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Ritsumeikan Style **SPECIAL ISSUE**

Academy Report 2021

SPECIAL ISSUE

On the Start of the 2021 Academic Year

—Learning Lessons from Our Response
to the COVID-19 Pandemic in AY2020—



AY2020 was marked by the tremendous impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the lives and studies of our undergraduate and graduate students. Amid this backdrop, the university has undertaken myriad efforts, such as implementing the Emergency Relief Package in Response to the COVID-19 Outbreak, to continue providing educational value to students through a process of trial and error, and we have strived to realize student learning and growth. In addition, with regard to the impact of COVID-19, our students (by way of the Student Government Board) have pointed out the problems that they are facing. We held several discussion meetings with the Student Government Board to engage them in communication, and we set this as a topic for the Representatives' Meeting of the AY2020 Plenary Council.

In order to deal with and overcome such an unprecedented situation, it is important to unite all the members of Ritsumeikan University, including undergraduate students, graduate students, faculty, staff, and other stakeholders. In AY2021, based on the foundation we built under the R2020 Second Half Plan, we will develop different styles of learning and campus life in light of our experiences dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, since AY2021 will be an epoch-making year in which we flesh out the details of the R2030 Challenge Design (mid-term plan) with an eye on the future, we are publishing this special issue of Ritsumeikan Style to summarize the initiatives and experiences of AY2020 and connect them to our future prospects.

Chapter I:

The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic in AY2020 and Ritsumeikan University's Initiatives

In AY2020, the COVID-19 pandemic changed the essence of what constitutes a university, and everything considered “normal” and “ordinary” with regard to academic affairs and campus life was turned upside-down. The university prioritized the protection of the lives and health of its students, faculty, and staff as it searched for ways to continue the academic and research activities that form the basis of the institution. After deciding to shift to online classes in the spring semester, we devised a comprehensive emergency relief package (totaling of ¥2.5 billion for the entire Academy) to support the implementation of classes along with students' learning and activities. Starting in late April, we (1) provided ¥30,000 in emergency aid to all students so they could prepare the necessary IT environment for talking online classes, (2) loaned personal computers and mobile routers free of charge to students facing difficulties in preparing the necessary IT environment, (3) drastically enhanced Manaba + R, which was temporarily unstable immediately after the start of online classes, (4) developed a new FAQ site to answer various questions from students related to the changing situation, and (5) purchased the necessary equipment, software, and mailable experiment kits for each college.



In addition, to ensure the quality of online classes, we also established a page on the faculty site to provide announcements and share information about online classes. After the Golden Week holidays in May, the library resumed lending services by mail and significantly expanded the number of contracts for e-books. In terms of student life, we disbursed ¥90,000 (¥30,000 per month x 3 months) as emergency aid for students facing hardship stemming from the loss of part-time jobs or sudden changes in their household finances. Financed by donations from alumni, faculty, and staff, we were able to provide this aid to around 3,800 students. Combined with the national government's relief payments for students, the total amount of support that was provided to about 10,000 students exceeded ¥1 billion yen.

As for extracurricular activities, we inspected each club's activity plans and conducted interviews with their student representatives to confirm that measures are being taken to reduce

the risk of infection, and we have started to allow clubs to resume face-to-face activities on a limited basis. Even after resuming face-to-face activities, each organization is receiving ongoing support from faculty and staff members as well as their coaches, directors, and assistant directors. In addition to these measures, we developed videos, quizzes, and other teaching materials for the purpose of raising awareness about measures to combat COVID-19 and used these to deepen students' understanding of infection prevention.

Furthermore, the offering of online classes served as an opportunity to reaffirm the unique value that face-to-face classes provide and the roles they perform. As such, we have decided to resume face-to-face classes as much as possible starting in the fall semester. At the same time, in order to create an environment where anyone can learn and everyone can learn from each other, we have decided to recommend that faculty live stream their face-to-face classes or make video recordings of those classes available to students. To this end, we have (1) installed cameras and speaker systems in all our roughly 600 classrooms to enable simultaneous live streaming and/or the recording of face-to-face classes, (2) concluded an Academy-wide license agreement with Zoom (web conferencing system), (3) introduced Panopto, a live streaming system that will allow students to watch videos of classes without having to download them, and (4) we increased the number of wireless LAN access points so that students can also take online classes on campus. These are not just temporary measures to combat COVID-19; rather, they are the first steps in our efforts to create a new kind of quality in education and student life in anticipation of the post-COVID-19 world.



