

## EDITORIAL: Students Need Our Support

When SGI President Ikeda meets with students, he often urges them to make study their top priority. For students, he has said, faith manifests itself in their studies. After all, in the long course of life, the time one can devote to intensive studies as a high school or college student is relatively short. And yet it is a decisive time; what students can get out of school deeply influences the direction their lives will take and what they will contribute in the future. With this in mind, one of the missions of the newly formed SGI-USA student division is “contributive life,” to “challenge ourselves through academics and faith toward positively contributing to society in the 21st century.”

It seems, though, that it’s getting harder than ever to be a student in the United States — especially a college student. Because of high tuition, many college students must work while they’re going to school.

In addition to working and taking classes, many are also participating, as best they can, in SGI-USA activities. That’s a tall order, and the truth is that sometimes it’s almost impossible to fill. People have different ways of dealing with the challenge of time management as students: Some cut back on activities or become temporarily “inactive”; a few stay in school longer than they otherwise would so they can fulfill organizational responsibilities. Every student needs to make wise choices.

With a growing number of students in our organization, and with the fall semester coming on, perhaps it’s an appropriate time to reflect on how the SGI-USA can best support students. How can our organization help students make studies their top priority, but also give them faith encouragement? How can we establish relationships with these members, whom we might rarely see at activities because of their busy schedules?

One way is through regular communication. A phone call here, an e-mail there, or a calendar in the mail once a month can help students feel connected to the organization. And they *want* to feel connected. Some students say they are sorry they can’t be as active as they were before; some are dismayed when they’re unable to attend a discussion meeting for a few weeks and then feel they’re “written off” by their leaders (the phone calls suddenly stop). But if the communication keeps coming, if students feel they’re still in the loop, they’ll be encouraged to persevere in faith and their studies.

Another way we can support students is by respecting their decisions. Many times students have to decide between doing an activity or studying. Honoring their choice may sometimes be hard. When we really want a student to attend a meeting, and she decides not to, we might start thinking of ways to persuade her to change her mind. “You can study in the car on the way,” we might say, offering her a ride to the meeting. But our good intentions might inadvertently cause pressure and resentment.

On the other hand, we may worry about students who are very active in the organization, when we feel they should be studying more. But many students find that what they learn in the SGI gives greater meaning to their studies and translates into greater productivity with their schoolwork. (Of course, if we feel a student is using activities to run away from schoolwork — going to meetings every night during finals week, for instance — we’d do well to express our concern.)

Respecting students’ decisions also means to understand that their schedules are sometimes subject to sudden change. Students often don’t know ahead of time how much homework they’ll have on a given weekend, how long it will take them to finish an assignment, when they’ll be able to meet with classmates to work on a group project, etc.

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Helping students make their studies priority No. 1 makes us all winners. We can take pride in their victories at school as would their families. And the students will come to more deeply respect the SGI-USA for its support — not pressure — during this crucial time, learning the principle that faith manifests itself in daily life. The SGI-USA has a lot to offer students in this respect.

But ultimately it's up to the students to take responsibility. We can point them in that direction, but whether they can become "humanistic leaders [who] will emerge like a glittering galaxy of stars," as President Ikeda has said he hopes they will, in the end depends on them.

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