

Opening Address

Congratulations to all the new students on your enrollment to Sophia University. I am sure that your parents and guarantors are also very happy for you. I would like to express my heartfelt congratulations. I am very happy to be able to welcome you to Sophia University today.

I am sure that you are standing at a fresh starting line as university students or graduate students, with many different hopes and expectations. Some of you may already have made various plans, while others may be looking forward to new encounters.

As you begin your university life, what is the mission you wish to pursue through your university life? Sophia University also has a mission. It is the educational philosophy of our university, which is the common mission of Jesuit universities around the world: “For Others, With Others”. It is a very short phrase, but its meaning is very deep and important. How would you interpret “Others”?

Whenever I give thought to this, I am reminded of a particular scene. It is the St. Ignatius de Loyola Junior and Senior High School in Timor-Leste, a Pacific island nation. This school was established by the Society of Jesus in 2013 with the aim of nurturing the leaders of future society as the country recovered from a period of great conflict. I had the opportunity of visiting the school in 2013. There, I remember seeing the school building, which had only just been completed, as well as the students and the Jesuit priests who taught there; they had just started to create a new learning environment together. Whilst the scars of the conflict were still evident, the desks and chairs used there had been donated by the Rokko Gakuin, a Jesuit school in Kobe run by the Sophia School Corporation. Thinking about the painstaking efforts on the part of the teachers and staff who prepared everything one by one by hand, I witnessed students learning with passion supported by enthusiastic teachers, and this made me think strongly that it was in this way that the dreams and hopes of various people came together to create Sophia University when it was first established 112 years ago, in 1913.

Now, together with the St. João de Brito Institute, a teacher training institution that opened in East Timor in 2014, the school has started to send out graduates into the world. Some of them have entered Sophia University as international students, and after graduating, some have started their careers at the JICA office in East Timor or have advanced to graduate school. You may also meet students from the St. Ignatius Institute after entering Sophia University.

Sophia University is a university committed to the kind of mission I have just described. In other words, it is a university that stands by the vulnerable in society and, while working together with them, and through such engagement, one can pursue new possibilities for the future. It is a place of learning that looks to the future while respecting diversity and upholding its history and traditions of working with others, which it has valued since its founding.

A passage from the Gospel of Matthew was read out earlier to congratulate you on your enrollment. I believe there are various ways of interpreting the phrase “those who are like little children” that appears in the passage. I would like to see this “child” as someone with an honest heart and intellectual curiosity, and at the same time someone who is in a disadvantaged position in society as well as someone who humbly stands by them. When you think about the importance of learning from people who are in different circumstances or have different cultural backgrounds, it is clear that the reason why Sophia University has so actively welcomed international students and other diverse students since its founding is that it values diversity and learning from them.

Nowadays, with the introduction of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the importance of diversity and the goal of leaving no one behind are widely discussed both in Japan and overseas. However, from its founding, Sophia University has been committed to its mission and thus has placed importance on diversity, and at the same time inclusiveness, or being open to everyone, as well as fairness in learning so that it is meaningful for each person.

Another important mission for us is to support you as you take your first steps towards pursuing your own missions. I believe that even before the entrance ceremony, undergraduate students have already been taking part in the Liberal Education and Learning program, “Learning to Learn”. This program is also one way in which we support your missions. Now you will be advancing your studies in a variety of specialized fields. While being exposed to cutting-edge research being conducted by the faculty in their respective fields, you will embark on a rich and diverse world of learning in the nine faculties and 29 departments, 10 graduate schools, 1 program across the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences on the Sophia University campus. The Liberal Education and Learning program is unique to Sophia University and we have designed it to serve as the foundation for your learning. As you deepen your studies after entering the university, you will also benefit from the liberal arts program for upper-year students. Knowledge itself is constantly being renewed and updated. When AI is used in so many different ways as it is today, how should we approach the use of knowledge? As you begin your studies, I would like you to consider this core question.

There are many different ways to learn. Of course, it is important to acquire knowledge and language skills, but what we truly hope for is that you will be empowered to use that knowledge, whether that it be through creativity, critical thinking that considers matters from multiple perspectives, or the ability to express and communicate that knowledge, and furthermore, the ability to deploy that knowledge to achieve your individual missions. Our greatest wish is that your studies will be meaningful and tailored to your individual needs, and that you will be able to use the knowledge you acquire to become the leaders of future society.

In your time as a university student, many different paths will open up before you. I sincerely hope that your time as a university student will be fulfilling. Congratulations on your enrollment.

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Miki Sugimura

President of Sophia University