However, students complained about variations in the quality of online classes, and they were taken aback by the sheer amount of in-class work and homework, which marked a major difference from the basic learning styles they had experienced to date. In addition, campus usage was restricted and it became increasingly difficult to participate in extracurricular activities, so we were unable to create a sufficient number of venues where students could meet their friends to discuss and resolve these issues. As a result, many students felt dissatisfied and stressed because they were unable to lead the student lives they had envisioned. These sentiments were also clearly evident in the questionnaires conducted by the university and the Student Government Board; not to mention, many parents have expressed their concerns to the university.



In recognition of this feedback and the actual conditions these students are facing, the university has been working hard to create a new style of academics and campus life support in order to respond to the sudden changes in the environment caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Not all these problems have been resolved, but the fact is that, despite the many difficulties that have arisen during this time, new initiatives have emerged in both curricular and extracurricular learning. While sharing the above-mentioned circumstances and experiences throughout the university, the university will provide learning and student support by adding digital and various other tools to our toolbox while maintaining a basic policy of providing in-person services with an eye on the direction the university should take after COVID-19 subsides. Based on this, we felt it was important to have a sincere discussion with undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, and staff about how to develop these various measures and for all members of the Academy to work together to implement them. From this standpoint, as described in Chapter II, we held discussions with our undergraduate students (Student Government Board) and graduate students (Graduate School Student Senate) at the Representatives Meeting of the First Plenary Council of AY2020.

Chapter II: Examining learning and tuition in light of our experiences with the COVID-19 pandemic

—An overview of the discussions at the Representatives' Meeting of the First Plenary Council of AY2020—



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submission deadlines therefor to ensure that students do not become overburdened despite the recognition that out-of-class learning is indispensable in substantiating the credit system. As for the standardization of ICT tools used in online classes (Item 2), the university accepts that it will be necessary to take measures in the future but believes it is not appropriate to standardize them under the current circumstances where various tools are being used on a trial basis. Regarding feedback on classwork and homework (Item 3), the university has provided support, such as holding a discussion on FD in the Division of Academic Affairs and offering training sessions on IT skills, to ensure that faculty can focus more attention on this issue. In terms of feedback in general, we recognize the need to develop a certain set of rules with the aim of building consensus at the university level. As a countermeasure against poor connectivity (Item 4), we plan to introduce support services for stable, high-capacity, high-speed internet infrastructure. In terms of the future of class formats (Item 5), the university is considering the use of a hybrid (face-to-face + online) format that allows students to enjoy the merits of both face-to-face and online classes. Regarding this point, we will continue to share issues in an effort to secure venues for peer learning among students as well as pursue ongoing discussions with the students.

Next, looking at extracurricular activities (Item 6), we have been providing online support since April 2020 while giving the highest priority to protecting the lives and health of the students. In recognition that extracurricular activities are an important part of student growth, we have gradually been resuming face-to-face activities since June 2020. We believe this process of reaffirming the significance of activities independently organized by student clubs and confirming each club's action plan to protect the safety and health of its members has helped everyone involved in these activities achieve personal growth. As we prepare for the new 2021 academic year (Item 7),

On January 27, 2021, we held a discussion at the Representatives' Meeting of the First Plenary Council of AY2020 on learning and tuition in light of the experiences of our undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, staff, and the university with the COVID-19 pandemic. Considering that the COVID-19 pandemic had a great impact on undergraduate graduate students' learning and campus lives, the Chairperson of the Board of Trustees and the Chancellor also attended the session to hear directly what the students had to say.

The details of the discussion on the first agenda item— "Measures implemented in light of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in AY2020"—is as follows.

