

## ASPIRE Forum 2023 held at KAIST



The ASPIRE Forum, the annual meeting of the ASPIRE League, of which Tokyo Tech is a member, was hosted by Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology (KAIST) from July 2 to 4 at its main campus in Daejeon.

The ASPIRE League, initiated by Tokyo Tech and established in 2009, is a consortium of top science and engineering universities in Asia with the aim of forming an innovation hub in the region through the development of science and technology and human resources. The five member universities are Tsinghua University (China), Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST, China), Nanyang Technological University (Singapore), KAIST (Korea), and Tokyo Tech. Since the launch, Tokyo Tech has been serving as the League's secretariat.

Due to the spread of the COVID-19, the forum was held online from 2020 to 2022. But this year the forum was held in person for the first time in four years, after Tokyo Tech hosted the forum in 2019.

### **Symposium**

The ASPIRE Symposium was held on the morning of July 3. Researchers from each member university gave talks on technologies and research findings related to this year's forum theme, "Technology and Stewardship for a Sustainable Global Future." Lectures were given on technologies that contribute to achieving carbon neutrality and on energy issues, and it was evident that each university is engaged in a variety

of research activities aimed at realizing a sustainable society.

Tokyo Tech's Professor Nobuhiro Hayashi, Vice President for International Affairs, gave a lecture on "Sustainable futuristic healthy society realized through AI-assisted proteomics based on practical open innovation." The lecture was well received by the students who attended.

The Q&A session was lively with many questions from the participating students. Even after the time was up, the audience lightheartedly continued with questions over coffee during the break time, which was a valuable advantage of the face-to-face meetings that were common before the COVID-19 pandemic.

During the symposium, a surprise party was held for a student from Tokyo Tech who had celebrated her birthday the day before. While all forum participants sang Happy Birthday to her, KAIST Vice President Man-Sung Yim presented her with a cake, which was a heartwarming gesture.



### **Vice Presidents and Senior Staff Meeting**

On the afternoon of July 3, the Vice Presidents and Senior Staff Meeting was held. The vice presidents shared information on the status of recent international collaborative activities at their respective universities and discussed future League activities. Proposals for the ASPIRE League Partnership Seed Fund (start-up support for collaborative research among ASPIRE League member universities) for the 2023 cycle were also reviewed.

Tokyo Tech gave an overview of its upcoming integration with Tokyo Medical and Dental University (TMDU), and also reported on the ASPIRE Undergraduate Engineering Design Challenge (UEDC), an exchange program for undergraduate students. The second UEDC was held the week before, in person for the first time. The proposal to hold another UEDC at Tokyo



Tech in June 2024 and an ASPIRE Forum at Tsinghua University in July 2024 was approved at the meeting.

After the meeting, six of the collaborative research project groups that have so far received support from the ASPIRE League Partnership Seed Fund gave online presentations of their research outcomes. Of the six, two projects involved Tokyo Tech researchers: one with Professor Tsuyoshi Michinobu of the School of Materials and Chemical Technology, in collaboration with HKUST and Tsinghua University (selected in 2019), and another with Visiting Professor Masahide Yamaguchi of the School of Science, in collaboration with KAIST (selected in 2020).

## Student Workshop



The student workshop this year was held in two phases, from June 28 to June 30 online, and from July 2 to July 4 in person at KAIST. A total of 22 postgraduate students from the member universities were divided into five groups and participated in the group work. On the final day, each group made a presentation to a panel comprised of the vice presidents in attendance. The panel evaluated and ranked each group before

presenting prizes for outstanding efforts and completion awards to all those at the workshop. A proposed system to support the everyday lives of dementia patients won the Best Presentation Award.

Many proposals focused on technologies and services that make the most of artificial intelligence (AI) to solve social challenges. KAIST's Professor Jaewook Myung, the workshop's instructor, said in his feedback comments that the participants had been specially selected from member universities and were clearly all talented. He was particularly impressed by their insightful questions following the special lecture. In addition, the students demonstrated such remarkable progress in their final presentations, compared to the previous day's rehearsal, that they seemed like totally different presentations. Professor Myung half-jokingly worried that the students had stayed up all night to prepare.



The forum this year ended with the closing ceremony and a lunch reception.

The next ASPIRE Forum is planned to be held in July 2024 at Tsinghua University in Beijing, China.