

Nakajima Seminar

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Specialty: Applied Econometrics

Interviewer: 倉富・木屋

『The Economics of Connection and Influence』

What do you research in your seminar?

I'm not sure if students will be attracted to the seminar after hearing about what I research, but recently I have been studying Economics in relation to Connection and Influence. (Laugh) I believe that when people interact with each other value is produced, and I would like to measure the specific value that is produced.

Since Economics is related to Social Science, observing a single person is not very interesting. Actions and decisions ripple, and through such interactions, I believe that there is much more than just a simple transaction. My belief is that I want to be able to verify this through numbers and data.

In the past, I studied the pure effect of smoking, but recently I have been focusing on innovation. For example, I believe that the reason why innovation is produced in the Silicon Valley is because a variety of people are interacting with each other, and new values are being produced. Not just in the Silicon Valley, but the ripple effect of knowledge is local. I have been researching the type of interactions that produce such innovations. At first glance, this topic may seem as if it is not related to economics, but at the very least, I believe that this is a crucial topic to research. This is what I have been researching for the past 10 years.

I have not related this topic to other topics such as Industrial Organization Theory, Labor Economics, or International Economics because I like to do what I want.

『I wish I could convey to everyone the joy of research』

Can you tell us about your education philosophy?

I don't have an education philosophy. (Laugh) I am not an educator to begin with. (Laugh) I think if I keep talking less people will apply for my seminar, but I am not here to be an educator, I am here as a researcher. At Keio, I do what I like to do because college is a playground.

I want to transmit this exciting feeling to my students. Of course, I teach my students, but I think that excitement will broadly and deeply transmit better than if I teach. In 5, maybe 3 years, you will forget about everything that was taught to you, but the things that were fun or exciting you will remember for a lifetime. I guess this is my education philosophy.

In my seminar, I allow students to study based on the range I decide, but I'd be happy if it seems like you are having fun with the topic. I'm not motivated to teach; I'm just doing what I like that. Even if I teach, most students will forget what I teach. But there are a variety of people, right? I think that's very interesting. And the students have very interesting ideas, and when they research about these ideas, it becomes a stimulation for them. I don't intend on teaching, and I don't intend on students learning anything from me.

『Economics is basically limitless. You can do anything!』

Tell us about your college days

During my college days, I was an Agriculture Major, and I didn't study until my 3rd year. (Laugh) I was basically a farmer. I would wake up at 5 am and ride horses, take care of the horses, mow the grass field, take a nap, and I would sleep by 8pm. When I was in my 3rd year, I realized that I should do something about this lifestyle, and in my 4th year, I decided to join a research seminar. In the research seminar, I decided to research as a student helper under a professor.

However, the Agriculture Major was very strict. The faculty would not allow students to study anything other than agriculture. Personally, I like to do what I want, and at the time, I wanted to study Agricultural Economics to save the Japanese agriculture industry. When I joined the Agriculture Major, I realized it was boring. Economics had no limits to the topic it can be related to, because any topic can be analyzed through an economic approach. I went to New York to get my master's degree in economics. It didn't have to be in New York, but I went there because I was accepted there.

Even though I was attending college, I self-studied the foundation of economics. I believe that a master's degree is simply just an extension of self-studying. Since I was originally an Agriculture Major, I never really learned Economics, so I self-studied Economics, studied with my friends, and talked with my professor. However, this feeling of harmony and excitement is still left with me to this day.

『Next time I think I'll make something like a girls' school』

What do you require from the incoming 2nd years?

Diversity. The reason why I want smart students is because there is no need for me to teach them. Currently, I have many gentlemen who are not very smart, and so I would have to teach them. (Laugh) I think I want diversity.

I'm also not desperate to have students join my seminar. I don't understand why unmotivated students join seminars for the sake of joining a seminar. I'll have these kinds of people quit.

Currently I only have male students, so I am pushing for female students. (Laugh) All boys are no fun, so I might make my seminar all girls... I'm just kidding. (Laugh)

『Putting all the useless things I did in my school days together makes me what I am today』

Lastly, a short message to the 2nd years

Everyone is goal oriented. In other words, people join certain seminars because of connections with big named companies or because there are many girls, and so on. I don't really mind this, but I don't like the fact that everyone is goal oriented. I believe that having a goal-oriented mind would cause people to think in the short term rather than the long term.

From my perspective, Keio University is a group of goal-oriented people. I don't think it's a bad thing, but in my seminar, I want students that can seriously work on tasks that have no meaning, since my seminar and lectures are meaningless. (Laugh) However, if you think about it later you will find value in the future. But it will not give you immediate power. But knowledge that would become immediate power will not last for more than 5 years.

Since my students are from urban areas, they can think quickly, and they are resourceful. But I don't think such characteristics will help them in the future. They should gamble more because they have luck. I think they should try studying about something meaningless.

Sidenote:

This interview was done in the seminar room in which Professor Nakajima teaches. His frank, humor, and casual way of speech allowed us to be drawn into every word he was saying. As someone who was captivated by Professor Nakajima's charm through this interview, I edited this article with the hope that second year students who will read this article will also be drawn in by Professor Nakajima's charm.