The Student Government Board indicated that it was aware of a major loss in opportunities for learning and personal growth stemming from factors including a sharp decrease in face-to-face classes due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the cancellation of study abroad programs, restrictions on extracurricular activities, and difficulties faced by students in forming communities among

themselves. The Student Government Board then raised the following learning issues that have become particularly and asked the university to make improvements: 1) increase in homework for online classes, 2) standardization of ICT tools (online tools) used in class, 3) guaranteeing feedback from faculty to the students pertaining to assignments submitted for online classes, 4) improvement of telecommunications infrastructure, 5) exploring class formats to enhance educational effectiveness, 6) procedures for implementing face-to-face extracurricular and self-directed activities, and 7) the significance of first-year education with a particular focus on the formation of communities for first-year students. In response, the university expressed the following views.

Regarding the various learning issues that have arisen amid the COVID-19 pandemic, in terms of the amount of classwork and homework in online classes (Item 1), the university asked faculty at the beginning of the fall semester to consider the amount of homework they assign and the



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we agreed to collaborate with the Student Government Board on an event for both new first-year students and new second-year students who enrolled in AY2020 to welcome them to a safe and secure campus together with the Student Facilitators and current students.

Regarding the second agenda item, we held a discussion on the topic of “examining tuition in light of our experiences with the COVID-19 pandemic.” In this discussion, the university explained the concept of providing academic services commensurate with the level of tuition. We also confirmed that we will continue to hold discussions on the importance of fostering a sense of learning commensurate with the level of tuition.

Ritsumeikan University prepared the infrastructure for real-time learning, developed new class formats for online classes, and enacted the Emergency Relief Package in Response to the COVID-19 Outbreak whose content was no less generous than that provided by other universities. This relief package included scholarships and subsidies to help students prepare the necessary environment for taking online classes and offset sudden changes in household finances. However, students faced severe restrictions in forming on-campus communities, making friends, and learning with each other, they were forced to cancel their study abroad programs, they could not live the campus lives they had envisioned and were not able to gain a sufficient sense of growth. Given this reality, there were strong calls for a partial refund of tuition, which the university takes seriously. We consider the COVID-19 pandemic to be an important opportunity to re-examine the ideal state of university education and research as well as the value of the campus as a place for people to interact, learn, and grow. Based on a confirmation of the actual situation in AY2020 and the results of our efforts, in AY2021 and beyond, we will continue to pursue the creation of an environment for learning and campus life for the era of COVID-19 and the post-COVID-19 era.

Turning our attention to Academy finances, tuition is the basic revenue upon which Japan's private universities operate despite the so-called double disparity^{*1} in public funding. We were able to implement the Emergency Relief Package in Response to the COVID-19 Outbreak precisely because of the financial base we developed from tuition revenue, and this also allows us to continuously improve the quality of education and research, which are critical missions of the university. To enhance our students' sense of learning and growth is a universal task, but even during an unprecedented emergency like the COVID-19 pandemic, we believe it is the responsibility of the university, which must provide services commensurate with the level of tuition, to strive to improve the quality of education and research while responding to the changing conditions at hand and

to create opportunities for learning and growth. What's more, these efforts to continuously improve education will not only reap rewards for our currently enrolled students, they will also increase the value of the school (alma mater) for our alumni. In December 2020, the President sent a message to all students entitled “Seven Declarations for Creating a New Campus Life.”

We believe the discussions at the Representatives Meeting of the Plenary Council held in January 2021 served to create a shared awareness among undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, and staff of the enormous impact and challenges arising from the COVID-19 pandemic while also marking the first step toward a future where our university and its academics and student life are equipped to overcome these kinds of hardships.

Explanation of Terms

The Plenary Council of the University

The Plenary Council is an organization that was established in 1948 to promote the active involvement in and discussion of improvements to education, research, campus life conditions by all undergraduate students and graduate students who form the learning community that is Ritsumeikan University as well as faculty, staff, and members of the Executive Board of Trustees.

