

Greetings from the President's Office

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As an Advisor and a Witness – A Memory in the United States

As you already may be aware, AIU established its Academic Advising System to ensure that all students receive academic advising from faculty members for their studies and mentoring for non-academic matters related to their lives. The AIU student handbook describes the Academic Advising System as a method to support students' academic interests, offer assistance in the optimal use of university resources, and support in overcoming academic and personal challenges in the students' lives. This system is widely entrenched among universities in the U.S. as I recall my experience advising and mentoring as a faculty member while working there. My story goes back more than 40 years while I was in a teaching position at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign at the College of Business. One of my advisees, who was an excellent student with high grades, comes to mind. His face I can still remember, but unfortunately, not his name. Aside from regular appointment meetings, he occasionally and casually would pop in during my office hours to have a chat. I learned that his parents were farmers in southern Illinois, but that he was hoping to further his academic career and pursue a MBA course. I was certain that he would make an excellent MBA student, and I promised him to write recommendation letters when the time comes. By and large, candidates for MBA programs were required to have working experience prior to their study in the course, and it was quite rare for most students to be accepted right after finishing an undergraduate degree. I was sure that he understood the significance of gaining working experience. The tuition fee for MBA programs back then was more expensive than other programs, and continues to be so today. The student needed to work and save money, which worried him seriously. Unlike most Japanese college students, students in the U.S., especially those pursuing graduate courses, were expected to manage their tuition on their own by working. Even so, some students still required other financial aid from the government or through educational loans. One day, the student came to my office and asked me for advice. Though he did not have enough money to pay for graduate school or have only work experience, he asked me to write recommendation letters in order to apply for MBA programs soon after graduation. The reason behind this decision was because he had a girlfriend, who was the same age as him, and they were planning to get married after graduation. His girlfriend was wholeheartedly prepared to support him financially by getting a job in the same place as his study and prepared to live frugally. I spent a lot of time with him on this matter in my office, and in the end, I decided to write the letters. I probably wrote six or seven in total, describing his diligence, remarkable achievements, and strong potential, as well as a request for scholarship, even though we were not sure

if he would be accepted or not. After a few months, he suddenly burst into my office and delivered me the good news that he gained admission to a MBA program at New York University (NYU). I was very happy for him, not only because he was accepted, but also because NYU is one of the most prestigious private universities in the U.S., but unfortunately, our request for a scholarship was denied. And if I remember correctly, the annual tuition fee at that time was \$25,000, and they also needed an extra \$10,000 for living costs, at least. In total, the cost would be \$35,000, or \$70,000 for two years. My annual salary in those days was approximately \$30,000, so it was easy for me to imagine that such an amount would be a great burden to the young couple. Since then, the three of us spent a good deal of time calculating and trying to figure out how to make this possible. His girlfriend was also from a small town in Illinois, but she was searching for a job in New York City. I was strongly impressed by her attitude, and was really impressed that there was such a dedicated woman at that time to support her partner. With the new semester at NYU approaching, there was another important thing to do before they moved to New York city, to have their wedding. Almost 40 years ago in the small town of Illinois, there still remained a good old-society; their custom required the man of a farmer to announce his marriage and a wedding ceremony held in a church with the town's witnesses. The couple asked me to be a witness because I was the only person who knew both the bride and the groom well, and I happily accepted their offer. In the evening during early fall, they held a wedding ceremony in a church at the groom's town. I cannot recall what the ceremony was like, but I do remember the after-party, which was like a scene from Pieter Brueghel the Elder, "Peasant Wedding," a typical and traditionally beautiful provincial wedding; all the people gathered for the couple to celebrate with lots of food and wine, and the bride and groom walked and greeted the crowd with their arms linked. This kind of scenery can be seen in current Japan, but I can say that there were some distinct differences. The venue was a farmer's house and its yard was decorated with full of candles. The space was filled with lively joyous voices, with dialects and humor that I could not understand at all, and drink spree with wine. By the time it was my turn to convey my sincere congratulations to the couple as a witness, I was a little tipsy, and I can only guess that the people in attendance were astonished by seeing a strange Asian give a congratulatory speech. There might have been an awkward silence, but voices and laughter soon resumed. In the middle of the party, I became concerned about my long 30 mile way home to Urbana city. The party had advanced deep into the night by the time I left. After I celebrated the couple's marriage, I still remember the way home; a country road along an endless stretch of cornfield that grew thick and tall. The young couple must be in their 60's by now, a memory of mine in the U.S. 40 years ago.



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