Today, accelerating social transformations have given rise to new problems and complex new challenges. In such an environment, there is a pressing need for contributors to the formation of public policy to adapt to the times. Policy formation fully utilizing the results of advanced research is now a prerequisite to the resolution of the various problems that face society.

Faculty members of the University of Tokyo have over many years made significant contributions in the policy making process, in particular through their participation in various advisory bodies to the government. With universities expected to make a social contribution, however, one of the responsibilities of the University of Tokyo as a “national university corporation” should be to provide intellectual resources for policy formation and offer policy options.

For this reason, the Policy Alternatives Research Institute was established as a think-tank organization, a body intended to transmit the University’s wealth of accumulated knowledge to society at large.
Toward a Wider Space for Research and Education — Mission for a Think-tank in a University

Kiichi Fujiwara
Director, Policy Alternatives Research Institute

The first role of a university is research. I think it is clear that universities thrive on outstanding findings that challenge previous theories or paradigms. Also obvious is that the primary audience for such new research is researchers themselves, for they can appreciate the contributions made by their peers. This also means that researchers may not be as interested in the social impact of their studies. Academics eager to advance scientific knowledge are not necessarily eager to think of the use of such knowledge, unless such use leads to material benefits. If we leave academic research only in the hands of academics, the results may end up consumed within the ivory tower, with no impact on society.

Another role of universities is education, which is the primary route through which academic achievements are channeled to a new generation, who are expected to carry the torch and generate new findings. Of course, education is not only about educating researchers, because it has an important nexus that unites university research and broader society. However, education need not and should not be the only nexus between a university and society. Scientific information becomes less relevant over time, and after several decades, college graduates can no longer rely on what they learned in class. Here, we must open a path that integrates university research and social needs in a different way than education in the narrow sense. In other words, universities should no longer remain institutions for research and education, but deliver academic findings in a way that best suits the community’s needs and demands. This is what we do. PARI attempts to find and provide an alternate path between academic research and the society in which research is conducted, most often in the form of policy proposals.

Conceptualizing Next Generation Social Systems Based on Knowledge Collaboration — Expectations for the Policy Alternatives Research Institute

Makoto Gonokami
President, the University of Tokyo

The 20th century witnessed dramatic development across all disciplines of the natural sciences, becoming a period of wide-ranging technological advancement. These scientific and technological innovations tremendously expanded the scope of human activities, transformed society, and granted humans unprecedented powers. Even so, the limitations of the basic systems supporting modern society, such as capitalism and democracy, have become obvious. I feel that the world situation is becoming increasingly unstable because of the manifestation of global-scale problems, including the degradation of the global environment, depletion of natural resources and regional disparities. For humanity today, which has acquired greater capabilities than all preceding generations, the path to creating a stable and peaceful society is still unclear. With these circumstances in mind, I believe that we need to create a new system that encourages people from diverse backgrounds to respect one another and cooperate so that they can give a substantial boost to the global economy. Nothing but human wisdom can put this new system into action. In other words, what I have just described is a society in which wisdom drives the economy. I believe that humanity is now at a crossroads, forced to choose whether or not a shift towards this kind of wisdom-driven society is possible. As a developed country in Asia, I believe that Japan has a historical obligation to lead humanity’s shift towards a wisdom-driven society, and that the University of Tokyo should make significant contributions.

It is my desire that the Policy Alternatives Research Institute shall play a role in conceptualizing the next
that should be implemented for the public need. PARI is similar to a think tank; however, the proposals that emanate from this think tank are based on advanced research that previously may have been left in the confines of the ivory tower. By providing a path between research and a concrete call for action, PARI transforms advanced research into a property that can be shared by a wider public.

Research must accompany relevance. Traditional academic research could maintain that new findings are relevant by themselves, even if the research has little impact on improving lives. This will not do, for a mere show of research findings does not assure its relevance. What questions need to be addressed? What answers are most in demand? Relevant research becomes so only through constant interactions between the provider of knowledge and its consumer. We believe that the relevance of research stems from showing a new choice, an alternative unknown before. As an institute for policy alternatives, our duty is to show previously unknown views and choices.

Roles and Activities of the Institute

Communicating policy alternatives utilizing research results at the University of Tokyo

Integrating diverse and advanced knowledge accumulated at the University of Tokyo, this research organization functions as a think tank, promoting interdisciplinary research, creating forums for international knowledge collaboration, and presenting policy recommendations for a new socio-economic system that will contribute to solving global issues.

