

Cultural Dialogue with Youth Romance In His Heart

Eric Hauber, Ph.D. became the vice president for academic affairs and dean of faculty at SUA, Aliso Viejo, in 1995. He began his academic career after graduating from UCLA in 1971 with a Ph.D. in anatomy and cellular biology. He was an NIH Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Colorado in molecular biology before becoming a faculty member in the SUNY at Stony Brook School of Medicine in 1973.

After eight years in the classroom, he embarked on his administrative career as director of Allied Health Sciences at Fairleigh Dickinson University from 1981–87; assistant vice president for Academic Affairs at FDU from 1987–90; associate vice president for Enrollment Management at FDU from 1990– 92; and associate vice president for Academic Affairs at FDU from 1992–95.

He was introduced to Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism by his wife, Theresa, and began practicing in 1973. Since then he has been actively involved in SGI activities, taking on various responsibilities including SGI representative to the United Nations. Currently he is a vice general director of SGI-USA and also serves as the leader of the Academic Division of the SGI-USA Culture Department.

In this interview by Erica Gebhardt, representing Los Angeles Fife and Drum Corps members, Eric Hauber talks about religion, education, Soka University of America and SGI President Ikeda's vision.

F/D: I've heard that President Ikeda has said that SUA in Orange County is one of his last projects — I can't remember the phrase exactly. But I want to know what exactly he said and what does he mean by that? You know what I'm talking about, right?

EH: Yes I know what you're talking about. That's really a good question, because last August I asked him a similar question. An SGI vice president said once that President Ikeda had said there are three things in the United States that add romance to his heart, and I'd never heard that expression or use of the word *romance*. He said that they were the Boston Research Center, which has produced tremendous benefit and result already, the Florida Nature and Culture Center, which is a wonderful place for people to refresh their lives, and then Soka University of America.

President Ikeda said that education is of such fundamental importance that he was going to focus on devoting the rest of his life to it through SUA. I was thrilled to hear that.

But then he said last year at a meeting that education is the religion for the 21st century. I wanted to find out what that really meant. So when we were with him in August in Japan, I had an opportunity to ask him about his statement.

What he said was really interesting. He said that religions originally existed to educate people on how to become happy. He said that all religions lost that focus and instead began to just teach people old traditions. He said that priesthoods in particular lost that spirit.

As people became more and better educated, they started to ask very specific questions. These were questions that priests couldn't answer. So they tried to shut down the dialogue and use religious authority to put down people. Priests did not want to dialogue with lay people as equals. President Ikeda said that the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood is a living example of that.

But the Daishonin's Buddhism *is* education, he said. Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism is

a university in which people study together, they talk together, they dialogue together, and they advance together. So it's dialogue, it's education, it's advancement together. He said that is Buddhism. He said it's the education of people — what he called it was the general education of people. It doesn't mean studying a variety of subjects. He's talking about the education of people about their own Buddha nature — education to give people whatever it takes for them to lead happy, joyful, and productive lives.

So he wasn't talking about education as being simply a purview of the university. And he said that our role as human beings is to become educated in a broad sense. The function of leaders is to help people become educated. People who become educated have the responsibility to educate others.

There was one other statement that he made. He said that to be educated is to be truly human, which I thought was really interesting. Again he's talking about the bigger view of education — part of which is to become educated to the world around you and to yourself. It's part of the process of developing world citizens, too.

F/D: What is the Soka University philosophy of education?

EH: It's how you do what I just described. I had an interesting conversation once, which bears on this question, with the head of the Soka Gakuen, which is the umbrella for the high school, junior high school and elementary school in Tokyo. We [Culture Department representatives] were talking to him about Makiguchi's theory of education. He said: "Let me clear up something. What we are doing here is not to implement Makiguchi's theory of education. What we are doing here is to implement President Ikeda's *interpretation* of Makiguchi's philosophy for today's world." This philosophy of education really is President Ikeda's based on Makiguchi's. He said that there's a difference.

The same holds true then of SUA. Our greatest challenge is to really grasp what the founder President Ikeda's sense of vision is for what we should do, how we should do it, what it should feel like, what students should get out of it. We constantly think about it and ask ourselves and dialogue among ourselves to make sure.

You know, it's very easy to think, "Oh yeah, I know what he's saying." But then you have to go into depth. Whatever we do in the beginning is the foundation for whatever comes for the next 200 years after, so it's important to get it right from the beginning.

The challenge that President Ikeda has given us is truly to produce graduates who are global citizens. If you read his Columbia University speech, he talks clearly about what the characteristics of global citizens are. One thing that was not in the speech but was in the Q-and-A period after was that someone asked him the kind of question that you just asked me. He said that there are three pillars to SUA: absolute peace, human rights and the dignity and sanctity of life. Those are the three pillars.

Students who graduate from SUA should develop the capacity to operate on those three arenas in their daily lives. They should become leaders for world peace and operate in all strata of society. These are people, then, who should not only be well educated — that's just a given; you can become well-educated at almost any university depending upon your determination — but further, people for whom knowledge is becoming wisdom. People who have developed a true sense of integrity and a sense of mission in wanting to live life for something bigger than just themselves.

F/D: In terms of the university and campus itself, aside from everything you have already said, how will this university be different from other private universities?

EH: Good question. We get this question all the time. There are two things that make us different from other universities: (1) the manner in which we interact with students and what we teach them, and (2) the vision of the founder.

SUA will truly put students first in every aspect of its functioning. Learning, rather than teaching, will be most important. Also, the qualities of integrity and character, of valuing each other and other cultures will be things we all learn through our humanistic interaction rather than trying to just teach it in a classroom. SUA will be unique in the way it melds the viewpoints of East and West in every class.

The vision of the founder is the foundation for everything we do and for the very existence of SUA in the first place. There are many first-rate universities, so we don't need to simply create another one. We want to create a first-rate university that graduates humanistic, global citizens with wisdom, character and integrity, and a sense of commitment to living their lives for someone other than just themselves. This too is part of the vision of President Ikeda.

Also, I think our degree of trust sets us apart. If you are really student-centered, you should trust students. And most universities don't. I think that you would have to be there [at SUA] and see it happen, because it's in the process, it's not in the structure.

F/D: If I were a high school student right now and was thinking about first-rate schools like Stanford or Harvard, what might make me want to choose Soka University?

EH: That's a question a lot of students are going to have because there are going to be a lot of good students in the SGI-USA who could go to Stanford on a scholarship. They should go.

President Ikeda himself said not every student needs to go to Soka University. He said that in Japan to the student division there. He encouraged students to study hard enough to go to any university that fits your dream, and then you should freely choose.

Same here. We're not saying that every SGI-USA kid has to come to Soka University. Truly, it's up to them. I hope that the SGI-USA will develop the kinds of students who, based on faith and their own determination, could represent the SGI-USA well in all universities.

I think that the students who would come to us are really looking to become the kind of global citizens President Ikeda talks about. I think that they are students who want to find President Ikeda's vision of education, the wisdom of Buddhism, and go to an institution that will teach them the Western perspective along with the Eastern perspective.

That's something that's different, which I didn't mention in the first question. In every course, we are going to teach the basic Western European mode that we have always taught in American universities, together with many of the views that make up Asia and the Pacific Rim. We will teach them in a comparative way in every classroom.

Team-teaching will be a big part of this. For instance, if you are studying childhood development, there is certainly a wealth of information from the Western perspective. But what are the theories of childhood development that exist in Malaysia, China, Japan? They're definitely not Western.

But if you're going to understand those cultures, you have to understand that aspect of it. And we don't want to teach Western over here and Eastern over there. We want to pick particular pieces of childhood development and compare and find the value in these choices. So somebody who is looking for that would come here. Not everybody wants that.

F/D: Do you know if we can look forward to an American Soka kindergarten, elementary,

junior high or high school in the future?

EH: It is my determination. Has it been planned yet? No. It's our hope and determination that all this will happen. It's a question of when, where, how and all that.

Right now, we are focused on SUA.

President Ikeda always values dialogue, discussion and give and take. When he received an award from the University of Denver, the chancellor said that students do not learn through lectures but through personal interaction. We happen to agree with that 100% and so does President Ikeda.

The vast majority of classrooms [at SUA] will only hold 12 students. And the classrooms are not heavy with technology. They are designed for dialogue, discussion, give and take. You don't have to have somebody just talking at you all the time while you strive to take down notes. You can come to class prepared to give your thoughts and feelings, dialogue with other people and ask questions.

A lot of technology [at SUA] is designed to be used outside the classroom, not inside the classroom. We have fully interactive multimedia classrooms, but it's up to the faculty and students how to use them. We have classrooms that can be used in almost an infinite number of ways. We have all our computer and power connectivity in the floor, so you can sit on the floor, you can sit in big beanbag chairs, you can sit at a table.

One thing I want to do is use technology in really creative ways. For instance, if you are in a classroom and talking about some aspect of Malaysian culture, I would love to have a simultaneous feed from Malaysia, possibly from a leading professor, giving a presentation, having a Q-and-A and dialogue with our students in real time. It would be wonderful. Why not have a creative writing course and talk to someone like Aitmatov from Russia?

What you can do with this is pretty much bounded only by your imagination. We're swimming upstream in a lot of things because most universities, when you read their materials and talk to them, haven't truly thought out a technology value statement. They are just trying to become as technologically advanced as they possibly can, putting computers in every classroom.

We're going the other way. We didn't start out determined to be the most technologically advanced university. We said that this is what we want to teach, this is what we want it to feel like, and then asked how can technology help that? If it can't help it, we didn't put it in.

The other thing we are swimming upstream about is the emphasis on dialogue in small classes. Everybody else is trying to cut corners, thinking that the computer is going to help them teach more people cheaper. That's not learning. Not in its true sense it's not. So people ask, "Are you going to be a model for universities of the future?" The answer is yes, but not the way you think.

I really appreciate having the opportunity to talk with young people about SUA. It's wonderful to answer your questions and share with you how excited I am about the future — and about SUA.

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SEEKING GLOBAL CITIZENS

Soka University of America's new Aliso Viejo campus is looking for some very special junior high school students and high school freshmen and sophomores who are interested in learning more about other cultures — and in making a real difference in both their communities and the world.

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SUA is an independent, selective, co-educational, comprehensive four-year liberal arts university which will open in September 2001 to its first 100 fantastic freshmen. SUA will be looking for top students with strong academic backgrounds.

Initial majors will include history and literature, economics, comparative and international studies, government and politics, philosophy and religion, and psychology.

The university features:

- **a founding philosophy devoted to world peace, human rights and developing leaders of character and integrity**
- **a 12 to 1 student/faculty ratio**
- **small seminar classes;**
- **an international student body**
- **an international faculty engaging students in the comparative study of Eastern/Pacific Asian and Western perspectives**
- **three years study of a second language (Chinese, Japanese and Spanish will be the first languages offered)**
- **required international internship using chosen second language**
- **a beautiful, new 100-acre campus two miles from the Pacific Ocean and adjacent to a 3,400-acre wilderness park, only two miles from the ocean**
- **Olympic swimming pool, tennis courts, baseball and soccer fields, a bike path around campus**
- **a library with 225,000-volume capacity and a rare books facility.**

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