

President's Speech for the Commencement of March 2026

March 25-26, 2026

Aiji Tanaka, President

Waseda University

Dear Graduating Students,

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 anticipating while studying here at Waseda.

We considered inviting family members in addition to graduating students to this graduation ceremony, but we were concerned that it would be dangerously congested on the road in front of Waseda Arena. Consequently, we have been inviting only the actual graduating students to this arena for the last several years. We hope you will understand our decision.

Those graduating from undergraduate programs, those completing Art and Architecture School programs, and those completing master's or doctoral programs today are all, I believe, filled with a sense of brightness and joy. We are also truly happy to see your bright smiles.

This ceremony also carries special meaning for me personally. I will step down as President on September 20 this year after serving two terms over eight years, and therefore this will be the last time I deliver a commencement address in March.

During the seven and a half years since I became President, many things have happened both in the world and in Japan. In recent years, so many violent conflicts and military attacks took place all over the world. Because of these, many people died, and even more people were injured. In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic began and continued for three years. Climate change has continued to intensify across the globe. In January 2024, the Noto Peninsula was struck by a major earthquake and tsunami, affecting many people, including those who lost their lives. None of these problems have been

resolved.

Why do people oppose and hurt one another? And are human beings powerless before the great forces of nature?

As with these examples, the problems that humanity currently faces are all issues without correct answers and without clear solutions. I call the ability to boldly confront such problems without answers and to think through one's own solutions "intellectual resilience." Over the past seven and a half years, I have spoken about my wish for students to foster this capability.

At the same time, I have said that I would like students to cultivate "flexible sensitivity," the ability to understand and empathize with people suffering from war, conflict, and natural disasters, as well as those in circumstances different from one's own.

Over the past four years, I have also conveyed the importance of enhancing "responsive reasoning," the ability to listen to people with different perspectives and to exchange views.

I believe that during your time at Waseda University, you have cultivated "intellectual resilience," "flexible sensitivity," and "responsive reasoning." Precisely because the world and Japan are in such a state of deep uncertainty, society now seeks people with these qualities.

This way of thinking is in fact connected to Waseda University's founding spirit. Our founder, Shigenobu Okuma, espoused the principles of "independence of scholarship," "practical application of scholarship," and "fostering good citizens," a philosophy he further articulated by stating, "Do not think only of your own interest, your family's interest, or the interests of your country alone, but be ambitious to contribute to humankind throughout the world." It is precisely because of this spirit that many Waseda students and alumni have contributed to Japanese society and to the world.

At the same time, I trust that you have acquired at Waseda the academic foundations that serve as the basis for thinking through solutions to problems

without answers. Scholarship is a systematized accumulation of the essence of human experience over approximately 5,000 years since the invention of writing. Therefore, it does not necessarily stipulate solutions to unknown problems that humankind will face in the future. However, it does record how humanity has confronted and solved unknown problems in each era of the past. Therefore, scholarship must not be neglected. It should provide suggestions on how to think and how to respond when you face unknown problems in the future.

Over the past 25 years, the quality of education and research at Waseda has steadily improved, and we have become able to provide students with education of the highest level in Japan. For example, the Global Education Center and the Data Science Center now teach AI-based big data analysis methods from introductory to intermediate and advanced levels, and the total number of enrollments last year exceeded 18,700. There is no other university in Japan that provides such high-quality education to students across the entire institution.

Waseda's research capability has also risen to a level comparable to the top national universities. In the Japanese government's "Universities for International Research Excellence" competition, held twice between 2023 and 2025 to support universities with global research competitiveness, we were the only private university to take on the challenge of competing twice. Although we were not selected, Waseda University's vision for reforms received a high evaluation.

This relates to the words that Okuma Shigenobu imparted to graduates. Okuma said, "You will surely fail. Do not be discouraged by failure," and urged them to use failure as a foundation for success. Even if Waseda's attempt was called "a reckless challenge for a private university," I believe that the significance of trusting in ourselves and taking on the challenge regardless of the outcome was very great. This is what can be called the Waseda spirit. As a result of this challenge, Waseda has obtained a vision of what it should be in 25 years, that is, in 2050. In other words, I am convinced that if Waseda maintains the new vision completed in the 2025 academic year and proceeds with its reforms, it will be regarded as a top-level university in the world by

2050.

