The Soka Education conference theme this year was “Creating Value through Education toward the Future”. The presentations varied from medicine education at SUA, language learning through play, creative writing, math education, and education for special needs. Workshops were also held, such as gender neutral language and education, Soka Education in action, Soka Education and visual media and 2nd Language learning within Soka Education.

The keynote speaker was Rebecca Martusewicz, a professor in the Teacher Education department at Eastern Michigan University, focusing on concepts such as ecojustice and social foundations in education. Dr. Martusewicz addressed many topics, one of the most potent being the idea of a human economy and greater economy, an idea borrowed from the poet Wendell Berry. It refers to the notion that as a human society, or simply just as ourselves as a single entity, we strive to fulfill our own needs. As a society, we strive to facilitate an ‘economy’ that works to benefit society itself, focusing on the significance of the human being as the centrifugal source of this ‘economy’. However, there is a large economy, the ‘greater’ economy, within which the human economy is only a part. This economy includes the world itself, earth, other beings, perhaps even the universe. In defining these two economies, we describe the dichotomy that we see in many ways: the needs of human society vs. needs of the natural world; the needs of a particular human society vs. the needs of other particular societies (human, non-human and non-sentient); the needs of one human being vs. the needs of another being. Dr. Martusewicz speaks, that when these dichotomies are constructed, where the economies of one strives in disregard to another, when it considers itself superior to another, violence always exists. We can also see this dichotomy in our displacement from our roots, our cultural ideology of the value to displace ourselves from our cultural, ethnic, geographical origins.

Dr. Martusewicz’s words and the presentations of others provided a rich atmosphere of thought and consideration for how to truly advance the ideals of Soka Education, or as I would argue, the ideas of life-nourishment, making the dignity of life the primary focus. At times, Pauling Hall was almost completely filled, and the audience engage presenters with questions that would point to brilliant relationships of ideas between presentations. While the presentations were quite varied, many connections were made, and unfailingly produced a greater unified dialogue.

As an alumni, I was deeply encouraged to see that the effort to engage the principles of Soka Education had not lost its intensity. The current students, to me, represented such a fresh period for SUA and its development, and I look forward for new expressions of its development. As a first time presenter, I was humbled and inspired to work harder in bridging the gap between the ideals of Soka and the current reality of society.

As Danny Habuki said, in his opening remarks, quoted Dr. Ikeda’s words to the first graduating class of Soka High School, saying, “The true value of Soka Education is your attitude towards life.” Dr. Habuki continued, saying, “Our dream is to actualize the Founder’s dream. Each conference is a step towards that.” Cherishing the beautiful campus, and weather, during the conference, my goal is to use this experience, the ideas and the almost palpable atmosphere, to make concrete strides in my own life and workplace, and to actualize the implementation of Soka Education principles.