

Summary of Proceedings of the Second Expanded Plenary Council Representatives' Meeting for AY2015

Chancellor Yoshida's opening comments

Chancellor Yoshida noted that 2015 marks the 70th anniversary of the end of World War Two and is an important year for engaging in discussion with undergraduate and graduate students in the Plenary Council. The Chancellor expressed his respect for the extensive and ongoing discussions that have already taken place, and said that he felt heavy responsibility for the fact that it was necessary to delay the open proceedings of the full Plenary Council. He stated his resolve, as executive with ultimate responsibility for academic affairs, to sustain the discussions that have taken place in the 2015 academic year (AY2015) in deliberations from now on.

Agenda Item 1. Conditions in higher education and Ritsumeikan

The Student Union representative commented that at the same time as acknowledging the importance of diversity under globalization, peer support, students' mutual learning and learning commons, it is difficult to encapsulate the increasingly diverse needs of the student body in concrete demands. The representative referred to the launch of the Ritsumeikan Learning Forest Project designed to explore concepts of the ideal student, and likened the task of formulating demands to the planting of a single tree to sustain students' growth. The Graduate Student Council representative stated a desire to discuss the following matters: in relation to OIC, the concept of generating new intellectual and interpersonal exchanges and an improvement and reform cycle informed by actual conditions; the globalization of graduate school education and graduate students' lives; and the development of an environment to cater for a diversity of graduate students. The Faculty/Staff Union representative observed that in light of developments both within and beyond Ritsumeikan, including the R2020 latter phase plan, the security bills forced through the national legislature, and the lowering of the voting age to 18, Ritsumeikan is now entering a new phase of university advancement. Ritsumeikan's true value as a comprehensive academic institution is being put to the test, and we stand at a crossroads and need to decide where to step next. The representative expressed the Faculty/Staff Union's desire to discuss matters such as models of academy-wide consensus building, global education, present-day practical approaches to our educational ideals of peace and democracy, and citizenship education. The Ritsumeikan University Co-operative representative addressed overall Academy policy, stating that it is essential to formulate the R2020 latter phase plan to reflect actual conditions in student life and develop education and campus environments accordingly, and that the Co-op looks forward to participating in discussions as it continues its work in areas such as implementing student life surveys and tackling food environment issues. The Executive Board of Trustees stated that the Plenary Council is a crucial forum for students to participate in self-government by all the academy's constituents through discussion of matters such as the university's overall direction, academic affairs, student life, and tuition fees, and thereby to give shape to the educational ideals of peace and democracy. The Board further explained their plan to finalize the latter phase plan and table proposals on tuition, financial management and scholarships by March 2016, and to work towards addressing the challenges of globalization, enriching student learning in both curricular and extra-curricular fields, reforming graduate schools, and enhancing research, while remaining attuned to national policy developments such as the Central

Council for Education's new graduate school policy and the education ministry's strict guidelines on university enrollment management.

Agenda Item 2. Achievements and challenges in diverse curricular and extra-curricular learning

The Student Union raised several points for discussion in the area of quality enhancement this academic year, including: (1) the need to develop, in the context of Ritsumeikan's distinctive strengths in diversity and multiculturalism, an approach that treats all aspects of student life in both curricular and extra-curricular settings as learning spaces, and an environment that enables a diverse range of students to interact with one another and grow together; (2) the importance of acknowledging the "weight of tuition" and ensuring that students accept tuition policies and are motivated to engage actively with their learning; (3) the need to set achievement objectives for classes and conduct teaching in a manner that provides students with a sense of development. Representatives of university management highlighted four areas demanding attention: (1) to sincerely address the issues identified by the Student Union in regard to interaction among diverse students and development of learning and student life environments, in the course of responding to the expectations placed on universities in the global era and the roles that Ritsumeikan is expected to play therein; (2) to treat the "weight of tuition" as the weight of academic responsibility, and discharge that responsibility accordingly; (3) to advance peer support activities; (4) to adopt a university-wide approach to developing faculty members' skills in interactive teaching using ICT and commons, and sharing and developing teaching practices such as PBL.

(1) Diversification of the university as a whole, learning in multicultural environments, development of human resources to take active roles internationally

Referring to the findings of a questionnaire survey of more than 3,000 students, the Student Union representative reported that more than 60% of Japanese students had a high level of interest in international exchange but a low level of involvement. On this basis the representative suggested that it was necessary to create more opportunities and forums for exchange and to raise students' proficiency in foreign languages. The meeting shared a common awareness of the challenges in developing environments in which English-basis students and those with diverse cultural backgrounds could enjoy student life safely, securely and comfortably, including providing bilingual campus notices, observing dietary considerations, and providing prayer spaces, as well as the importance of pursuing deeper exchange among all students, domestic and international included.

(2) Toward enhancement of learning quality

Taking into account the progress made on matters confirmed in the 2011 Plenary Council, the meeting discussed the enhancement of learning quality in curricular settings, around the theme of "creating an environment where students learn actively with a view to their own futures." The following challenges were identified: (1) establishment of systematic learning; (2) motivating students to engage in learning autonomously and actively; (3) globalization of academic affairs. The meeting confirmed that concrete steps would be taken to present the curriculum more clearly and understandably (including university-wide publication of curriculum maps, trees, etc.), to make active use of manaba+R, to develop classes in a manner that enhances students' motivation, to

design autonomous approaches to learning with a view to career development, and to formulate approaches to foreign language education attuned to the global area.