Based on the idea of “self-government for all,” discussions are held by the four component groups of the university (i.e., the Student Government Board, Graduate School Student Senate, the Faculty and Staff Union, and the Executive Board of Trustees), and the Ritsumeikan Co-Op, which supports students in their daily lives, attends these discussions as an observer.

Thus far, any time we have reviewed tuition and the methods for revising tuition at Ritsumeikan University, we have created a summary of our achievements to date and future issues pertaining to education, research and student life support, and we have held discussions in the Plenary Council on the direction of reforms and improvements to education, research, student life support before proposing subsequent tuition policies and tuition revision methods.

In AY2020, we held 21 discussions with undergraduate students (Student Government Board) and six discussions with graduate students (Graduate Student Senate) in preparation for the Representatives Meeting of the Plenary Council. Please refer to the website for more information on past Plenary Council meetings, including an overview of the discussions in the AY2020 Representatives Meeting and items confirmed in the AY2019 Plenary Council.



*1 Public subsidies for private universities in Japan are characterized by the following structural contradictions. (1) Despite the public nature of education, public expenditures on education in Japan remain low, and the private sources account for 65% of expenditures at the tertiary level, which is more than double the OECD average. (2) In addition, although both private universities (incorporated educational institution) and national universities share the same responsibility for public education, public funding directed to private universities is about one-fourth that that provided to national universities, which yields a per-student funding disparity of about 13 times.

Chapter III:

Initiatives to be undertaken in AY2021 to elaborate upon the R2030 Challenge Design

Challenge **your** mind

Change **our** future

AY2020 marked the final year of the R2020 plan, and it was also the year in which we finalized the Challenge Design based on the R2030 Academy Vision. The Challenge Design based on the R2030 Academy Vision will be embodied by all undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, and staff members based on our aforementioned experiences with the COVID-19 pandemic. This section provides an outline of the Challenge Design and describes the specific initiatives to be undertaken in AY2021.

1 Regarding the Challenge Design based on the R2030 Academy Vision

In terms of the ideal shape toward which Ritsumeikan University strives to achieve in the 2030s, the university has proposed the following two pillars with an eye on creating value for a symbiotic society: (1) become a next-generation research university and (2) become a university that creates innovation and produces emerging talent.

When we defined these pillars, we also set three priority goals that we aim to achieve: (1) create shared knowledge with society, (2) provide learning value, and (3) realize a self-reforming organization. Based on these goals, Ritsumeikan University's Challenge Design outlined the following five issues that we will tackle with detailed measures: (1) develop a next-generation research university centered on the Ritsumeikan Knowledge Nodes concept, (2) develop education that connects the improvement of research capabilities with the advancement of education, (3) improve the adaptability of learning systems to handle the diversification of learners, (4) build multidimensional partnership that promote open innovation, and (5) pursue organizational reforms

that leads a diverse array of individuals toward the creation of new value.

Through these efforts, Ritsumeikan University aims to continue to create new value and learning. Furthermore, we believe that the source of energy to tackle these issues is our undergraduate and graduate students, alumni, faculty, staff and other actors who continue to study throughout their lives even after entering the real world and who come to Ritsumeikan University at a turning point in their lives to learn from each other. In this sense, Ritsumeikan University serves as a home port for voyagers on this lifelong journey of learning.

2 Initiatives to be undertaken at Ritsumeikan University in AY2021 to enhance learning

In the R2020 Second Half Plan, we sought to improve the quality of education centered on the pillars of learner-centered education, the formation of learning communities, and international education. To this end, one of the strategic basic issues we defined was the creation of a Ritsumeikan Model for Learning. This led us to undertake a wide range of initiatives including diverse forms of study support, course selection counseling, peer learning support in the commons, the Student Success Program (as a form of student support and support for extracurricular activities), the Ritsumeikan Impact-Makers Inter X (RIMIX) Platform, and the Ritsumeikan Innovators Supported by Alumni (RI-sA) online exchange promotion project. As a result, surveys between AY2017 and AY2019 not only reveal and increase in out-of-class study time^{*2}, they also show an uptick in the number of students achieving the B1 level on CEFR, which is one of the standards

we use to measure language proficiency. In this way, the learning environment continues to improve, and while we have shown these efforts to be effective, we are expected to aim even higher. One detailed initiative aimed at materializing the R2030 Challenge Design is the plan to further create an environment where students can "learn anytime, anywhere with anyone" and enhance learning for all students by proactively promoting digital transformation (DX).

