President Kamata welcomes new students

I congratulate you all on your entrance to Waseda University.

On behalf of the University, I would like to also extend my warmest greetings and sincere congratulations to the families and friends of this incoming freshman class who have gathered here today to celebrate this momentous occasion.

Today, we welcome 9,421 undergraduates and 2,905 graduate students, a total of 12,326 new students. In addition to the 877 students (354 undergraduates and 523 graduate students) who entered in September of last year, the grand total adds up to 13,203 students as of April 1. 1,474 of them are international students, representing 11.2% of the class.

We are extremely pleased to have such accomplished and talented students here with us today from all over Japan and the world.

Waseda students come from all walks of life and have stories to tell. From today, we hope you will immerse yourselves in a wide range of educational opportunities and nurture rich character as individuals for a fulfilling student life.

Tokyo Senmon Gakko, the forerunner of Waseda University, opened its doors to the inaugural class of 78 students in 1882.

At that entrance ceremony, Azusa Ono, a leader in establishing the college, also known as “the Mother of the Foundation”, made the following statement:

“The independence of a nation is based on the independence of its people, and the independence of the people is based on the independence of their spirits. Thus, as the independence of people's spirits can only be achieved though the independence of learning, if the country desires to be independent it is essential to maintain the independence of learning.”

The government at the time was run by a handful of politicians and bureaucrats who created top-down policies for modernization. On the other
hand, Waseda's founding members believed nurturing educated citizens imbued with independent minds was the solution to deal with Western counterparts as a truly modern nation.

Among others, Shigenobu Okuma and Azusa Ono believed in these founding principles, a tradition that has been passed down to this day: 1) the independence of learning, a dedication to free and creative scientific inquiry for the advancement of civilization; 2) the practical application of knowledge, the practical utilization of knowledge for the public good; and 3) the creation of good citizenship, contributing to the welfare of the nation through educational opportunities which respect individuality and cultivate leaders who will be active throughout the world.

The newly admitted students may have studied until now with the assumption that there is one single answer or solution to a problem. However, we live in an age where scientific technology has rapidly developed and the societal framework has dramatically changed. We are bound to face many questions without existing answers. One American academic predicted that by the time children who entered elementary school in 2011 reach college, 65% of jobs available do not exist today. What the future holds is unknown.

In such times, no matter how impossible the issues may seem, with highly specialized professional skills and a broad liberal arts background, we are able to critically think about the issues and find their core. Moreover, we need to have the ability to analyze problems, draw conclusions based on evidence, and work together with diverse groups of people. I believe that the true purpose of a university is to afford each and every individual an opportunity to become cultured, learn to think independently and produce creative solutions, build their character, and learn how to put ideas into action.

Shigenobu Okuma realized this more than 100 years ago. He said:

“The mind has three functions: 1) to remember, 2) to contemplate, and 3) to imagine. All of this combined is called “intelligence.” Just having an exceptional memory is not enough. We start to use our intelligence when
we apply what we know. The process does not end there. We must use our imagination to find a creative answer. Memorizing facts only makes you ‘well-informed.’ From information, we need to infer, think and imagine. Only then have we applied our intelligence.”

Waseda Vision 150, the University's strategic plan, is committed to expanding our education and research systems so that students can cultivate global leadership skills with a broad range of exceptional qualities and the power of insight.

For example, at the Global Education Center, students can acquire practical foreign language skills, improve their academic and technical writing, and develop fundamental skills such as mathematical and logical thinking, regardless of their enrolled program.

We encourage students at the undergraduate and graduate level to take classes with interactive discussions and problem-solving activities. In addition, hands-on learning opportunities such as internships, fieldwork, and volunteer activities let students take a step into the real world. Moreover, we are expanding study spaces and facilities equipped with the latest ICT environment, allowing students to take initiative in their own learning.

There is a tradition at Waseda of diverse students striving together while building their own strengths. Alumni Bokusui Wakayama and Hakushu Kitahara studied together in the English department, and each influenced the other's work. From this kind of environment, our alumni have become very successful and contributed to society in wide-ranging fields, from politics, economics, journalism, to the arts and sports. This has been globally recognized and reflected in the QS rankings last November. Waseda ranked #1 in the country and 33rd in the world in the graduate employability rankings.

As a measure to sustain and develop Waseda's tradition of diversity, we pride ourselves on having the most progressive and active study abroad programs. We have exchange agreements with over 700 institutions.
worldwide and are further expanding our English-based degree programs. We have a wide range of study abroad programs catering to the students' needs, making us the nation's top destination for international student, a total of more than 5,000. These international students participate in classrooms and club activities with many opportunities to have discussions with their Japanese peers. Conversely, 3,000 students go abroad each year from Waseda, adding to their undergraduate experience.

As of research, the university has been selected for large-scale public grants: the Program for Leading Graduate Schools, the program for promoting the enhancement of research universities, and the Top Global University Project, to name a few. In the last five years, Waseda has had the most projects selected in 13 different fields through the Grants-in-Aid for Scientific Research program sponsored by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. This places Waseda at the top of private universities and in 5th place nationwide, reinforcing its global reputation.

Waseda is dedicated to providing students with an academically and culturally stimulating environment. Be reminded, however, that a university is not simply a place to fill students with knowledge. Rather, learning takes on a life of its own. It is up to each one of you to take advantage of the wide range of support and a wealth of resources in academics, the arts, and sports available.

To our dearest freshman class, we hope you will be enriched by the academic and cultural wealth this university built throughout its long history and tradition and fully utilize the state-of-the-art facilities for research and learning. Furthermore, by applying the skillsets you gain through opportunities interacting with your uniquely diverse peers and mentors, your student life will be fruitful.

I look forward to all of you becoming bigger and more powerful individuals than you ever imagined by the time you graduate.
Once again, congratulations and welcome to Waseda University. I wish all of you the best of luck in your wonderful journey of learning and discovery here.