

President's Speech for the Commencement of September 2022

September 17, 2022
Aiji Tanaka, President
Waseda University

Dear Graduates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of Waseda University, it is my great pleasure to congratulate you upon your graduation. We also extend congratulations to your family, relatives, and friends. I am sure that this is a moment you have been waiting for while studying here at Waseda.

I know that all of you, the graduating students in September 2022, must have many special thoughts, because you have suffered from the coronavirus pandemic over the last two and a half years. It was our great regret that we could not provide you with a normal campus life in 2020 and 2021. We were forced to move all classes online in the spring semester of 2020 and moved only a limited number of classes back into the classroom in the autumn of 2020. Nevertheless, we believe that those decisions were right in order to protect your health and to prevent the spread of COVID-19 infections among our students.

Some of you might feel that you lost a year and a half that should have been the most fruitful of your student life at Waseda. Please do not think that your experiences of this coronavirus pandemic had only a negative impact, but rather that your difficult experiences during the pandemic have developed you as a human being. You will be stronger and more resilient than other generations of university students throughout the world, precisely because—in contrast to other generations—your generation has experienced a devastating pandemic while young and studying.

I used the word “resilient” just now. This is rooted in two ideal goals of education at Waseda that I espoused when I became the president in November 2018. One is to foster “intellectual resilience,” and the other is to foster “flexible sensitivity.”

What, then, does “intellectual resilience” mean? Most of the problems

human beings are facing today do not have correct answers. Think, for example, about the COVID-19 pandemic, global warming, the growing gap between the poor and the rich, you name it. No one has a single “right” answer to solve any of these problems. After you graduate from Waseda and when you start working in the real world, you will face many new problems to which no one really has a correct answer or optimal solution, although the scale or the impact of those problems may be smaller than those of the coronavirus pandemic. I hope that you will tackle those new unknown problems and that you will find your own solutions to them. The tough-mindedness that impels you to think through a problem to arrive at a solution is what I call “intellectual resilience.”

At Waseda, you have learned how to use your own brain and think thoroughly. In order to do this, it is important to learn from the scholarship of thinkers who have come before us. Ever since the invention of a writing system over 5,000 years ago, human beings have recorded and compiled the essence of their experiences in the form of scholarship. Respect scholarship. Scholarship does not provide answers to unknown new problems, but it records how human beings confronted unknown problems in their own day. By learning about these human efforts, you have gained relevant knowledge at Waseda with which to address new problems yet to arise.

Another important ideal is to foster “flexible sensitivity.” The founder of Waseda University, Mr. Okuma Shigenobu, emphasized three ideals. He advocated “independence of scholarship,” “practical application of scholarship,” and “fostering of good citizens,” by which he meant “Do not think of your own interest, your family’s interest, or the interests of one country or nation, but seek to help humankind.” These ideals lead to the concept of “flexible sensitivity” by which we encourage our students to accept, understand, and pay respect to those people of different nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, creed, gender, and sexual orientation. During the coronavirus pandemic, we have learned that this pandemic more negatively impacts some people depending on their nationality, ethnicity, and income level. You have acquired the power of empathy to understand how different backgrounds matter. This understanding developed your “flexible sensitivity.”

I am proud of Waseda University for encouraging you to foster both “intellectual resilience” and “flexible sensibility.” We are very proud of you, our graduating students, for cultivating in yourselves these two ideals. Be confident of what you have learned at Waseda, and contribute to your own society as well as to humanity across the globe. We all offer you our full support in whatever you choose to do in the future.

Finally, I have one last piece of advice I would like to pass along. Pursue your interests and devote yourself to whatever pursuits for which you feel a passion. Do not be swayed by trends. Trends die out in five years or so, and even if you follow a trend, you will only be able to exert 80 to 90% of your potential if it is not something about which you are passionate. Devoting yourself to a meaningful pursuit will allow you to put in 120%. Without a doubt, an effort made at 120% will bear greater success than an 80% effort. I used to share these words with my graduating zemi students every year on graduation day, but now as president, I pass them along to you as well. They are the best advice I can offer you.

Even after you graduate, please come back to visit your alma mater. Our doors are always open to you. We look forward to seeing you again as you become ever-more impressive; and for our part, we strive to make Waseda University an ever-more shining alma mater of which you can be proud.

Congratulations on your graduation, our newest alumni!