Aiming to enhance learning in light of the achievements and issues of the R2020 Plan, our experiences with the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Challenge Design based on the R2030 Academy Vision, we will undertake the following initiatives in AY2021.



Classes

In AY2021, we will increase the opportunities students have to take face-to-face classes on campus and increase the number of face-to-face classes as much as possible even in those classes that combine face-to-face and online components. (Classes with face-to-face components^{*3} currently account for 90% of all classes under Level 2 of the BCP). In addition, class formats for each subject (i.e., face-to-face, online, etc.) will

^{*2} This item was removed from the survey in AY2020 due to massive impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

^{*3} This refers to subjects whose face-to-face classes account for more than one-third of the 15 classes.

be made available by listing them in the syllabus. Furthermore, we will develop the Ritsumeikan Model for Learning and begin to consider ways to expand opportunities for learning while taking various research outcomes into account.

Promoting interaction and exchange

In April and May 2021, we will work with the Student Government Board Organizing Committee and everyone involved in club activities to hold an event to encourage participation in extracurricular activities and welcome new students to Ritsumeikan University. The on-campus portion of this event will feature booths where clubs can showcase their activities in person and presentations in the halls and large classrooms. In addition, the online portion of the event will use a wide range of tools, like the university-led Ritsumeikan Cyber-Campus and the Student Government Board's FrontieR platform, to create venues for exchange and encourage interaction. This event aims to encourage interaction among both new students enrolling in AY2021 and new second-year students who enrolled in AY2020.



Extracurricular activities in student clubs

As of April 2021, we have increased the number of organizations that carry out extracurricular activities in person to more than 200 while thoroughly implementing measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 infection, and we will continue to provide them with support. In AY2021, we will continue raising awareness of measures to combat COVID-19 and providing other support to

those organizations that want to conduct face-to-face activities.



Study abroad and international exchange

To promote global learning and international exchange, we will further strive to establish international liberal arts courses, provide courses taught in English, implement co-learning and exchange events in the BBPs, and provide opportunities for learning foreign languages. Keeping an eye on the resumption of overseas travel, we will also promote online study abroad and hybrid study abroad programs.

Accommodation and support for a diverse student body

Turning to gender and sexual diversity at Ritsumeikan University, we will provide support for diversity and inclusion initiatives in accordance with the student support guidelines. As for students with disabilities, the support coordinators in the Disability Resource Center will listen to their needs and make adjustments to make it easier for them to pursue their studies. We will also continue providing our international students with multilingual daily living support.

Career development support

We will hold various seminars and workshops to convey information about the reality of the job search to undergraduate students in every year level as well as graduate students. We will also

utilize an online platform that allow students to meet with alumni and learn about their careers. Furthermore, we will use various other tools to provide interview preparation support. Meanwhile, students can choose between online and face-to-face formats for individual consultations. Finally, we will continue to provide support based on each student's situation and aspirations.

Infection prevention measures

We will continue to enact measures to keep everyone safe from infection (e.g., installing acrylic boards to prevent droplet transmission and mask-wearing). In addition, to prepare for future outbreaks, we have adopted our own contact tracing system. QR codes have been affixed to the seats in all the classrooms, and if you scan the code to register the location of the seat, you will be notified when an infection occurs nearby.



Elaborating upon the R2030 Challenge Design

AY2021 marks the first year of the R2030 Challenge Design, and the university will undertake measures to flesh out the following four priority issues outlined in the plan: (1) enrichment of learning in the era of COVID-19 with an eye on the post-COVID 19 era, (2) advancement of education and research and enrichment and activation of learning through the stepwise promotion of digital transformation (DX), (3) promotion of new forms of globalization, and (4) formation of an entrepreneurial culture and mindset through open innovation.