

Dr. Yamada Atsuhiko
Specialty: Social Policy Theory
Interviewer: 倉富、菊井

『An Economic Approach to Social Policy』

Please tell us about what your seminar is about

Social policy is broadly divided into two areas: labor policy and social security and welfare policy. I am often asked what social policy is in comparison with economic policy. However, to put it in the simplest way, we can say that “social problems are defined by the large scale of labor and social security policies. The content is to remove and reduce it with a two-pronged policy.

So, what kind of theory do you research in the field of social policy? From an economic approach, we research how to increase the efficiency and fairness. This is an example of how you can pursue this from a theoretical perspective. In addition, the social security policy is to provide large benefits of more than 20% of the scale of the economy and income redistribution. Providing benefits affects people’s income distribution. This is an example of how you can pursue this from an empirical perspective.

Even at Keio, there are quite a few people who have various family circumstances and are facing social problems, so I think it is easy to work in this research field of how to get rid of social problems. In addition, as the population ages, and the question of how to distribute social security benefits efficiently and how to use them to improve the income distribution situation, with consideration given to the working generation is becoming important to everyone. I think this is a relevant issue for me.

Please tell us about what you are currently researching

Personally, I am researching about three topics.

One is that there are social policies that support people’s lives such as the minimum wage, pension, public assistance, and that create a minimum level that is the basic level of social security benefits. However, compared to other countries, the balance is quite distorted in Japan. I am researching on how many layers of poverty there are.

Second, while social security benefits account for 20% of the economy may seem large, this scale is very small compared to other countries where the aging population is not as advanced in Japan. Under such circumstances, pension benefits account for 50% of Japan’s social security benefits. Especially in the case of Japan, the employment rate of the elderly is very high, so we must evaluate the income distribution of the elderly.

As a third topic, I am researching about different types of medical and nursing care access are given to low-income groups. This is important because this is a major social issue for people is when their health care is not satisfied.

『I want to help you gain new knowledge』

Can you tell us about your education philosophy?

As for education philosophy, it's presumptuous because my seminar is still on its 7th term ... However, when I say education, I am simply helping students dig deeper into what they are interested in, but I just want to let students know I am there to support their academic endeavor.

One is the study of social problems, so we discover what the social problems are. What's more, it's not enough just to find a solution. I would like them to acquire the skills to discover problems, present problems, and convey them to others in an easy way.

The second is teamwork. I believe that Keio's philosophy of "half learning, half learning" is a great philosophy. I would like you to understand that we will continue to advance our research in a positive direction.

Thirdly, I would like to help people acquire new knowledge, but research cannot be done in a time efficient manner. I believe everyone has acquired the attitude of striving to get the maximum results as much as possible every time they are given a task. That's a good thing, but research must be done in a slightly different way.

As you accumulate hard work, you can obtain opportunities that lead to new knowledge. Beyond that, there is the joy of gaining new knowledge. After all, writing a graduation thesis is a long-term project that takes two years from entering a seminar until your graduate. I want you to do this. I don't know if you can call this an education philosophy, but it's what I want you to learn.

『My strong desire to see what this society will look like in the future』

Can you tell us about your Student Days?

During my freshman and sophomore year, I was in 2 clubs: a tennis club and an art club. I was simply enjoying my college life. However, at the end of my sophomore year, I started thinking about how this society will look like in the future.

The desire to see this, something like an intellectual curiosity, came out. I thought that social policy has an important role that determines the state of the society, and as a result, I became attracted to this field. I understand how it feels to change their field more than twice. But I think it's important to take a detour like that.

『Have an interest in the field and be willing to do something difficult 』

What do you require from the incoming 2nd years?

It is important to have an interest in the field of social policy. I think that's all there is to it. And in my seminar as well, the goal is to gain some new knowledge, so don't be afraid to work hard for that. I ask students to study data analysis methods, the various systems of social policy, and

the economics framework that forms the basis of analysis, as I will study social policy using an economic approach. I would like to find someone who can do such hard work.

Research is always a series of hard work, so there are times when you get frustrated along the way. At times like that, you can return to where you started, such as when you began to feel a strong passion for social issues or feeling resentment at the very existence of social issues. This is an important motivation for research. Just being interested in social issues and social policy you are welcomed, but if you have that, you're even more welcomed.

『This 2 years will make a difference. Training your intelligence will be important』

Lastly, a message to the incoming 2nd years?

After all, in your second year, I think it is important to learn a wide range of general education and deepen your specialized field. At the same time, you should work hard on your language skills. Because the institutional variation of social policy within Japan is small, there is a need to know about the social policies of other countries as well. Of course, the friendships you make during your university days around the age of 20 will last for the rest of your life, so I hope you will deepen those relationships in seminars and circles.

On the other hand, what you do academically in my university life is to make full use of what I have accumulated so far and gain some new knowledge on my own. The campus will change from the first year, so I hope that you will make a fresh start, change your mind, and study.

I think there are various kinds of seminars, depending on the teacher's policy, such as the ratio and laissez-faire. A person who graduated without training at all, and there is a huge difference in these two years. Even if you don't think your laziness has any impact on you, I want you to think that you actually incur a large "opportunity cost."