

250402 Entrance Ceremony Speech

Nobuaki Furuya

Congratulations on your matriculation to Waseda University today. I also extend my congratulations to the families who have been supporting these outstanding students.

I am Nobuaki Furuya, an architect who have just retired from Waseda University at the end of March. In 1974, I entered the Department of Architecture at Waseda's Faculty of Science and Engineering, and I completed my graduate studies at the Graduate School of Science and Engineering in 1980. After three years as an assistant in the Faculty of Science and Engineering, I became a lecturer in the Faculty of Engineering at Kinki University. My area of expertise is the study and practice of architectural planning and architectural design. In 1994, I returned to Waseda's Faculty of Science and Engineering, where I spent the next 31 years. I have advised about 520 graduate students, 31 of whom have received doctoral degrees, and 14 of whom have served the department as full-time research assistants.

At the orientation day for the architecture department in my first year, all 18 professors of the department gave a short speech. Of these, the one that stands out in my mind was Professor Takamasa Yoshizaka. He would end up having a great influence on me throughout my six years of undergraduate and graduate studies.

Professor Yoshizaka said,

“By the time you graduate in four years, the only jobs out there will be fixing cracks in buildings.”

That came as a big surprise. This was in the middle of the postwar growth period, when Japan's economy was growing at a dramatic pace. I wondered why he would say that, but it was at the end of the previous year that the second oil crisis had occurred, and all of Japan had been scrambling to buy toilet paper. Professor Yoshizaka anticipated that the impacts would be extraordinary. We didn't know how to react, but his words came true. Four years later, for the first time ever, there were zero open job offers from major construction companies to Waseda's architecture department. I learned from him the importance of keeping an eye on the world.

Next, he said:

“All 180 of you need to submit a graduation plan,” he said. That is how we call the graduation design we have to submit together with the graduation thesis to be able to graduate. This practice continues today. He continued, “If the grade on your graduation plan is in the top ten in the class, then you don't

have what it takes to be a good architect."

Once again, I could not believe my ears. I thought I had misheard, but I did not. He wanted to say that a high score was merely the sum of the scores of the 18 professors in the department, which implied work that the professors could appreciate on average, and such work would not necessarily be appreciated in the future. I take his words to mean that you should carve out your own path to what you believe in. The university is not a place where professors teach students, but a place where students learn by themselves. I have told this story every year to new students at the orientation day for the Department of Architecture. This year is the first time I am sharing this idea with students from other disciplines, and I believe it applies to you as well.

I said earlier that the times were so tough that the only job we could get would be "fixing cracks in buildings," but in hindsight, this worked out very well for me. If I had graduated into a world full of jobs like today's, I don't think I would be standing here now. It was only because it was so difficult to find work that I was able to stay in college and learn firsthand from my mentor that there is a truly free and progressive way to design architecture.

As an extension of that, my life as an independent architect has allowed me to create several challenging architectural works. The Chino Cultural Complex in Chino, Nagano, is one such project that has received the Architectural Institute of Japan's Design Award and the Japan Art Academy Prize. Today, I am honored to have been granted the prestigious title of Honorary Fellow of Waseda University in recognition of these achievements. I am truly and sincerely grateful.

I would like to leave all you new students with these words: look at everything that happens around you in a positive way. The same event will leave a very different impression in your mind depending on whether you approach it with a negative or a positive mindset. No matter how painful or unpleasant the experience, we can find something in it that will help us in the future. And in the midst of good times, it is much better to rejoice that there is still half left to go, than to lament the half that is gone. I urge you to start living a positive university life today, and to create a great path that only you, yourself, can take. You may never be able to overcome the things that you struggle with now. But you can become even better in the areas where you excel. I am cheering for all of you as you start your life at Waseda.