The reason we can now confidently say that Waseda has grown so much is not only due to the efforts of faculty and staff, but even more owing to the achievements of our alumni and the activities of our students.

In recent years, Waseda alumni have achieved remarkable success, producing global leaders. Let me first introduce three of our female graduates who have achieved great distinction in their international careers: an Under-Secretary-General of the UN, a senior partner of Boston Consulting Group's Japanese branch, a former Japanese representative of the World Economic Forum that hosts the Davos Conference. In addition, so many presidents and CEOs of major companies in Japan are currently Waseda alumni, for example, among major media organizations such as Asahi, Yomiuri, Mainichi, Nikkei, NHK, and TBS, in leading manufacturers such as Toyota, Sony, Panasonic, Mitsubishi Electric, Canon, and Uniqlo (Fast Retailing), in major general contractors such as Shimizu, Kajima, and Obayashi, in finance such as Daiwa Securities and Meiji Yasuda Life, and in transportation such as ANA, Tokyu, Odakyu, Keio, Seibu, Nagoya Railroad, and Hankyu Hanshin. Furthermore, the development of the leading startup Mercari as well as the growth of Yahoo Japan and PayPay are also supported by Waseda alumni. At Waseda, we call our graduates “koyu” (alumni), and their achievements are too numerous to list.

Student activities, including athletic clubs, have also become very active. At Waseda, under the supervision of the Athletic Center, student-athletes maintain a balance between academics and athletics, and in the WAP (Waseda Athlete Program), even regular players are suspended from official games if their academic performance does not meet a certain standard. Even in this strict environment, the baseball team achieved three consecutive championships, the rugby team has been a runner-up in the National University Championship for two consecutive years, and in this past January's Hakone Ekiden, our team came within reach of winning the outward way to Hakone. Other sports have similarly achieved many successes, including participation in the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Cultural and artistic activities have also seen remarkable achievements by students and alumni. For example, three novelists who are candidates for the Nobel Prize in Literature from Japan are all Waseda alumni. In addition, many alumni are active as screenwriters, film directors, and performers in traditional and modern arts.

Therefore, please move forward into society, pursue further studies here, or study abroad, with confidence in what you have learned at Waseda, and open up new paths. At the same time, please do not forget Waseda and maintain your connection with it.

Finally, there are two things I would like to tell you.

First, please keep your MyWaseda email address so that you can remain in contact with Waseda after graduation. Please set it to automatically forward to a private email address that you intend to use throughout your life. In addition, please register for Waseda's official LINE account. In these ways, when you wish to pursue recurrent or reskilling education or study abroad in the future, Waseda will surely be able to provide the answers you seek. At that time, your MyWaseda email address and the LINE account will be useful. Please remain connected with your alma mater, Waseda University, for life.

Secondly, and lastly, what I most want to tell you is this: once you graduate and enter society, devote yourself to what you truly want to do and find meaningful. If you make your choice based on immediate promotion or profit and engage in work that does not interest you, you will only perform at 80 percent of your ability. However, if you pursue what you find interesting and meaningful, you will be able to perform at 120 percent. In any era and in any society, those who work at 120 percent are more likely to succeed than those who work at 80 percent. I have told this to my seminar students when they graduated, and now, as President, I would like to offer this message to all Waseda graduates.

After graduation, please return to your alma mater from time to time. When you do, let us meet you, who shine even more brightly than now, again at a Waseda that shines even more brightly than now.

To those graduating students who are still learning Japanese, I want to congratulate you briefly in English.

You should be proud of what you have learned at Waseda, as well as trust in your intelligence and ability. With your education, intelligence and ability, may you contribute to humankind as you make your way through the world. Congratulations on your graduation!

Graduates, once again, congratulations on your graduation!