

Congratulatory Address

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Congratulations, new students, on your university admissions.

The COVID-19 pandemic that necessitated the declaration of a state of emergency twice may have forced many of you to take online school classes without much communication with your friends.

Amid such unprecedented circumstances, you must have worked desperately to get the admission result, and consequently you are here now. As one of the graduates, I am very pleased to see you today who have made efforts despite the tough environment. I would like to extend my heartiest congratulations to all of you on entering my alma mater, Waseda University.

As mentioned earlier, I graduated from the School of Commerce of Waseda University 43 years ago in 1978. I entered this university like you and studied here in an era when the Vietnam War was drawing to an end, as you may have learned at school. This era was also marked by the big hit of the pop song “Oyoge! Taiyaki-kun (Swim! Taiyaki),” the successful launch of Japan’s first-ever geostationary meteorological satellite Himawari, and the opening of Narita International Airport, which you must know well. It was an era when Japan achieved international growth, ushering in the rise of the automobile, home appliance, and other high-tech industries that was accompanied by Japan-U.S. trade frictions, and then heading toward the bubble economy.

Waseda University has an association of graduates, Tomonkai, and I concurrently serve as the head of Finance Tomonkai. We hope the association will strengthen connections among Waseda graduates who thrive in society in a broad range of areas and thereby contribute to the development of the finance and economic circles even if only slightly.

You have focused entirely on studying for examinations so far, and you may have various feelings looking forward to your campus life from now. The ongoing coronavirus calamity has significantly changed how society should be like and people’s way of thinking. In this very time of change, you are about to begin your studies at Waseda University. This will certainly become a big turning point in your own life. As you have made a new start in such a way, I would like to tell you three things that I hope you will keep in mind.

Firstly, I would like you to interact with many people you may not have met before, experience diversity, and try to create new values out of diversity. On campus, you will be meeting a lot of people who come from different high schools and regions. Currently, the pandemic has made it difficult to move from country to country. However, Waseda University is characterized by international openness, so you will have a lot of opportunities to come in contact with people coming from abroad.

Humans are apt to follow an easier course. We are liable to get together with like-minded persons or stick to our

own thoughts. We may sometimes find it difficult to communicate with and tend to shy away from people who have different mindsets, including those of different nationalities, races, genders, cultures, and histories.

However, it is very important for you in building the foundation of your future life to have the courage to mingle actively with diverse people, and convey and understand each other's thoughts. Peers and friends you may have through such experience will become an indispensable treasure in life. I myself have peers and friends with whom I have kept in touch since my university days. They are now active in various fields, and I have a lot to learn from them despite the career differences.

After getting out into the world, we meet many different people. Sometimes you may have to mediate interests among a number of stakeholders. At such times, those who can cooperate to resolve the problem while showing understanding of each other, and who try to create new values from there will be of great value. With further progress in globalization expected in the future, people of such talent will become increasingly important. I hope you will cherish encounters with a variety of people, which will help you grow into such a person.

Secondly, I would like you to find something you can do with enthusiasm. Recently, while there is abundant information available in the world, I feel that this has increasingly left people drowned in the waves of information, not knowing what to choose.

No matter what you may search over the internet, you can quickly find superficial how-to information and general explanations, which allow you to see through the advantages and disadvantages even before taking the action. It seems to me that in these situations, many young people cannot make a move, not knowing what to do. It was unthinkable in our era when we could access only limited information.

When put in such circumstances, please value your feelings, such as "I like this" and "I get excited at these things." You don't come to like something because you are told by someone to do so, but you naturally take an interest in something you like. People can learn something actively only if they find it interesting. As you learn more, you get more interested in it, and eventually you will find yourself exploring things deeper and deeper. Those who get absorbed in something attract people around them, which in turn makes it easier to produce results. Please create such a virtuous cycle.

You may be absorbed in academic study, research, sport, or art. There are different options for different persons, but you will never know whether it will be of use in the future unless you try it out yourself in the end. When I was young, I put myself into kyudo, judo, and kendo. At that time, I learned through experience the balance between offense and defense, as well as the thinking of "masters." I find them still useful as a guide in making a business decision.

Having reached this age, I think young people have tremendous power to look for what they want to do and rush

headlong toward it. I hope you will follow your feelings and find things that you can try out and explore as you like. I think Waseda University provides the best field to realize them.

Thirdly, I would like you to develop the capabilities to solve problems, think through, and explain your thoughts based on evidence. As I told you earlier, you must have studied hard so far, and it is really great that your efforts produced positive outcomes. You can be proud of that. However, you are not going to study to get good marks or scores from now.

Then, for what are you going to study at university? There are various academic fields relating to society, humans, and natural science, for instance. Regardless of your field, it is crucial to think how to address issues that have yet to be solved and work out solutions.

Currently, coping with COVID-19 is the top global issue, but there are really many other problems and issues to be tackled in the world, such as global warming, race discrimination, as well as Japan's declining birthrate and aging population and income gap. To most of these problems, there is no clear "answer."

Those who can find a problem with no "answer," think about its causes on their own, and hone their knowledge and capabilities that are necessary to reach a good solution will be able to thrive not only in the academic and business domains, but also in various areas of society. I hope you will enhance these capabilities.

Takeda Shingen, a warlord in the Warring States period whom I respect, said: "For people, learning is like leaves growing on the branches of a tree." Increasing knowledge is not sufficient. The essence lies in the "trunk" of a tree. I hope all of you will learn from your studies and aim to grow as a person.

Having told you the concepts I want you to value from now, I would like to conclude my congratulatory speech.

In the brilliant stage of Waseda University, I hope you will have a lot of fun, put yourselves in this changing world, and acquire the capability to navigate rough waves of the world.

Be a person who will lead Japan, or even the world, in the future.

You have infinite possibilities to do that.

I hope you will have a fruitful, memorable, and meaningful campus life.

My sincere congratulations for today.