

Dear GLA Students and Families:

Throughout the spring, faculty and staff across the Ritsumeikan University have worked together to plan for Fall 2020. We announce today that all courses offered in Fall 2020 by the College of Global Liberal Arts will continue to be online. While the Australian National University in Canberra is conducting hybrid model, all ANU courses to be taught on OIC in the Fall semester will also remain online.

The rationale is as follows:

1. Travel restrictions continue to remain uncertain, and as a program where the majority of students must travel from outside of Japan, planning for a timely arrival by the time the semester begins would incur significant mental and financial costs to students and families. Given the issue arising with visa processing delay, as a global program, we must offer a decision early rather than take a wait-and-see approach until September so that you and your family can plan for the Fall semester and your summer travel schedule.
2. Besides, as the current university-wide decision about the Fall 2020 semester stands, if the Business Continuity Planning (BCP) level were to reach level 3 by the end of August *all courses must automatically switch to online teaching. The same applies even after the semester commences* (Ritsumeikan University Academic Affairs Council Emergency Meeting 07.27.2020).
3. The availability of vaccines cannot be expected by the time the fall semester commences.

We at GLA have deliberated on both the benefit and risk of going hybrid as opposed to keeping all courses online. Even if we were to pursue hybrid teaching, all teachings must immediately switch to online teaching at any moment. Weighing the uncertainty of travel restrictions, the unpredictability of whether the current trend towards border control relaxation will continue or not, and the need to first and foremost protect the safety of our students, staffs, faculties, and the community have resulted in the unanimous decision at the faculty meeting on July 7th to keep all teachings online.

Dual Degree Program with the Australian National University

As a Dual Degree Program, many of you have expressed concerns about what will happen with the travel to Australia. As of now, the border remains closed, and the leadership at GLA and BAPA (Bachelor of Arts in Pacific Affairs) are coordinating closely while monitoring the situation. The decision as to whether Cohort A students can travel to ANU in Spring 2021 will be announced at the end of October 2020.

ANU courses for Fall 2020 will continue to also be taught online.

Below is a message from Convenor Dr. Hobson with regards to ANU

At present, both Australian and Japanese borders remain closed, and ANU travel is not approved. Governments are in negotiations about relaxing border restrictions and we are hoping the situation will improve, so that it will be possible for you to travel as scheduled in 2021. Yet there still remains a high level of uncertainty and ongoing disruption due to COVID-19. Given this, we are currently planning for different possible scenarios and working through various options that will allow you to continue your studies with minimal disruption and graduate on time. We are doing this in close consultation with our partners at Ritsumeikan University.

We plan to make a final decision about travel for first semester 2021 by the end of October 2020. While ANU has already decided to cancel summer and semester 1 2021 exchange programs, BAPA does not fall under the same requirements and so we have more time for making a final decision. Waiting until end of October gives us time to continue monitoring the situation and hopefully for borders to re-open. If travel is possible, there will still be sufficient time for making the necessary visa and travel arrangements. And if, unfortunately, it is still not possible to travel, you will know far enough in advance to make arrangements for 2021. In the interim, we will keep you updated with any further developments. If you have any outstanding questions, please get in touch. I am always available for Zoom consultations and happy to make time to talk.

This has been a very challenging year, and we have been impressed with how you have all responded. We will continue to help support you with your studies and look forward to things returning to normal in the future.

No college can eliminate the risk in its entirety. The past few months have posed a significant challenge to the program in sustaining academic continuity while also ensuring the safety of our students, staff, faculty, and the community. We will continue to monitor the situation of the global pandemic closely and strive to minimize any academic disruption within the means available.

We thank you for your understanding and cooperation.