abilities. Always remember, "There's no royal road to learning," and consider Generative AI with this in mind.

(2) Challenge Support Project

Recently, I have heard that many students aspire to start new activities with friends or groups or aim to embark on entrepreneurship. In order to support such students, we are launching the Challenge Support Project for students. This initiative will allocate budget to projects conceived by our students, which

may include activities that anticipate future trends, innovative product development, research-based recommendations, or preparations for entrepreneurship, among others. We will evaluate and select ideas submitted by new groups or individuals that do not come from clubs and extracurricular activities. Applications will be accepted starting from May, so students with ideas are encouraged to prepare and apply. We look forward to the participation of many students.

(3) Please actively participate in new lectures.

As I introduced last academic year, there are project-based classes offered as active learning courses. These classes involve discussions in small groups and field surveys conducted jointly with professionals from companies, aimed at proposing solutions to social issues. Such classes, akin to on-the-job training, also provide an opportunity to connect with students from other departments. We encourage you to proactively enroll in these and other active learning courses.

Furthermore, under the comprehensive collaboration agreement with Saitama Medical University, extracurricular learning programs are conducted where faculty members from each university lecture and conduct practical sessions on topics of mutual interest. Although these programs do not offer credits, they encompass a wide range of intriguing subjects from general education to specialized areas. Additionally, starting from last year, a credit exchange system has been established with Saitama Prefectural University. Despite geographical constraints, classes related to health and medicine, not available at our university, are being offered. If you are interested in these topics, we strongly encourage you to consider enrolling in these classes.

(4) Student Support

As you may be aware, the legal age of adulthood was lowered to 18 years of age on April 1, 2022. While this change has made it advantageous for obtaining licenses and qualifications, it has also removed the right of guardians to cancel contracts made by minors, raising concerns about the potential increase in consumer exploitation, such as scams. When entering into contracts, we warn all students to exercise caution and careful consideration. Additionally, there is a growing trend of illicit employment opportunities, including through social media. Rather than being swayed by the promise of quick earnings, always prioritize your safety and be vigilant in protecting yourself as an adult.

On the other hand, the operation of the Saitama University Shogai Gakusei Shienshitsu (This office actively promotes reasonable accommodation for students with academic concerns, as well as for their parents and guardians) began last academic year. Collaborating with the Student Counseling Room, the Office of Advising Services for International Students (OASIS) and Health Service Center, this office provides comprehensive support tailored to students' needs. Life presents various challenges, and while it is essential to confront them with resilience, it is equally important to remember that seeking assistance through consultation when needed is not a sign of weakness. If you encounter any difficulties, please do not hesitate to reach out to these support channels or to consult with faculty members in your department

or graduate school.

(5) Closing Statement

In addition to the initiatives mentioned earlier, Saitama University offers a variety of unique lectures and programs, such as those provided by the Diversity Promotion Center and the GY Program. Moreover, there are many students who excel in activities such as studying abroad, serving as Student Public Relations Supporters, and participating in club and circle activities. The university provides a platform where a wide range of activities are available for those who seek them. Alongside your daily studies, I encourage you to explore and participate in activities that align with your interests and passions. It is from these experiences that new discoveries and insights will emerge. I sincerely hope that this year will be meaningful and transformative for all students, fostering further growth and development.

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