

On final exams

June 18, 2020

To all students of the College of Arts and Sciences,

This year, you have had to attend lectures at home due to the coronavirus pandemic. We are sorry for the resulting inconvenience. The College is doing its best to support you, but we are afraid that we sometimes have been unable to do so adequately. I would like first to apologize for those deficiencies. Although face-to-face classes and extracurricular activities on campus were not possible in the S semester, we are preparing to make them possible in the A semester.

The final exams for the S semester will be conducted in July. Normally, to ensure fairness, face-to-face exams must be conducted under identically controlled conditions. However, this year, quite a few students have returned to their homes outside of Tokyo or are refraining from going out due to health risks. With this in mind, at the University of Tokyo as a whole, the majority of classes will be graded based either on online exams or on assessments given on a regular basis throughout the semester. (For those students who do not wish to or cannot take exams online at home, a small number of test-taking booths will be available by appointment on campus.)

I have a request to all of you. It concerns cheating. The College of Arts and Sciences has always taken strict measures against cheating on exams. In face-to-face examinations, cases of wrongdoing (cheating and copying) have occasionally been detected, in which case all grades for that semester were revoked for both those students and their collaborators.

All faculty members are aware that cheating would be easier in online exams than face-to-face. We will be careful to take various anti-cheating measures. (The specific measures will vary from teacher to teacher and cannot be fully disclosed in order to prevent those measures from being subverted. We will let you know the guidelines, main testing methods, and necessary equipment for taking online exams through UTAS next week. Because of the measures to prevent fraud, we expect that questions on the exams will confirm your fundamental understanding of each subject, so you will need to study hard well in advance.)

However, no matter how stringent the institutional anti-cheating measures are, the weaknesses of the system can be exploited. That is true in the case of face-to-face exams as well. The situation is analogous to that of society in general: no matter how strictly the law

regulates social behavior, there are still criminals. Therefore, to prevent cheating, we must depend on the moral rectitude of each one of you.

Recently, we have witnessed leaders in positions of responsibility who were supposed to be models for others and be law-abiding, but in actuality turned out to have been frauds. If you cheat on online exams now, thinking “this should be okay,” you will continue to cheat for the rest of your life. That wrongdoing will become an ingrained habit. In the beginning, you may manage to conceal it, but eventually you will commit worse acts. In the end you will lose everything. I do not want any of you to follow such a path. Therefore, in these exams, I urge you all not to take even a small step in the wrong direction. The final decision is up to you, but I sincerely hope that you will decide to live honestly and with dignity.

One other thing I would like to note is group cheating. Cheating is often not done by one person but with collaborators. The College imposes equally severe punishments on those collaborators. It has been reported that students from the same high school might exchange information and cheat together. If a group cheating incident were to occur at the University of Tokyo, the media would undoubtedly focus on it. It would also be a major issue on the Internet. The targets of the condemnation would be not only the parties involved but also the University of Tokyo community as a whole, including current students, alumni, parents, faculty, staff, and prospective students, as well as the cheating students’ high school and families. Everyone will be hurt. Therefore, if a mass wrongdoing is planned, first of all, do not get involved. Also, if you see or hear about any such attempt, please contact the Academic Affairs Division before the exam begins. (Your report will be treated as completely confidential, of course.)

Finally, please remember that you were all accepted and admitted to the University of Tokyo in a fair manner. If you engage in cheating, all of your efforts and all of the trust that you have earned will be for nothing. I hope that such behavior will be avoided at all costs, and that not a single act of cheating will take place on our final exams. If this is realized, it will mean more than just credits and grades. It will be a wonderful honor for all of you.

I sincerely look forward to seeing you on campus this fall.

Kunihiro Ohta
Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences