

## **AUDREY HEINESEN, TOKYO, JAPAN**

### **HOW SOKA UNIVERSITY OPENED MY LIFE**

When Audrey Heinesen entered SUA's graduate program in Calabasas, Calif., she didn't know it would change how she viewed the world. Four years later, she works at Soka University in Japan and sees her mission as being a humanistic educator.

When I first stepped onto the campus of Soka University of America, located in Calabasas, Calif., little did I know of the impact this experience would have on my vision of the world. In September 1994, SUA had just embarked on its own journey, making history by opening the first Soka graduate school in the United States. The graduate school was offering (and still is) a Master of Arts in Second and Foreign Language Education with a concentration in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages.

I, too, had started on a new path, uncertain of where it would lead me. After completing my undergraduate studies at the University of California, Berkeley, I hadn't decided what I wanted to do next. I found myself interested in the field of education, moreover, seeking the passion of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi's philosophy of humanistic education. In addition, I was interested in going to Japan to study its language and culture. My mother, who is a native of Japan, always wanted the best education for her children and for us to realize the power of our Buddhist practice. I believe that it was her sincere determination and prayer that led me to U.C. Berkeley and then to SUA. My mother also led me to seek SGI President Ikeda's spirit. Therefore, I am eternally grateful to my mother for showing me the best path for my life.

After being accepted to the graduate school, I felt so fortunate to become a part of the Soka school system that President Ikeda founded in honor of his mentors Mr. Makiguchi and Mr. Josei Toda — a system with founding ideals that are based on developing capable global citizens for the sake of humanity's happiness and peace.

President Ikeda, citing Mr. Makiguchi, said, "The vision he cherished of the kind of teachers who would carry out that sacred task is not of someone who sits ensconced on the throne of learning as an object of veneration but rather as a public servant who guides those aspiring to ascend that throne themselves."

Being a part of the first class with nine others coming from different parts of the world was an extremely enriching experience. Such a diverse make-up allowed us to explore each other's cultures and experiences.

Academically, the courses are challenging and engaging. Our teachers of SUA gave us their passion, their support and friendship. Due to their sincere efforts, I was able to awaken my desire to be part of Mr. Makiguchi's, Mr. Toda's and Mr. Ikeda's dreams. In other words, I could realize my mission in life: serving others and contributing to the blossoming of each individual through education. The connection I made with my teachers is something I still cherish and appreciate to this day.

I am currently in my third year teaching at Soka University in Japan. With the sole wish of applying humanistic education in my classes, I am determined to help students reveal their full potential as leaders of the 21st century.

In conclusion, the education I received at SUA was both academically and spiritually invigorating. Being an educator allows me to learn from my mentor President Ikeda, who

dedicates his life to a very clear purpose: the happiness of all. President Ikeda helped me find my dream, and SUA helped me realize it. I also cherish those at SUA who work so hard behind the scenes: dean, faculty and staff members who participate in this endeavor. I will apply what I have learned at SUA and continue to learn from my experiences in the future as a student of life.

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