

Dean's Message at Waseda SILS Graduation Ceremony
on 18 September 2021

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Congratulations on graduating from the School of International Liberal Studies (SILS) at Waseda University.

At the outset, I have to acknowledge that you must have had extremely challenging situations for more than one and half a year due to COVID-19. On behalf of the faculty, I sympathise with you in your extraordinary suffering from the various consequences caused by this unprecedented pandemic—particularly in the last three semesters of your studies at SILS.

You may have stayed home alone for a long period over a few semesters, felt less satisfied with inconvenient lifestyle adjustments—such as attending classes online—and missed innumerable precious opportunities to enjoy your final moments of university life, especially those spent with your teachers and friends.

Please understand, however, that this is practically the first time in a century since the Spanish flu of 1918-1920 when people in the world have experienced an equally similar critical moment for the health of human beings beyond borders due to an extraordinarily wide and fast spread of the virus. Under these circumstances, simultaneously, you must have learned how to cope with this 'once-in-a-lifetime' situation and a 'new normal' no matter how stressful they may be.

I hope that this experience has strengthened your resilience and will invariably widen your future perspective, particularly when you encounter another difficult time to overcome. Please do not forget to transform your misfortune into a blessing. This positive attitude is what you have largely acquired at SILS, as you will see the benefits in the future.

Graduation, or commencement as it is called in the United States, signifies that this event is the beginning of a new stage in your life and the start of your professional career. You must stand on your own feet, enjoy your freedom, and take full responsibility for your actions.

Therefore, the request I make of you for your future today is this: Please lead your life so that, in retrospect, you find your SILS days as certainly some of the best moments of your whole life. You must be confident about what you have done at SILS, thanking everyone who supported you during your studies. You should be proud of who you are and step out into the real world. You have already studied and trained extensively, by completing our liberal arts

programme.

Students often ask the question, ‘Teacher, what is the *use* of this (subject)?’ However, *usefulness* does not guarantee the essence of things. As history shows, what is useful (practical) at one time tends to become useless (impractical) eventually. Technology is a good example. If this is so, then what about artificial intelligence (AI)? Do you think that it will replace us and take our jobs? Or will we overcome the rise in any emerging technology? We human beings may occasionally be overly concerned about the unforeseeable future. It is understandable now, mainly because nothing is certain in the ‘post-corona’ era.

If we have an uncertain future, what, then, is the use of the classics and history? Classics will remain with us as long as human beings exist. History may mirror our future and be with numerous treasures of lessons. That is the purpose of classics and history. Whether in the East or the West, we will certainly continue to need Homer’s epics, the Four Books and Five Classics of Confucianism, Shakespeare’s dramas, and Descartes’ philosophy, among many others. I hope that you may have enjoyed some of these classics of literature, films, operas, and any other form of arts during the stay-home period.

It could be the case that you do not know when what you acquired at SILS will become useful. I do hope, though, that what you learned here will bear fruit in the long run, no matter how many years it takes. Your learning at our school will certainly provide you the ability and will to move forward with your own effort—even under adversity such as this pandemic. This is, in my opinion, the effect of receiving an education of liberal arts at an exceptional school like ours.

In earlier times, the life expectancy of human beings was about 50 years, while it can exceed 100 years in the present-day world. Given this, you have to consider that less than a quarter of your life has passed. A much more significant period lies ahead of you.

You can now freely exercise your abilities in any way you choose. Your future will be based on what inspired you at SILS. You can be creative and make your own path, by putting forth your best effort. You are expected to make a meaningful contribution to society where a new normal prevails, or even with COVID-19. We cannot go back to where we were before this pandemic. Therefore, what will your contribution be? Please confidently look ahead to the future, no matter how daunting it may be.

Finally, I would like to celebrate this occasion by congratulating all of you and your families. On behalf of the faculty and Waseda University, I wish you all the best for a healthy and prosperous life.