

Joint Statement from ANU College of Asia and the Pacific and RU College of Global Liberal Arts

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic continues to cause widespread disruption and uncertainty. As countries have tried to gain control, borders have stayed closed and travel is greatly reduced. Other common measures have included lockdowns, restriction on large gatherings, and encouraging working and studying from home. This unique situation has unavoidably had ramifications for our dual degree program. As we have been moving through this unprecedented time, our focus has been on ensuring that students are able to continue with their studies with minimal disruption.

At the heart of the dual degree program is the academic and personal exchange that comes from students from different countries joining together for classes and activities on campus in Japan and Australia. We are disappointed that the pandemic has prevented us from holding classes in-person and has restricted the ability of our students and faculty to travel. During this pandemic, it is necessary for institutions to take into account the needs of their students, whilst also being socially responsible and acting in ways that will limit the further spread of the COVID-19 virus.

We are aware that students may be wondering whether it will be possible to travel as planned in 2021. We hope that this can happen, while acknowledging that if border restrictions continue, then it may not be possible. Governments are in negotiations about relaxing border restrictions. We are monitoring the situation closely and hoping it will improve. To help manage this uncertainty, we have announced that we plan to make a final decision about travel for first semester (Spring) 2021 by the end of October 2020. This allows time for borders to re-open, and if not, there is ample time to make alternate arrangements.

Recognising this difficult situation, the College of Global Liberal Arts, Ritsumeikan University and the Coral Bell School of Asia Pacific Affairs, The Australian National University clearly affirm the following points:

- Our commitment to continue the full provision of the dual degree program. Even if travel restrictions continue, students will be able to take courses online from both institutions so that it will not impact the issuing of degrees by both universities. This remains dependent on students successfully fulfilling the original degree requirements.
- We will continue to collaborate closely to ensure the resumption of in-person classes for the dual degree program as soon as possible, whilst taking into account health and safety concerns of students, staff, faculty and the broader community.
- We are currently planning for different possible scenarios in case disruptions persist. In doing so, we are working through various options that recognize diverse student needs, whilst minimising academic disruption and ensuring it will still be possible for students to graduate on time.

This has been a challenging year. We have been impressed with how well our students, faculty and administrative staff have responded to this difficult situation. The knowledge and skills students are developing through their studies can be valuable tools for helping to understand and navigate this unique period. We look forward to soon being back together at the ANU campus in Canberra and Ritsumeikan OIC.