Message from SUA Founder Daisaku Ikeda
To the Seventh Undergraduate Commencement Ceremony
Soka University of America

To Soka University of America’s Class of 2011, each of you whom I cherish with my life: Congratulations on your graduation and on the glorious success of this ceremony!

I thank you for having dedicated the past four years to your studies, and for forging your character and growing as individuals at the same time. I laud you for this feat achieved in your time of youth. We have all triumphed as a result.

And now you are poised to embark from this day as great victors for a lifetime, to leave behind yet-unwritten chapters in the ever-unfolding epic of your lives.

To the families and friends of the Class of 2011, please accept my felicitations as well and allow me to share in your pride and joy on this wonderful day.

I also wish to express my warmest greetings and gratitude to the members of the faculty and administration, for the thoughtful encouragement and counsel you have provided our students day and night; and to the distinguished guests and supporters who have gathered here today, for so generously assisting our school publicly and in private over the years.

And finally, to the proud alumni of SUA, who are intrepidly forging ahead upon august paths of purpose throughout the world: Welcome home, my dear friends!

The gates of this institution opened with the dawn of the 21st century. Few will deny that the world in the new century has been buffeted by constant upheaval and the gales of change greater than that faced in the previous century. Yet, even in the darkest of hours, the bold light of renewal cast by SUA, its service as an institute of higher learning to advance peace and humanistic education, has never waned nor wavered.

Today, a growing community of American educators is citing SUA for being one of the most diverse universities in the country. Many of the world’s foremost thinkers and leaders have also hailed it as a model institution for the education of global citizens and
hold the highest expectations over its continued contributions in the future.

The tenth anniversary of the Aliso Viejo campus has been an unqualified success. We owe this to those who embraced this school from its inception, the men and women who poured their hearts as well as energies into its development. It is an achievement that people around the world have acknowledged and applauded. And for their work, I shall always remain indebted.

This Commencement is being held at the Soka Performing Arts Center, whose opening we have long awaited. I not only stand in profound gratitude to those who strove mightily to complete it, I am also very much aware of how hard our students and others have worked to prepare for this ceremony. I thank all of you from my heart.

As this is a day in which the Class of 2011 sets forth into the world, I call out to you: Bear the banners for new paths of peace and our humanity!

Our world is being repeatedly rocked by intractable issues, from the food crisis and disparities created by poverty, to natural disasters, global warming and outbreaks of regional conflicts. It is precisely because we live in such trying times that the need for a truly united network of global citizens is imperative, for they possess the global vision, the belief in life’s ultimate sanctity, the drive and energy to create peace, to better our world.

In his inaugural address delivered a half-century ago, President John F. Kennedy called out to a Cold War world mired in an East-West standoff and haunted by the specter of a nuclear holocaust:

We offer not a pledge but a request: that both sides begin anew the quest for peace, before the dark powers of destruction unleashed by science engulf all humanity in planned or accidental self-destruction.

In another address, President Kennedy wrote:

Most of [the new steps toward peaceful cooperation] will require a new approach to the Cold War—[primarily] a desire… to compete in a host of peaceful arenas, in ideas, in production, and in service to all humanity.
The contest will continue…but it should be a contest in leadership instead of destruction, a contest in achievement instead of intimidation.

Allow me to reiterate this point made by the president: “to compete…in service to all humanity.” It resonates deeply with the idea of humanitarian competition proposed by Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, founder of Soka pedagogy, at the turn of the 20th century, when the scourge of imperialism began to sweep across the world.

The concept of competition defined here obviously does not mean for one party to overwhelm and conquer the other. It should be thought instead as a friendly rivalry in a broadly based attempt to resolve a common problem; those who take part in this effort vie with one another to develop, strengthen and amplify the capacity for peace and humanity within as many young people as possible. No one loses in this contest; there are only winners.

I believe it is the only viable form of competition in which our world can afford to engage, enabling us to resolutely respond to the myriad challenges from our past that remain unresolved to this day—a struggle to be won through education to enrich our humanity, advance peace and develop global citizens. And you are the ones who bravely bear the banners of peace and humanity at the forefront of this battle.

Professor Sarah Wider, a fellow poet and past President of the Ralph Waldo Emerson Society, has shared how much she expects from the students at SUA over the course of our discourses:

…Soka students pursue their studies with vision. They convey a strong sense of being able to do important work in the world, and of knowing that one need not wait to engage in that work. They do that work wherever they are, and make certain that what they are doing connects and supports the solutions others are creating elsewhere. That impresses me because when young people understand and act on this understanding, they advance the work for peace and justice with an imagination and energy that are essential to the world’s vitality.

I understand that the Performing Arts Center that opened today has generated considerable interest among local followers of the arts as a multi-purpose cultural
facility.

America has many prestigious halls and centers promoting the arts that have long been loved by her people. One such facility is Carnegie Hall, which I had the opportunity to visit when I traveled to New York in 1996 to deliver a lecture at Columbia University’s Teachers College.

A story dating back many years that I found particularly revealing goes like this: One day, a man stopped a world-famous pianist on the street and asked how to get to Carnegie Hall. The pianist replied, “Practice, practice, practice!”

For artists the world over, performing at Carnegie Hall is a dream come true, a goal of a lifetime and peerless honor.

The man who built the hall was Andrew Carnegie, who emigrated from Scotland with his parents when he was a boy. A close-knit family, Andrew strove tirelessly to overcome poverty. His parents endured great hardship, but they embraced their son with pride and joy. Thus inspired, Andrew went on to become one of the world’s most successful steel magnates. Renowned for his philanthropy and the passion with which he pursued it, Carnegie devoted much of his life into the advancement of the arts and education, as well as to the welfare of his employees.

One of the first projects he undertook 120 years ago was to construct Carnegie Hall. For many of his peers, then, the name “Carnegie” stood for ceaseless effort.

As a youth, one of my favorite Carnegie adages was this: “I believe that the true road to preeminent success in any line is to make yourself master of that line.”

Carnegie also understood that a cheerful life would not succumb to adversity: “There is very little success,” he stated, “where there is little laughter.”

I urge the Class of 2011 to learn from Carnegie’s words and example, living each day in joy and with great care, whatever your choice of work or pursuit. Advance along your chosen path one surefooted stride at a time and become a person who is indispensable by being the best at what you do.
Today marks the beginning of a new hall of culture bearing the name of Soka in Aliso Viejo. Still, the magnificence of this building in itself does not signify that it has been completed.

Its completion will only come after paeans to life and humanity are sung and a grand symphony for the triumph of peace resounds from this very center, the crescendo of a new, value creating dynamic emanating ever outward. You are the ones, as individuals and together, that must make it so. In this sense, SUA, while celebrating its tenth anniversary, remains very much a work in progress. Our task, then, has only begun.

Just as Carnegie Hall kindles the desire to practice in the hearts of musicians, let SUA become known to all for its unceasing effort, daring and creativity. I hope that you will make that day come true.

As you are all the young cofounders of this school, it is the success, solidarity, and victory that each of you achieve which will breathe new life into the name of Soka and ensure that SUA will fulfill its promise.

Remember, there can be no impasse in a life spent in creating value.

I ask this of you, then: Master your role in the great drama of life in a way true to yourself until the very end, bringing forth the creative energy you honed here at SUA to the fullest.

This day is a new start for you. Let us set off toward further progress!

Our goal is to scale the summits that bring us closer to timeless completion, winning victory after victory!

Long live our SUA!
Long live our glorious Class of 2011!

Daisaku Ikeda
Founder, Soka University of America
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