

“Lab culture shifts starting with titles—addressing each other as ‘Nim’”: GIST selects two ‘human rights-friendly labs’

- *Implementing various initiatives for a healthy research culture... Ranging from encouraging open suggestions and supporting the onboarding of new members to sharing research information and ensuring fair compensation*
- *Selected through a process involving written evaluations and interviews with members... Awarded a plaque certifying the lab as “human rights-friendly” along with prize money*



▲ Members of the winning laboratories and officials pose for a commemorative photo at the awards ceremony for the “3rd GIST Human Rights-Friendly Laboratory Contest.” (Fourth from the right in the front row: GIST President Kichul Lim)

The Gwangju Institute of Science and Technology (GIST; President Kichul Lim) announced that it held the “3rd GIST Human Rights-Friendly Laboratory Contest” to foster a healthy research culture characterized by mutual respect and communication among laboratory members. The institute selected the “Sustainable Energy / Electronic Materials and Devices Laboratory” (Department of Materials Science and Engineering) and the “AI Law and Policy Laboratory” (Graduate School of AI Policy) as this year’s human rights-friendly laboratories.

In this year’s contest, the “Sustainable Energy and Electronic Devices Laboratory” won the Grand Prize, while the “AI Law and Policy Laboratory” received the Top Excellence Award.

Organized by the GIST Human Rights Center, the "Human Rights-Friendly Laboratory Contest" is a program launched to spread a culture of respect and communication within laboratories and to enable members to fully immerse themselves in research within a safe and equitable environment. Now in its third year, the contest accepted applications over a four-week period between April and May and selected the final two laboratories following a process that included document reviews and interviews with laboratory members.

The evaluation comprehensively assessed criteria such as a culture of mutual respect that is free from abuse, verbal harassment, or forced attendance at social gatherings and drinking along with a communication culture that encourages the free exchange of ideas and fair distribution of tasks. It also evaluated a cooperative culture that supports new and international members, as well as an ethical culture focused on transparent lab operations and improved member welfare.

The Grand Prize winner, the "Sustainable Energy and Electronic Devices Lab" in the Department of Materials Science and Engineering (led by Professor Sanghan Lee and representative Dr. Jun Beom Hwang), operates an online feedback channel allowing members to freely voice their opinions and uses a shared calendar to coordinate the use of research equipment and enable autonomous scheduling.

Notably, the lab pairs new members with senior members to facilitate their adjustment and hosts quarterly sessions on the online communication platform "Agora" for all members to share their views.

Furthermore, the lab supports smooth communication and a positive research environment by holding in-depth monthly meetings with the lab manager to continuously monitor members' opinions and concerns.

The "AI Law and Policy Lab" at the Graduate School of AI Policy and Strategy (led by Professor Do Hyun Park and representative master's student Young-taek Oh), which won the Top Excellence Award, practices a horizontal communication culture where all members address each other with the respectful honorific "-nim," regardless of rank or age.

The lab utilizes online collaboration tools to share research information, ensuring no member is left uninformed, and provides a lab guidebook to help new members settle in.

Additionally, it fosters an environment where members can participate fairly in research and share achievements by maintaining transparent standards and procedures for compensation based on research contributions.

On August 27 (Thursday), GIST held an awards ceremony at Oryong Hall and presented "Human Rights-Friendly Laboratory" plaques to two research groups. Cash prizes of 1 million won and 750,000 won were awarded to the Grand Prize and Top Excellence Award winners, respectively. The certification as a Human Rights-Friendly Laboratory is valid for one year from the date of selection.

President Kichul Lim encouraged the winning laboratories, stating, "The Human Rights-Friendly Laboratory contest is part of the 'Harmony Up' initiative—aimed at fostering communal harmony—which is one of the three core value innovation strategies I proposed upon taking office." He added, "Scientific creativity can flourish further within a laboratory culture where members respect one another."

Meanwhile, in the first contest, the Grand Prize and Top Excellence Award went to the Department of Chemistry's "Nanoscale Surface Chemistry Laboratory" (Advisor: Prof. Hyunseob Lim) and the Department of Environment and Energy Engineering's "Water Security Laboratory" (Advisor: Prof. Changwoo Kim), respectively. In the second contest, the awards went to the School of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science's "Intelligent Information Systems Laboratory" (Advisor: Prof. Euiseok Hwang) and the Department of Semiconductor Engineering's "Solid-State Lighting Laboratory" (Advisor: Prof. Dong-Seon Lee).