

April 2, 2026

Congratulatory Address by Akio Negishi

Congratulations to all new students on your admission. My name is Akio Negishi; thank you for the introduction. It is a great honor for me to address you all on this joyous occasion. I would also like to extend my heartfelt congratulations to your families and everyone who has supported you up to this point.

I enrolled in the Department of Mathematics at Waseda University's School of Science and Engineering 49 years ago, in 1977. In high school, I was drawn to the logical nature of mathematics, so I decided to make it my major at university and eventually go on to graduate studies so I could pursue mathematics as far as I could. I have fond memories of traveling all the way from Saitama with four or five classmates during my second year of high school to attend a cram school in Ochanomizu during long vacations, in preparation for the entrance exams. Thanks to the support of my family and teachers, I passed the entrance exam and entered Waseda straight out of high school. I remember it as if it were yesterday, standing here on the Waseda campus grounds on the day of the entrance ceremony, with my heart swelling with joy and pride. I was the son of a silk farmer in the countryside of Saitama, and here I was going to study in the big city.

Much like myself 49 years ago, I imagine all of you are standing here today with your hearts full of emotion and hope. Every one of you possesses infinite potential. As you start to carve your own path in life, there are a few things I can share that may be of help to you. Please allow me, an alumnus, to convey three messages that I have learned and cherished throughout my university life and subsequent career.

The first message is the phrase *yūjō katsuri*. It means "While logic is important, it is only through emotion that logic comes to life." I was taught this phrase by a close friend from my days in the School of Science and Engineering. We were out drinking with an older student one night in my mid-twenties, when a heated debate between me and the student turned into an argument. My friend stepped in and advised us, saying, "Humans are creatures of emotion. It's called *yūjō katsuri*. Without emotion, logic doesn't hold up."

I eventually gave up on my pursuit of mathematics. However, I wanted to find a path where I could still make use of my love for the subject, so I joined a life insurance company as an actuary, a professional specializing in insurance mathematics. For the next 13 years, I applied mathematics to ensuring the financial soundness of the insurance company and keeping its business operations fair. Later, I volunteered to jump into an entirely different world by moving to sales. As a result, I was able to build a foundation of logic through my experience as an actuary, and truly learn the importance of emotion through my time in sales.

Fundamentally, life insurance is built on logic, which is provided through the precise

calculations of the actuaries. On the other hand, for customers, it is founded in emotion: it is a means of entrusting their hopes and dreams to the person who will receive the insurance payout. In sales, we are required to sincerely embrace that emotion, show consideration for our customers, and treat them with empathy. For an insurer, the balance between logic and emotion is particularly crucial.

This is not limited to life insurance. Humans are not AI or machines; ultimately, we are driven not only by logic but also by emotion. Precisely because you have majored in science and engineering, and precisely because we live in an era of remarkable advancements in AI technology, I hope you will place importance on logic while also valuing the human relationships you have built through the university, club activities, part-time jobs, and other experiences. I hope you will strive to empathize with the emotions and feelings of those around you, and cherish the balance between logic and emotion.

My second message is the phrase, “Take action and the future will become clear.” This was what a senior colleague told me when I took on the challenge of becoming a sales office manager at the age of 35. It means that if you stop being passive and take initiative, then regardless of whether the outcome is good or bad, you will see a different perspective that will lead to growth. The phrase is based on the idea on having courage to take on any challenge, which I believe was cultivated during my university life at Waseda. The university’s free-spirited atmosphere taught me to take responsibility for my own actions.

When I was in university and on the verge of giving up on mathematics because I felt I could never master the field, I asked myself, “How, then, can I contribute to society?” This allowed me to shift my focus and aim to become an actuary. Even after joining the insurance company, I thought, “There are issues in the company’s profit structure that I have identified as an actuary and now I want to see them first-hand.” That is what led me to the challenge of becoming a sales office manager, which was completely outside my field of expertise.

Even now, guided by that conviction, I tell my junior colleagues, “Stretch yourself just beyond your current capabilities.” When you stretch yourself and achieve something, a different perspective opens up. From there, you stretch yourself again, and again, until eventually you achieve growth – for yourself, the organization you belong to, and society as a whole.

A world of endless possibilities lies ahead of you. “Take action, and the future will become clear.” That is why I hope you will constantly take on new challenges, like climbing a staircase one step at a time.

Finally, my third message is: Cherish the people you meet. Waseda University brings together a diverse group of people in a free-spirited atmosphere. I met and was inspired by many people here, in both the humanities and the sciences.

There were still very few female students in the School of Science and Engineering when I was a student, so I went all the way to the main campus to look for a student club to join. However, I ended up in the Transportation Policy Research Society, essentially a club for train geeks, which was full of guys. But thanks to that experience,

I have often been able to liven up conversations in my working life by talking about trains, and the hobby continues to enrich my social circle to this day. Toward the end of my student life, seeking something new, I also joined a tennis club. Apart from finally meeting some girls, I also got to know some friends who have become lifelong companions. We still keep in touch through shared hobbies such as golf, horse racing, and recreational mahjong.

Furthermore, even after graduating, the Tomonkai alumni network and the Waseda Hatsukakai (an association for Waseda alumni who are business executives) have helped me to network with executives from various industries and companies whom I would never have met otherwise. I am president of the Waseda Hatsukakai, and I am grateful that every time a Waseda alum takes on a leadership role, we often receive requests for membership.

I strongly encourage all of you to cherish the people you meet. Make use of the connections you make on the Waseda campus through classes and student clubs, as well as those formed off-campus through part-time jobs and other activities, and the alumni network, so that you may be inspired to do greater things.

We live in an era of rapid change and uncertainty, or what is often called the age of VUCA. Precisely because of this, I believe society is placing its hopes on Waseda University, which fosters a spirit of taking on challenges under its liberal academic atmosphere. I sincerely hope that all of you will use your scientific skills to create the future. I believe that the scientific approach – formulating hypotheses, developing logic based on theorems, and deriving answers – is extremely useful for building a story when proposing solutions to business and social challenges. I encourage you to become wonderful storytellers.

Shigenobu Okuma, the founder of Waseda University, once said, “Is there any reason why a young person with a sound mind and a healthy body should not succeed?” and “Is this world not yours, young people?” To reiterate, you young people have before you an infinite array of possibilities and opportunities. Cherish your encounters with many people, study diligently, enjoy life to the fullest, and lead a fulfilling university life. Through these experiences, I sincerely hope you will grow into brilliant individuals endowed with creativity and resilience. As an alumnus, I will be cheering for you from the sidelines.

Once again, I would like to extend my heartfelt congratulations on your admission. I offer these words with the hope that your lives, filled with infinite possibilities, will be blessed with much happiness in the years to come. Thank you very much.