

President's Commencement Address

Norihiko SUZUKI, DBA

Congratulations to each and every one of you on your graduation! 198 students have completed their study at AIU this year. Also, I would like to extend my heartfelt congratulations to all those students who are completing their graduate degree in Global Communication and Language. My sincere congratulations also go out to the parents, family and friends who have been eagerly waiting this happy day. This year is the 9th AIU commencement, and the number of AIU graduates who have entered society will now total 1,495. Compared to other universities' graduates, this number may be considered very small. However, each of our graduates has tremendous potential for the future. It is because AIU's international liberal arts education has cultivated each of you into 'thoughtful individuals.'

The mission of the Graduate School of Global Communication and Language, which was established in 2008 as the nation's first professional graduate school in this field, is to nurture highly specialized professionals who are capable of working in multiple languages in a global society, with advanced understanding of international communication theories as well as practical knowledge and skills. Although the number is still small, AIU is proud to award a Master's degree to 7 students from the English Language Teaching Practices, 5 from the Japanese Language Teaching Practices and 10 from the Global Communication Practices.

Let us take this opportunity to consider just what an international liberal arts education is. The term "liberal arts" originated from the Latin word "artes liberales" which in English means "The Art of a Free Person." This educational philosophy was developed more than two thousand years ago, in the Greek and Roman eras, during when many Greek and Roman city-states were formed. In those city-states, education was offered to the younger generation in order to nurture their ability to defend, manage and develop the city-state through responsible behavior and leadership. The focus was on developing a person's intellect, physical strength, ethics and behavior, much like ancient Olympic athletes. During the Middle Ages in Europe, the need for liberation from the restriction and oppression of the feudal system led to the emergence of a humanitarian approach to creating a systemized education system. In this system, students were trained in three basic subjects: grammar, rhetoric and logic. Students trained in these subjects were known as Bachelors of Arts. Those who learned the four advanced subjects of quadrivium; which included geometry, arithmetic, music, and astronomy, were called Masters of Arts. And those who completed the study of law, medicine and theology were called Doctors of Philosophy. Thus, the liberal arts denoted an education that provides knowledge in multiple fields of study. This is reflected in the current curriculum of humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences, which develop a broad spectrum of a person's intellectual abilities. Famous figures that trained in the liberal arts include Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Galileo Galilei, and many others. In modern times, the liberal arts style of education spread from Europe to the United States and consequently led the western world with the aim to educate the "whole person" and transform education so it would cultivate leaders who can play active roles in society, politics and industry. The liberal arts style of education was eventually brought to Japan after World War II. Through its long journey from Greece and Rome thousands of years ago to Japan today, we can say that the liberal arts style of education has had a distinguished history. So exactly, how does AIU provide students with a liberal arts education? Well, all of you started AIU's curriculum by taking the TOEFL(R) exam and underwent rigorous English training in EAP. You then moved through BE coursework to GB or GS, and completed your advanced education in a specific area of study. All your courses were conducted in English and revolved around dialogue between faculty and students, and among students. Besides classes being held in English, through your one-year study abroad and shared dormitory life with international students, you were also able to experience a diverse international environment, which you would not have been provided with at other universities. These international experiences have led to AIU's education being called an "international liberal arts education."

Based on the promise of this international liberal arts education, AIU was selected as a grant recipient of MEXT's Top Global University Project, also known as the "Super Global University Project," on September, 2014. The aim of this project is to turn AIU into "Japan's World-Class Liberal Arts University" in the next decade.

Our society is globalizing at an accelerating pace, which could lead to the homogenization of life-styles or a shared way of thinking all over the world. People tend to have a strong notion that we are on the same "Earth Spaceship," sharing a common destiny. At the same time, however, we "crew members" need to be aware how important and imperative it is for human beings to maintain their local characteristics as well as to preserve the rich life, culture and history that is a part of their national heritage. Thus, on "Earth Spaceship," it is necessary to ensure adequate localism including diversity, identity and creativity in each area while at the same time taking advantage of the convenience, rationality and economic efficiency that are ushered in by globalization. To move forward maintaining a dynamic equilibrium between globalism and localism is your duty as pilots of this "Earth Spaceship."

Again, my sincere congratulations on your success. Take good care of yourselves. Good luck and best wishes.