Detecting problems by constructing networks covering a wide range of fields

Taking advantage of being a part of a university which has diverse research interests, we try to detect problems and to look for comprehensive solutions which could not be found by research done in any single discipline, by constructing networks covering a wide range of fields.

Activating policy research by interacting with internal and external organizations

In order to facilitate multidisciplinary and multilateral research, we form networks with the government, companies, mass media, NPOs, and other organizations, as well as with departments inside the university, and try to activate mutual exchanges and policy research initiatives.

generation mechanisms to supplant the limited mechanisms of contemporary society mentioned above, and in disseminating this to the world. In order to achieve this, it is essential to conduct knowledge collaboration, drawing together a diversity of knowledge with a global perspective. By further combining the academic knowledge held by the various organizations and disciplines across all faculties of the University of Tokyo, and by forging deeper cooperative relationships with foreign research institutions and the front lines where issues are resolved, it is my hope that this institute develops into a domestic and international network “hub” where people with a diversity of knowledge can coalesce.
Methodology of Policy Research and Recommendations

We call a unit which conducts policy research a “policy research unit” and a unit which conducts concrete social demonstration research a “research demonstration project”. Policy recommendations based on research results are published under the name of the policy research unit or the research demonstration project.

Researches at the Policy Alternatives Research Institute are organized by projects ongoing here, such as existing funded research or corporate sponsored research programs in our various departments. In addition to these, independent policy research units or research demonstration projects may be launched by the institute on important issues which, from the researcher’s viewpoint, could potentially arise in the future, even if such issues are not presently socially recognized.

As a general rule, research undertaken by each policy research unit and policy recommendations based on the results of that research are conducted under the name of the unit or its director.

When we propose policy recommendations, we make it a principle to indicate multiple possibilities and provide information which would aid actual policy making, showing clearly both advantages and disadvantages based on objective data.

Policy Recommendations (notable examples)

- Rebuilding Global Health Governance -Recommendations for the G7 (PARI Policy Brief) — Complex Risk Governance Policy Research Unit (May 2016)

Research management: Five years on from Fukushima (Nature) —Masahiro Sugiyama, Ichiro Sakata, Hideaki Shiroyama, Hisashi Yoshikawa & Taketoshi Taniguchi (March 2016)

Science and Technology Policy and Global Research Universities in Singapore: Implications for Japan —KAKENHI & PARI (March 2015)

Final Report - Resilient Governance Study —PARI & COCN (March 2014)

University Reform from the Viewpoint of Innovation System: Evaluation of a National University 10 years after its Incorporation —University and Society Policy Research Unit (December 2013)

Recommendations for the Review of the Basic Plan on Ocean Policy —UT Ocean Alliance & PARI (September 2012)

Final Report – The Silver New Deal for our Active Aging Society —PARI & COCN (March 2012)

Options for Institutionalizing Technology Assessment in Japan —Technology Governance Policy Research Unit (December 2010)


Energy and Environmental Policies for our Society —Technology Governance Policy Research Unit (July 2009)
Seven Key Research Areas

Currently, we have seven key research areas, under which we classify policy research units and research demonstration projects.

1. Universities and Social Systems
Established to study methods of knowledge management at universities with especial focus on specifics such as intellectual property, security export control, organizational management and human resource development.

2. Innovation Systems
Established to adapt to new innovation environments, and study systems to promote innovation from a multifaceted perspective, covering economy, technology, society and other related fields.

3. Technology and Risk Governance
Established to organize a wide range of expertise and knowledge obtained through extensive practice to deal comprehensively with risks and policy issues in technology utilization, natural disasters, financial markets, energy, space activities, etc., and study mechanisms for social decision-making and policy instruments.

4. Security Studies
Established to conduct cross-national research on the future of national security from various angles, covering foods, energy, economy, and human interaction, as well as military power.

5. Institutions for an Aging Society and Medical Innovations
Established to make a comparative review of various policy instruments in many policy areas to deal with the aging of society, assess the impact of medical innovation and study the future of comprehensive policy measures and systems.

6. SDGs Collaborative Research
With the objective of being a hub, in collaboration with other departments at the University of Tokyo, the focus of the SDGs Collaborative Research Area will be to study sustainability, climate change and conflict, and sustainable economic development.

7. Collaboration Research/Sponsored Research