

A Message from the Dean of the School of International Liberal Studies (SILS) at the Entrance
Ceremony

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Hello everyone, and welcome to the School of International Liberal Studies (SILS) at Waseda University! On behalf of SILS, I would like to offer my congratulations and a warm welcome to all the new students who are entering this school.

I teach international law, Japan's foreign policy, and other related courses at SILS. It is our great pleasure to see you all.

Since its foundation eighteen years ago, SILS has steadily acquired an extremely dynamic and diverse culture, which is evident in the campus's international atmosphere. Certainly, English is the de facto *lingua franca* at our school. However, our unique diversity is based on the multicultural backgrounds and plurilingual perspectives of our students and faculty members. We hope that you will take full advantage of our curriculum, especially our liberal arts education, as you choose which courses to take.

Moreover, freedom and responsibility are two sides of the same coin. You must take responsibility for your decisions and conduct, —not only in your selection of courses but also in your daily life. 'When you are in Rome, do as the Romans do'. In a society, 'your freedom ends where someone else's freedom begins'.

We are living in a time of VUCA: V for volatility, U for uncertainty, C for complexity, and A for ambiguity.¹ For more than two years, the world has been facing the COVID-19 pandemic, which is likely its most serious challenge since the Spanish flu of 1918-1920. The current war in Ukraine has also signalled to us that we are, and will be, in an uncertain world for a while. We all know that these challenges critically affect the whole world in many ways. How long will they last? How should we cope with them? What should we learn to overcome them?

History can tell us many things. Confucius (551 BC– 479 BC), a Chinese philosopher, for example, reminds us of the fluidity of things in nature:

子在川上曰、逝者如斯夫、不舍晝夜²、 [Standing on a riverbank, Master Confucius says what passes by is like this, ceaselessly day and night]. (My translation)

Although there are various interpretations, it is amazing that, beyond the space between the East and the West, but almost at the same time, the essence of this preaching coincides with the famous quotation attributed to Heraclitus (ca. 540 BC– ca. 480 BC), a Greek philosopher: ‘Everything flows and nothing stays.’³ You will, therefore, need to be flexible and resilient to adapt to new situations and find ways to cope—and prevail.

Please continue to think and decide for yourself, regardless of how convenient artificial intelligence (AI) and the Internet may seem. Please do not reach a conclusion hastily or make a rapid judgment. You should take your time to find your own path and create your own ideas, through endurance and struggle, having empathy towards others, and adapting yourself to changing situations, both flexibly and resiliently.

I would say that this kind of virtue, or endurability, may be associated with ‘Negative Capability’, a phrase coined by John Keats (1795– 1821), an English poet of the nineteenth century.⁴ This is one of the attitudes you will hopefully acquire under our liberal arts curriculum, one which is most needed for survival in these times of VUCA.

Let us think about and discuss solutions to the world’s problems together while we are here at SILS. Classics and history, among others, are of great value for our study under the current circumstances. It is your will to succeed and your effort to learn here at our school that will largely decide your future—in the broadest sense.

We hope that you will freely and responsibly maximise your life as students at SILS and Waseda University. Our particular academic environment is sure to profoundly enrich your experience here and enable you to lead a fruitful and prosperous life in the future.

We wish you good luck and all the best!

Many congratulations and, once again, a heartfelt welcome to you all!

¹ See, for example, World Economic Forum, ‘Volatile Uncertain Complex Ambiguous – These are the skills leaders need in a VUCA world’, YouTube, 11 October 2016 at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z_FHRsQfDV4> (accessed 30 March 2022).

² 卷第五子罕第九、一七、『論語』（金谷治訳注・岩波文庫）、（岩波書店、2008年）176頁。

³ See *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*, Seventh Edition, edited by Elizabeth Knowles, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2009, p. 393 (the source of which is found in Plato’s *Cratylus*, 402a), where ‘You can’t step twice into the same river’ is also found.

⁴ See ‘To George and Tom Keats, 21, 27 (?) December 1817’, *Complete Poems and Selected Letters of John Keats*, Introduction by Edward Hirsch, The Modern Library, New York, 2001, pp. 491-492. On ‘negative capability’, see Walter Jackson Bate, *Negative Capability: The Intuitive Approach in Keats*, Introduction by Maura Del Serra, Contra Mundum Press, 2012; 帯木蓬生『ネガティブ・ケイパビリティ 答えの出ない事態に耐える力』（朝日新聞出版、2017年）。