

## Waseda University Entrance Ceremony 24/09/2022

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Congratulations, and welcome to Waseda University.

For some of you, it must have been a long and frustrating journey to come to Japan and Waseda. I know because I had a former classmate from B-school that contacted me late last year, telling me how his son had been practicing Japanese to come to Waseda but could not because the Japanese Government was not issuing Visas. A while later, this friend desperately emailed me again, heartbroken seeing his son continue his Japanese studies but not being able to start school. That second email made me very desperate. How can my country not issue visas to these wonderful students who were willing to take on a not so easy language to come and study in Japan. I and quite a number of corporate executives were becoming more vocal to amend the situation. Thankfully, the government finally changed course, and today I am very happy and honored to be able to welcome you to Waseda. I do not know if my friend's son is here today. But if you are, Kevin, you have a great dad, tell him hello! Before I share a bit about my experience at Waseda, I want to emphasize one very important point. And that is that I can pretty much guarantee that in the

months to come, the experience and the friendships that you will find here was worth all the frustration and anxiety you had endured to come.

You have chosen well. Waseda is a great school, not that I need to remind you but it actually becomes better once you graduate. More on that later.

I am a political science major and graduated in 1986. I am very proud that I can call myself your Sempai from this day onwards and happy that we will be sharing the experience of being educated at this great school.

When I started school in 1982, there were approximately 50 women amongst the 1300 students at the political science and economics department. We had to hike around campus to find a restroom. And I am not kidding. I had it in my head where the closest restroom was for all my classrooms, I also knew which ones had the shortest line. Very important information if you want to be in time for class. Waseda would be bombarded with criticism if this was still the case, but I learned that now the political science and economics department is 35% women so I am sure finding a restroom is no longer an issue. So many things have changed, when I was studying there was no internet so the school was full of bill boards, posters and leaflets. Waseda was famous for being loud,

that is why there are so many politicians that went to Waseda. In fact our current prime minister, Mr. Kishida is a graduate and so is the Finance Minister and a few other other politicians in his cabinet.

I would not trade my four years at Waseda for anything, To be perfectly honest, it is 36 years since I graduated, there is not much left in my brain on what I learned academically, but I remember feeling free to roam around campus, poking my nose into anything that stimulated my curiosity and I remember having fun making long lasting friends from all over campus. Waseda has always been known for its no nonsense, mind your own business, but we are here when you need us spirit. It formed the platform for what I am today, a strong basis that could tolerate the challenges I would be facing in the real world. It helped me weather the burst of the bubble, the Asian crisis, the world financial crisis and the turmoil after the big earthquake. It also prepared me for how I could rise against the prejudice I would face on being a woman in the male dominated financial industry. I welcome you to this platform, that is even more stronger than it was 38 years ago, stronger because it has added and adjusted to meet today's ever demanding needs, and stronger because of the 38 years it has been adding to the alumni pool that will be your circle from today. I will say it

once again, you have chosen well.

Now, a bit of advice.

There are a few things I recommend you do before you get too busy with class.

First the ever important food.

Find a place that serves what you think is soul food, a restaurant that serves food from your own country. You could go there when you get homesick or when you think you feel like speaking in your home language with a real person, not via zoom.

If you cannot find your favorite dish, call back home and ask for the receipt, find the ingredients, learn how to cook it yourself, and share with friends. You will be a hit!

It always great to have friends you can eat with. But it may be a while before you find a meal companion or maybe you cannot find a friend to go out with or sometimes you may just want to eat by yourself. Tokyo is a great place for this, as it is easy to get good food on a budget and feel totally comfortable being by yourself. Many places have a counter and stool so you do not have to face an empty chair. But If you do not feel like eating out, the convenience store or combini as we say in Japan is a great place to find food exactly how you want it.

By the time you graduate, you will probably have a favorite combini, as each brand has its strength and weaknesses, some are good with rice, some with dessert and some with bentos. I recommend that after this event, you walk around your neighborhood and find the closest combini, as I am sure that its will be a life saver more than once during your stay in Japan.

