

Words of Welcome for Incoming and First Year Students, September 24, 2022

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President, Waseda University

On behalf of Waseda University, I am delighted to welcome all incoming students to Waseda University today, September 24, 2022. Congratulations on your entrance to Waseda University. I extend heart-felt congratulations also, of course, to your parents, other family members, and friends.

I would like to take this opportunity to offer some words of welcome. It is our great pleasure to hold this entrance ceremony in person. Today, after nearly three years, we are finally able to conduct an almost full version of the entrance ceremony in our traditional manner.

We have been preparing to welcome you all and to provide the best possible educational environment under the present circumstances. Since spring 2021, we have done our best to offer 70 percent of classes in person. For this purpose, between August 2020 and January 2021, we replaced older air conditioning systems with brand new ones with the capacity to circulate 30 cubic meters per hour per person in each classroom. Therefore, you can feel safe attending face-to-face classes.

The COVID-19 pandemic also taught us a lesson. This kind of crisis has a greater negative impact on those who are weaker or members of a minority. The COVID-19 pandemic has been felt more severely by those who are less affluent, less healthy, and by those students who are living away from their own families. We must be considerate to those people and students who suffer more from a tragedy.

For example, let us imagine how fearful and uneasy those students from Ukraine studying at Waseda feel now. At the same time, let us imagine how those students from Russia feel as they look at what their own country is doing, and how scared they feel about other people's perception of them. It is important to empathize with how other people feel and to be considerate of people different from yourself. This ability is an example of what I mean by "flexible sensitivity."

Waseda University has a tradition of encouraging student diversity. Since my inauguration as the president of Waseda in November 2018, I have stressed the importance of “flexible sensitivity,” which is the ability to accept, understand, and respect people of different nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, culture, creed, physical condition, gender, and sexual orientation from your own. Please foster your “flexible sensitivity” while you are at Waseda.

Another important value is “intellectual resilience,” with which to develop your own solutions to problems for which there is as yet no answer. COVID-19 is one of these problems. There are many other problems like this: global warming, the growing gap between the rich and the poor, invasion of a smaller country by a militaristic government’s forces, and so on. You name it—the list goes on and on. No one has a complete solution to any of these problems. Indeed, no single solution may exist. It may be that there are multiple solutions to each problem. It is your task to come up with your own solutions to these and other, as yet unknown problems. While you are studying at Waseda University, you must learn how to use your own brain to think about the solutions that the world community of human beings will need. I hope you will all cultivate “intellectual resilience” at Waseda.

I also have been advocating a new long-term goal for Waseda: to make Waseda one of the world’s top-tier universities, even if it may take two or three decades. Consider some examples from the United States. In the early 1930s, top American schools including Harvard, Columbia, and Yale were far behind their top European counterparts such as Oxford and the University of Paris, but they were committed to catching up. It took those top American schools 40 years to catch up, but they managed to do so by the 1970s. It is time for Waseda to set our sights high and commit ourselves to that goal.

We faculty members and administrative staff pledge to do our very best to provide you with the educational environment that will allow you to graduate with the confidence to contribute to human society around the globe. Please study hard while you are at Waseda, but at the same time, enjoy your student life. When you graduate from this university, I hope you will have found at least one thing to which you are determined to devote yourself.

Once again, I wish you a wonderful and fruitful student life at Waseda.
Best wishes to you all!