

April 1, 2026

Congratulatory Address by Noriko Chibayashi

Congratulations, students, on your admission today. I would also like to extend my heartfelt congratulations to your families and relatives.

It is a great honor to have this opportunity to be part of your wonderful new beginning.

As just mentioned, our company, Asahi Biocycle, was established with the goal of solving social issues and creating economic value using the Asahi Group's proprietary biotechnology. We are aiming to achieve the principles of *The Analects and the Abacus*. Currently, nearly 80% of our revenue comes from overseas.

I have been managing this company since its establishment. When I was a student like all of you, I was in the School of Letters, so the idea that I would one day be president of a biotechnology company never even crossed my mind.

Looking back, I think this is what makes life so interesting. Since I've been given this valuable opportunity today, I hope the experiences that I share might be of some small help to you in the future.

My first message is that when you enter university, you will suddenly find yourself much closer to the real world.

Since the legal age of adulthood is now 18, I believe you all already feel a certain degree of social responsibility. However, the school environment you've been in until now was, in some sense, a closed space. The moment you enter university, you sense the feeling that society has suddenly opened up, and you have to start thinking for yourself and making decisions in all kinds of ways.

These days, we are seeing more collaborative initiatives between universities and companies, so the gap between business people and students has clearly narrowed.

Our company also collaborates with universities around the world in biotechnology research, and development. There are more and more opportunities for students to play a role in these projects, and we are gradually increasing the number of cross-border interns from overseas.

Many students are also taking the initiative to start their own businesses in the form of startups and venture capital companies, often inspired by these industry-academia collaborations.

Speaking from my own experience, during my four years at university, I worked part-time at a research institute that is now part of the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism. Interacting with professionals of various ages and backgrounds gave me an appreciation for how fun it can be to work within an organization. As my connections with the professional world grew, I began to consider a job at a company with strengths in manufacturing and technology.

There is no doubt that society will open itself up to you during your time at university, and this will influence how you think and behave.

Second, there is no such thing as a wasted experience, so just take action.

As you gain more experience in the future, you'll often find yourself being forced to make a choice while still grappling with doubts. In such situations, just remember one thing: No experience is ever wasted. Even if you fail, that experience will come in handy somewhere down the line.

That's why there's no need to be afraid of making choices. If you do feel afraid, simply taking the first step usually solves most problems. The vague sense of anxiety tends to disappear once you take action and discover the reality of the situation.

When I was a student, I chose Chinese as my first foreign language and Chinese literature as my specialization. I made that choice on a whim after enrolling, thinking it sounded interesting, and I wasn't exactly a top student. However, what I learned at Waseda University has proven to be surprisingly useful in my professional life.

A few years after I joined Asahi Breweries, the company acquired several Chinese companies and began a full-scale entry into the Chinese market. Just because I had a background in Chinese literature, I was sent to work on a feasibility study of the local market and was subsequently involved in the development of beer products for the Chinese market. China is a key market for our company's current business as well. Many of our clients are *huáqiáo* – people of Chinese origin who have found success all around the world – and my understanding of not only the language but also their mentality and culture has been immensely helpful in communication.

Looking back now, I feel that everything in one's life and career is delicately interconnected. Just like in the Japanese folk tale "The Straw Millionaire," even things that seemed insignificant at the time can change in value depending on time, circumstances, and interrelationships. Therefore, I think there's something to the saying that there's no such thing as a wasted experience.

Third, as you take your next step, keep a global perspective.

Waseda University is striving to become a university that shines on the global stage, and no matter which path you choose in the future, you will not be able to avoid associating with the world outside our shores.

This is especially true in business. More than half of the Asahi Group's approximately 30,000 employees are of non-Japanese nationality. Given this external environment, I believe that it will be very beneficial for your future to start engaging with different cultures as early as possible and to cultivate a mindset of diversity and inclusivity.

Fourth, please cherish your encounters with others and seek out a mentor for your life.

A mentor is your strongest running partner, someone who guides you through life and your career.

They are an advisor or confidant based on a relationship of trust. Your mentor can be anyone – a teacher, a senior colleague, or a friend – and you can have as many as you like. A mentor is someone you should cherish and follow for the rest of your life.

I have published a book in which I systematically organize the lessons I've learned throughout my career, in the hope that it will be a useful reference for readers as they reflect on their professional lives. The theme I chose for the book was "taking ownership," and it was a university classmate of mine who helped me through the planning and editing of the book. We reconnected through work after graduation, and for over 30 years since then, he has been a reliable mentor who has always been there for me to offer advice. Incidentally, the president of the publisher, Yurindo, is also a Waseda graduate, and the project gained significant momentum through our shared Waseda spirit, ultimately leading to the book's publication.

Perhaps your lifelong mentor could be in this very room today.

Finally, I'd like to speak about the importance of being grateful for what you have and approaching things with a sense of ownership.

One of the tools we use in business management is a combination of back-casting and forecasting. This approach involves identifying the gap between the desired future state and the current reality, translating what needs to be done now into a strategy, and then executing it.

I believe this approach is perfectly aligned with the lyrics of Waseda University's anthem: "The infinite Eternal Aim, Careful, too, of present need."

Simply put, if you look up at the North Star in the sky and walk without looking at your feet, you might fall into a hole. Conversely, if you only look at your feet, you might lose your way home.

This principle applies to life as well. If you keep envisioning the self you wish to become while taking ownership your day-to-day studies and work, taking initiative and acting autonomously, the path forward will open up to you.

Although your future self certainly includes career and status, it's more constructive to focus on your ideal state of mind and your aspirations.

During your time at university, you may feel lost when thinking about the future, or you might feel that things aren't turning out the way they were supposed to. I recommend thinking of life not as a single, straight ladder to climb, but rather as a jungle gym. Unlike a ladder, a jungle gym offers many different routes to the top, and the summit is spacious, with a 360-degree view.

University and the working world are not places where you are judged solely by standardized values like test scores. So, even if you choose a diverse approach to life like climbing a jungle gym, there will be no need for you to compare yourself to others. Determining what is fundamentally important to you instead of comparing yourself to others will be what gives you inner peace and personal growth.

In any case, I hope you will always cherish your ideal state of mind and your aspirations, which will serve as your North Star in life. If you keep that vision in mind, express gratitude for being where you are now each day, and take ownership of every challenge, then your student life will be both meaningful and enjoyable.

I offer these words of congratulations, praying from the bottom of my heart that you will enjoy fulfilling days at Waseda University, build many friendships, and go on to shine brightly and achieve great success all over the world.

Congratulations once again on your admission today.