

20<sup>th</sup> December 2021

To: Hiroshima University President Mitsuo Ochi

From: “The Study Group on Inappropriate Postings such as Twitter and other SNS Media”

### **Panel Report regarding inappropriate posts on SNS media such as Twitter**

It has been pointed out that some young faculty member of the Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences at Hiroshima University, posted some contents on Twitter that can be construed to encourage promoting discrimination and prejudice against certain foreign nationals, and that classes have been conducted that may promote such prejudice as described above as a result of a lack of consideration for the level of understanding of the students.

In light of this, “The Study Group on Inappropriate Postings such as Twitter and other SNS (Social Network Services) Media” (hereinafter referred to as the “Study Group”) was established under the special order of the President of the University, which included some panel members who are experts from outside the University; the Study Group has examined the handling of expressions that promote discrimination and prejudice against foreigners and minorities, as well as academic freedom, freedom of speech, and the role of university faculty members. The Study Group has met three times and has also deliberated by e-mail. Based on the recognition that the incident above is not just a problem for one lecturer, but an issue that all members of the university should be aware of, the panel discussed topics including the general attitude towards discrimination and hate speech seen in universities today, and the role that universities should actively play.

Although there have been some minor differences of opinions between the panel, they generally agreed on the following issues.

#### **1. Views on discrimination and prejudice at universities**

In today’s increasingly diverse and internationalized world, universities world-wide are receiving lecturers, researchers and students from abroad to promote collaboration in education and research. At the same time, universities are also seeing an increase in the number of home researcher undertaking research abroad, while the trend of sending home students abroad has been accelerating recently. In this context, universities are expected to make sure that they have a proper understanding on the situation of discrimination and prejudice both at home and abroad, including those concerning nationality and sexual identity.

In addition, in today's digitalized world, one cannot entirely deny the fact that there is a tendency among people becoming less sensitive to discrimination, prejudice and hate speech because of the filter bubble of information and biased opinions that are sent to them, and also of the echo chamber phenomenon where people become addicted to online information and fall for receiving the comments from their followers who have similar interests to their own.

Under these circumstances, universities have a responsibility to play a leading role in creating a society free from discrimination, prejudice and hate speech by raising awareness of their faculty/administrative members and students.

## **2. Expressing one's opinions on social networking sites and the university's response to such attempts**

It is difficult to immediately question the illegality of expressive acts on social networking services (SNS) such as Twitter under current Japanese law, even if they are likely to promote discrimination and prejudice against foreigners and minorities. Furthermore, universities should be cautious about intervening in the private statements and activities of faculty/administrative members there. When using Twitter for private activities, one should envisage the possibility of their blog contents to be partially 'extracted' and retweeted; in that case, we assume that it is the sole responsibility of the individual to deal with any resulting flood of comments to his-her blog contents or criticism received.

However, as the Twitter users are members of the organization, it is not appropriate for the University to ignore them, and the University reaffirms that it does not tolerate discrimination or prejudice. It is also the role of universities to inform students, who are expected to play an active role in the world in the future, about international trends in discrimination, prejudice and hate speech, and the importance of acting in accordance with common sense. It must be borne in mind that even in cases where it is difficult to question illegality in Japan, illegality may be questioned in some countries, and cases may be viewed harshly by international students, international faculty members, and overseas research collaborators. HU Faculty/administrative members and students, whether in Japan or overseas, should take responsibility for their own words and should always be careful to ensure that they do not constitute discrimination, prejudice or hate speech.

## **3. Aiming at the further enhancement of education at universities**

Universities have the responsibility and authority to determine the educational system and policies of the university, to provide an environment for lecturers to receive training and other courses to help them acquire the basic knowledge and improve their skills that they should

know as university lecturers, and to support them after their appointment so that they can start their teaching, research, administrative and other activities smoothly without being left out.

However, lecturers may not be allowed to teach anything in any way under the spirit of academic freedom, but should be familiar with the university's educational policy and try to devise their own teaching style. In particular, new teachers should make full use of the training provided by the university, and of the guidance and advice given by assigned mentors in charge of new lectures, when starting their classes. As for Hiroshima University, it has established a training program for new faculty members to provide an environment in which they can take courses that will help them acquire the basic knowledge and improve their skills that they need to know as university faculty members, and has also established a mentoring system to support faculty members after their arrival so that they can start their various activities in education, research, and administration smoothly without feeling left out. Newly appointed teachers are expected to take full advantage of this environment and support.

In undergraduate and postgraduate courses, it is important to introduce students to a wide range of knowledge and views, taking into account their learning history, so that they can develop a broad perspective. In particular, when using materials with sensitive content that may lead to discrimination or prejudice, it is necessary to provide sufficient supplementary explanations in class, to confirm students' understanding and to communicate with them sufficiently.

Universities are made up of students and faculty/administrative members from a variety of backgrounds. The panel members hope that everyone at Hiroshima University will listen to a wide variety of opinions, receive a wide range of information and opinions from a fair and impartial standpoint, have their own opinions, discuss them with others, and work together with mutual respect.

### **Members of The Study Group on Inappropriate Postings such as Twitter and other SNS Media**

Chair: Professor Shinichi Kobayashi, Dean, Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Hiroshima University

Professor Masahiro Sogabe, Graduate School of Law, Kyoto University

Professor Funck, Carolin Elisabeth Hanna, Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Hiroshima University

Kimiko Murofushi, Professor Emeritus, Ochanomizu University

Professor Takashi Monden, Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Hiroshima University

N.B.

In response to the inappropriate Twitter postings, the Study Group in question has been established to discuss the following from a free standpoint, based on the expertise and diverse experiences of each panel: i) the treatment of expressions that promote discrimination and prejudice against foreigners, minorities, and other groups in general; ii) academic freedom, freedom of speech; and iii) the role of university faculty. Please note that this report is not intended for discussing the disciplinary actions for the case concerned.