(3) Learning in curricular, co-curricular, and extra-curricular settings

Addressing the Plenary Council theme of “learning beyond college borders,” the meeting confirmed the importance of positioning “co-curricular” learning—an area between the formal curricular and extra-curricular spheres that includes activities such as study abroad and self-directed student project work—and strategies for linking it to motivation toward formal curricular learning. In regard to the development of environments to promote co-curricular learning, the meeting discussed enhancement of commons and clarification of the roles of peer support staff such as orientation conductors. It was confirmed that the need for peer support staff applies equally to newly-established colleges.

Agenda Item 3. Challenges in the enrichment of student life

(1) Development of safe, secure and comfortable campus environments

The Student Union raised the following issues: (1) development of environments for communication and expression of diverse student learning in a manner that is open to the wider student body and local community; (2) provision of dining environments similar to BKC Lunch Street in light of the limited facilities available currently, and expansion of menus such as halal food to cater for campus globalization; (3) development of exercise environments and leisure spaces to enable students to engage in exercise easily on their own; (4) renewal of facilities with a view to enhancing safety, security and comfort, including dealing with ageing facilities such as the lavatories in Zonshinkan and Seishinkan, earthquake-proofing the Student Center, and installing air-conditioning in BKC and OIC Arenas; (5) campus discussion meetings to address problems specific to each campus; (6) thoroughgoing implementation of campus no-smoking policy; (7) initiatives to promote inter-campus exchange (provision of shuttle buses). University representatives responded by confirming that issues relating to facilities, equipment and shuttle buses would be examined in the context of future campus development planning and financial management policy, that campus discussion meetings would be held as necessary, and that discussions would continue on the methods for sharing and addressing problems and challenges specific to each campus, both externally and internally. In regard to the issue of campus-wide no-smoking policy, university representatives stated that the Graduate Student Council had made a request for the provision of segregated smoking areas rather than a complete ban on smoking, but noted that the rate of smoking among undergraduate students was steadily declining, and that the university did not plan to relax its current no-smoking stance.

(2) Policy on scholarships and subsidies from AY2017 onward

In response to the outline of policy on scholarships and subsidies from AY2017 onward provided by the university to the Student Union in September 2015, the Student Union posed questions and requests concerning financial support scholarships, student growth support scholarships, and internationalization advancement scholarships, and the review of the receipt of multiple scholarships under the new policy. University representatives responded that the new policy on scholarships and subsidies was currently being discussed in conjunction with tuition and financial management

policies for AY2017 onward, and confirmed that this discussion would continue taking into account opinions gathered from the Student Union and other sources within the university, findings from the survey of parents of newly-enrolling students, and analysis of current programs. In regard to the issue of students receiving multiple scholarships, university representatives pointed out that there are some cases in which students receive scholarship payments in excess of the amount of tuition and fees payable, and a degree of restriction is thus necessary, especially in light of the fact that tuition and fees are themselves the major source of funds for scholarship payments.

Agenda Item 4. Issues in graduate school policy

(1) Globalization challenges in the graduate schools

Discussions were held concerning the importance of responding to globalization of the graduate student body and research activities, as well as increasing the number of universities participating in double degree programs, developing scholarship programs to promote research activities beyond Japan, enhancing study abroad programs, and providing support for thesis drafting and development of language proficiency. It was confirmed that all of these issues would be investigated further in subsequent discussions. A shared acknowledgment was also reached concerning the development of environments supporting research activities by graduate students of diverse backgrounds, including English-basis students and working adults, problems relating to race and ethnicity, and the wider challenges of globalization.

(2) Fourth phase of the graduate school career path formation support system

Focusing on the Fourth-phase Graduate School Career Path Development Support Program currently being formulated by the university, the meeting discussed the PD and TA systems, which form an important part of career development for graduate students. The TA system was acknowledged as important also as a means to raise undergraduate students' awareness of career paths, and it was agreed to continue discussions directed to enhancing the system. In regard to PD, the Graduate School Council requested an improvement in the conditions of engagement and an increase in the number of posts available, and these were flagged as issues for later discussion.

(3) Development of commons

A Research Commons has been established in Kyuronkan on the Kinugasa Campus with the aim of advancing learning beyond graduate school borders. A variety of commons have also been established as part of the innovative projects at OIC. These developments have been received positively by graduate students, but several problems concerning mode of establishment and usage patterns have also been identified. Discussion at the meeting produced a common understanding of the nature of these problems and the fact that graduate students' needs in regard to commons vary from campus to campus, reflecting the characteristics of each graduate school. The meeting resolved to continue discussions in line with the actual conditions of each commons related to graduate students' research activities, and the circumstances and demands of graduate students on each campus, and to formulate concrete policies to enable graduate students to use commons autonomously and pro-actively as spaces for interdisciplinary learning and research.