

To All Students

of the College of Arts and Sciences and the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

March 19, 2020

As you know, a new form of pneumonia caused by the novel coronavirus COVID-19 has spread throughout the world and was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization on March 11. On March 19, when I am writing this message, the number of people infected with the virus remains small in Japan and no serious disasters, such as a collapse of the health care system, have occurred yet. We cannot predict, however, when a sudden outbreak may occur in near future. We need to prepare for various possible cases, including those in which students, faculty members, staff members, and their families get infected, or come in close contact with those infected, or are required to stay at home, as well as the case in which the government declares a national emergency and orders the closure of schools and universities

In light of these circumstances, the University of Tokyo and the College of Arts and Sciences as well as the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences have been considering various options and possibilities, such as postponement of the start of S Semester. What we would like to assert first and foremost is that, regardless of the situation, we believe in continuing to provide education to our students the furthest extent possible. Your health and welfare come first, of course, but as university teachers, we also have to think about what should be done to keep the impacts on education to a minimum and how to ensure that no one is left behind educationally even when strict measures are taken to control infection.

After much consideration, we have concluded that delaying the start of the spring semester would not be effective enough if we continue teaching in a conventional classroom setting. For the first time since the establishment of the University of Tokyo, therefore, we have decided to adopt a mass introduction of online classes in the College of Arts and Sciences and the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences. (Note that, at the present time, these new measures are likely to be introduced from the beginning of April. See below for details.)

We believe that traditional classes are still the best in terms of educational effectiveness. Depending on the situation, however, it may not be possible to hold regular classes for months (for example, the UK government's chief scientific advisor estimates that schools must be closed for a minimum of 13 to 16 weeks to produce the proper effect.). On the other hand, if things have improved by April, a postponement of classes would be wasted. By preparing and establishing a system that allows online classes at any time from now on, we will be able to keep an eye on the development of virus infections until the last minute and decide whether or not we should go online or conduct face-to-face classes. And if things get worse after we start with face-to-face classes, we can immediately switch to online classes and thus minimize confusion.

Honestly speaking, the College of Arts and Sciences and the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences have not had enough time to prepare for the introduction of online classes. We will have to go through a process of trial and error at first. Some teachers are unfamiliar with online classes and ICT education. The College of Arts and Sciences and the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences have already been doing a risk analysis, but we are likely to come across many unexpected problems and accidents after the implementation of online education. We hope, therefore, that students and teachers unite and work together to get through this challenging situation.

The first thing we would like to ask you to do before the semester starts is to prepare a computer (preferably one with a camera and microphone; if that is difficult, a tablet will do) and a broadband Internet connection at your home. For those who have just moved into a boarding house or apartment and are not yet ready, we are considering taking measures such as giving access to terminals on campus. Please bear in mind, however, that in the worst case, the campus will be entirely closed. In principle, therefore, we would like to ask you to arrange an environment with network access at home or in your room as well as you can. If you are planning to set up an Internet connection now, keep in mind that it may take several weeks from application to the start of service. So please make arrangements as soon as possible. If you have a disability or cannot obtain a computer (or tablet) or Internet connection, please consult with the Student Support Division (*Gakusei-shien-ka*). They will give you appropriate advice and suggest measures to take.

Next, please read carefully how to use ITC-LMS, the Information Technology Center-Learning Management System (a learning-support IT system developed by the University of Tokyo) about which you will be informed soon and try accessing it in advance. Instructions, links, and teaching materials for online classes will all be uploaded to this system.

As to when we actually start online classes, we will follow the guidelines announced in an appropriate manner according to the different stages defined in response to the spread of virus infection as shown below. The current stage and its expected duration will be posted on the website of the College of Arts and Sciences and the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences and also in front of the main gate.

Preliminary research suggests that healthy young people need not be worried too much about the COVID-19 virus themselves. Nevertheless, you should try to keep yourself free from infection, and always be very careful not to transfer viruses that you may be infected with, especially when you come into contact with the weak. The intellectual power to think about what you do from the standpoint of the weak is actually an important part of a liberal education. Please consider the current crisis as also being an invaluable learning opportunity at the University of Tokyo. Let's strive to overcome the current situation together.

Guidelines for deciding whether to switch between in-person and online teaching

Under the guidelines shown below, the situation as of today (March 19) is Stage Yellow. A sudden change to Stage Orange or Red is very possible, however, so please begin preparations for online learning immediately.

Stage Red

Based on a declaration of a state of emergency, the governor of Tokyo orders people to stay at home and prohibits the use of school facilities. All classes are therefore conducted online. Nearly all students are forbidden to come to campus. Club and other extracurricular activities are prohibited.

Stage Orange

More than one student, faculty member, or staff member in the Junior Division, Senior Division, or Graduate School at Komaba has been diagnosed as infected and cannot come to campus. In-person classes are avoided whenever possible. In principle, all classes, including practicums and physical education, are conducted online. (Exceptions may be allowed with some Senior Division and Graduate School practicum and experiment classes.) In principle, all club and extracurricular activities on campus are banned; when the use of on-campus facilities is unavoidable, however, students can apply for and receive permission for the use of campus facilities.

Stage Yellow

The number of new infections in Japan continues at about the current level. (Specifically, the number of new infections per day stays between a few dozen and 200.) The first two class meetings will be held in person, with appropriate measures taken to prevent infections, or equivalent assignments will be given to students. After that, the classes will be conducted online in almost all cases, including practicums and physical education. (Exceptions may be allowed with some Senior Division and Graduate School practicum and experiment classes.) Students will be asked to refrain from conducting club and extracurricular activities that require large numbers of people to gather on campus.

Stage Green

The spread of new infections has stopped completely or nearly completely. Classes will be conducted in person as usual. (In this case, in-person teaching may be combined with online teaching.) Extracurricular activities may take place as usual.

Please note that the above guidelines have been devised by the College of Arts and Sciences and the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences based on the facilities and population density of UTokyo's Komaba Campus. They may not directly reflect the broader infection situation or decisions at other UTokyo campuses or other universities.

Before I conclude my first message regarding the current situation, I would like to ask you to keep yourself in good condition till the new semester in April and to prepare for studies thereafter. I look forward very much to seeing you in April.

Kunihiro Ohta
Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences
Dean of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences