

SUA ATTRACTS STUDENTS WITH BIG DREAMS

The first freshman class at Soka University of America, Aliso Viejo includes students from 18 countries on five continents. On Aug. 23, some of the international students sat down with World Tribune Staff Writer Jamie Liptan and described their experiences in coming to SUA.

Gonzalo Obeillero Argentina

The main reason I decided to go to SUA was because I thought it was the right place to reach the maximum of my capacity as a human being. I was studying graphic design for two years in Argentina, and I found that this kind of education was not enough for me. When I heard about SUA, I thought, this is the kind of education I need.

In regular college institutions in Argentina, you get no sense of cooperation between students. It's more like competition. You basically are trying to survive, so you can market yourself. It's only for practical purposes. That's necessary, but it wasn't enough for me. There was no consciousness of fostering human beings.

As a young man, I would have to pursue my development into the kind of human being I want to become on my own. I found that the kind of preparation you need if you are planning to contribute to society and make a change is much more demanding than just planning to get a good job. It takes a different kind of knowledge and experience, and I had a hard time finding that kind of training in my former school environment. It is possible to get it anywhere, but this is the ideal place. I find the expectations about being the first class at SUA amazing, and very motivational.

Academically, I seek the foundation to become a cultured man, fully cosmopolitan, who really understands the world and where we are at this time in history. I worry about South America because of the shame many people feel of being Latin American. I think I have that shame too, and I struggle with it. On the other hand, I am glad to share in that struggle. I want to work in the field of culture. I want to help to shape a strong South American cultural identity, maybe through governmental institutions or cultural activities.

In America, everything is big and amazing, yet the people here are warm. I would like to create deep friendships with my fellow students. When I first met them, I thought, "I don't know them, but I know they're going to be my best friends!" They have big dreams and high ideals, and that is so encouraging. I can't imagine being depressed here. I feel so encouraged walking the path through the campus from the dorms to the dining hall, seeing the great landscape and meeting all the students in the morning.

SJI President Ikeda is the person I admire the most. He has achieved so many goals. I am amazed at the way he realizes them. I consider him my mentor, and that is probably the reason I am here. When my experience about going to SUA was published in the SJI-Argentina newsletter, many students wanted to come here.

That is another main motivation for me; I am here for them as well. That is why I was able to break through the obstacles I had during the application process. It wouldn't make sense to just be here for myself. Sharing this experience with them is a way for me to keep my spirits high. The expectations people have for me make me feel lighter; without them it would be much harder for me. They give me a reason to challenge myself, to wake up in the morning and do my best.

Priyanka Sabarwal
India

A friend in India gave me a brochure from SUA that began with this quote from Dr. Ikeda, “What our world most requires now is the kind of education that fosters love for humankind, that develops character—that provides an intellectual basis for the realization of peace, and empowers learners to contribute to and improve society.”

And it just clicked. This is what I wanted, to work for peace. And I had been asking myself, “What is education really for?” It gives you an intellectual basis; it’s not just for fame or money.

I was one of the top students in my school until the eighth grade, when the school started using the exam system. I could not cope with it at first. I was used to studying at the last minute, and I could not do that anymore. I had to start working hard. But it was all to come here.

The process was really tough. For example, getting my visa was very difficult. It also took a long time getting my school records, and then there was the language exam. These obstacles made me even more convinced that SUA is where I was meant to go.

I was also encouraged by the support I got from SUA. Any kind of question or need I had, they were right there. The more that I heard about the school, the more excited I became! It’s a new century, it’s a new school. A lot of people have pointed out that it’s not well known, but we are going to make it recognized.

The college education in India is overpopulated, and the concentration is not on the individual. The true purpose of education is lost. At the better institutions, it’s like a rat race—very competitive. It is just to get ahead of the other, not to contribute to the world. One of my reasons for coming here is that someday I want to change the education system in my country.

The students here have deep bonds already. I think they were there since the day we came in. I did not know many of the students when I came, but in just minutes we were friends. It was amazing. I was homesick for only one night. We are united as a class, we all want to set the traditions and we are all very excited. This is home. We are like a family.

SUA has a great curriculum. I want to take so many courses! I plan to study very hard, give my best to my activities and make my country and Dr. Ikeda proud of me. I would also like to become a person of broad outlook and deep character, a world citizen.

Dr. Ikeda is so great. I have no words to thank him for this university. Since I have come here, it’s a new feeling, a new relationship. He is my mentor, and to study at a university which is established by your mentor, to be learning what you always wanted to learn, I think this is great. So I consider myself fortunate to be able to study at this university, establish it and help make its mark in the world. I think we have a great responsibility as the first class; all eyes are on us. We have to determine what this university is really about, so what we do is very important. We have a great president, a great faculty and we are great students. I think we can do it.

I am very close to Gandhi’s teachings. I read his writings often. To have a classroom building dedicated to him at SUA makes me really proud that I am from India. I think he has done a lot for India. His philosophy on education says that its true purpose is for the individual to become a great citizen, the ideal patriot to his family, community and nation. That is also the mission of SUA students, and that is what I aim to become.