The next is, going to a baseball or rugby game when Waseda is playing against Keio university. If you like hot weather, go for baseball, if you like shivering in the cold, go for rugby. Don't know the rules, don't worry that is not the point. Don't like sports, don't worry that is not the point either. It is the excitement of rooting for your team, drinking and eating while occasionally singing Konpeki no sora, a song I have sang so many times while I was a student and hundreds of times since I graduated.

The next is hopping on a train and exploring Tokyo and then the rest of the country. As a student you should be able to buy Japan railway tickets at a discount. Our country is quite small, but the food, the culture, the language is so different but so beautiful. You may not understand all that is spoken as there are quite a number of dialects some of which even I have difficulty understanding. You could get lost but that should be fine, actually the more lost you are, the more

likely you will find a hidden gem. You do not need a week, even a day trip outside of Tokyo will give you a glimpse of how each part of Japan is unique. Going to the same place in different seasons will seem like going to a totally different place. And my final recommendation, though you might find it a bit challenging at first is going to your neighborhood public bath, we call it sento. The most recent data which is as of 2020, there were 522 Sentos in Tokyo, so finding one nearby should not be difficult. The Tokyo Public Bath Union actually has a web site in English which will give you all the information including how to use a Sento, etiquettes and all. I am sure that you will find it exceptional, soaking your body in a hot big bath after studying hard on a cold winter's day. Going to a sento would be good practice to go to the ultimate goal which is to go to an Onsen, which is hot springs. Japanese young and old love going to an Onsen, we would go out of our way if we find there is a good onsen nearby. Sentos are currently 500 yen, so you would need to save up a bit, but it is Japanese culture at its core.

I have gone through my list of recommendations, now I would like to go on to my request list.

First on the list is. Talk about your home country. I have visited over 50

countries around the world. They were all beautiful and different. You learn to appreciate how the world is a better place because of the differences. The opportunity of sharing real, first hand stories with fellow classmates and students is a precious experience that most people will never have.

Second is to speak up, if not write. In addition to talking about your country, I would appreciate if you could share your opinions and thoughts as they would be based on experiences and ideas that are very different country by country. Sharing is easier in an academic environment more so than in business. It would be great if students especially Japanese students attending Waseda have access to all sorts of diversity. Because once they graduate and start working, and if they decide to work at a Japanese company, their access to diversity will be very limited. Quite a tragedy, which needs to change, but that is a topic for another day.

The third is to be a bit patient. You have been very patient with our government waiting for your visas. Additional patience would be appreciated when you find someone who does not speak good English try to communicate with you. Japanese have a confidence problem when it comes to speaking a foreign language. If they garner up courage to come to talk to you, please encourage them to speak

more. If English is not your first language the better, as they are likely to feel more comfortable. Japan has been trying to learn English forever, without much success. It would be great if you could help your fellow students at feel comfortable communicating in English.

And the fourth is to experiment. You may find some of the food we eat, challenging. But please do try, and at least three times. I do the same when I visit other counties. My first experience with Durians was not pleasant but by the third time, I could not have enough of it. Now If I happen to be travelling to Asia around Durian season, I would not mind sitting outside by the street in my suit if I could taste some Durian. Food and how it is cooked always has a history. My ask to Experiment is not just with food but with anything. Going out of you comfort zone is an important part of your education, easier when you are a student than after you graduate.

This is quite a long list of asks but please forgive me, as my asks are based on my hope that everyone in this room, all the students and stakeholders at Waseda, including alumini like me, can contribute to make this world a better place to



live, leaving no one behind as stated in the United Nations SDGs.

And finally, I would like to come back to what I mentioned before, being an alumini of Waseda is as good as being a student. It is like becoming part of a big family. In addition to Tokyo I've had the opportunity to work in London, Singapore and most recently New York, and in all of these cities one of the 1st things I would do after I arrive, is to find the local tomonkai chapter. Tomomkai is the name of Waseda's alumini association. That would be my first stop, because I know that even though I might not have any friends in the new cities, I would meet people that I have something in common with and they will make me feel at home. In New York I was asked to be the chairperson for the Tomonkai from 2014 to 2016. I had the opportunity to feel first handedly the respect people have for Waseda graduates, it opens doors and opportunities. It also gives you an opportunity to share and contribute.

Once again welcome to Waseda, a community that will last your life time.

Thank you.