

President's Address at the 2022 Saitama University Entrance Ceremony

Spring has come around once more in the Okubo area, the location of the Saitama University campus. There is no greater joy for us than to welcome new friends to our campus, where the trees are budding, and the cherry blossoms are in full bloom.

Today, I would like to congratulate 1605 Bachelor's students, 590 Master's students and 31 Doctoral students on their admission to Saitama University. All of our faculty and staff members would like to extend you a sincere welcome. In addition, to all of the parents and other related parties, who raised our new students with deep love and affection and supported them up to this point, you have our heartfelt congratulations.

Over the past two years or so, the spread of COVID-19 has resulted in the declaration of a state of emergency on several occasions. Society and your lives have been restricted in many ways. I would like to commend the efforts of our new students, who have overcome many difficulties in your studies and research, and who, today, have been admitted to the undergraduate faculties and graduate schools.

73 years ago, Saitama University opened as a university with the Faculty of Education and the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, taking over for the Saitama Normal School, Saitama Youth Normal School, and Urawa High School. Initially, the campus was located on the land of Urawa High School, which is now Kitaurawa Park. As the university developed, arranging for more robust facilities became necessary, and 56 years ago, the university moved to a place in Okubo, its present-day campus location.

Urawa High School under the old system of education, one of Saitama University's predecessors, was a three-year school that provided preparatory education to the former imperial universities. Urawa High School was known as a particularly prestigious school, and produced many graduates who played active roles in various fields. The writer Kazutoshi Hando, who passed away last year, was among the school's graduates. Mr. Hando wrote many excellent books on Showa history. Among them, his book "Japan's Longest Day"—which covers the process of Japan's decision to surrender in the Pacific War and announce its acceptance of the Potsdam Declaration at the Imperial Conference, and is based on in-depth interviews and testimonies—is an excellent nonfiction book that has been read for a long time, and was even made into a movie.

Although Mr. Hando studied at Urawa High School for only one year due to postwar school

system reforms, he described it as a very good school, where he was able to encounter many books and gain experience in broadening his horizons. At the time, the question was raised at the rowing club, where Mr. Hando was a member, as to whether or not the club should participate in the national tournament held during summer vacation. After the club members expressed various opinions, such as "What's the meaning of rowing a boat?" and "What's the meaning of forcing ourselves to compete when we barely have food to eat after the war?" a vote was taken. Mr. Hando felt that the club should participate in the competition, but the atmosphere in the room made him raise his hand to vote in favor of not participating. However, another one of the members of the club, who had thought the team should compete, stood up, opened the window, and yelled, "Here, the Urawa High School Rowing Club has collapsed!" He felt ashamed of himself for being influenced by other opinions. Mr. Hando said that this experience gave him an outlook on life of faithfully doing the things he had decided to do, and seeing them through to the end.

Just as Mr. Hando accumulated knowledge and experiences at Urawa High School that would form the foundation for the rest of his life, I hope that you will also aim to establish yourselves through a variety of experiences while learning and thinking at Saitama University. At the same time, we, humanity, now stand at a crossroads in terms of whether or not we can build a sustainable society. Carving out the complex and difficult path of coexistence with nature and other people, and building a sustainable society, are precisely the tasks entrusted to all of you for the future. For those of you who bear that responsibility, I would like to talk about two things that I hope you will learn at this university.

First, I want you to refine your ability to think. The first step in this process is to master the basics of academics through classes. Knowing about the truths that our predecessors grasped over the course of their long history, and about the paths of contemplation and research which led them to those truths, is to stand at the gateway to learning. Learning is to discover problems on your own, to think about them until you are satisfied, to pursue further truths using various methods, and to create new knowledge, based on the knowledge you have learned. By continuing to build on this sort of learning, your ability to think will be refined. To pursue truths, you also need to constantly doubt existing things and what is common sense, and even look critically at your own ideas. Having this sort of attitude is important; not just for your future academic career, but also for working in an increasingly complex society, and for developing as a person with an established identity.

Second, for undergraduate students, I would like you to consciously accumulate a wide range of experiences. Experiencing the unknown—like taking a part-time job, doing circle activities,

traveling, doing volunteer work, and taking an internship—and meeting various people through those experiences, then engaging in dialogue, will lead you to expanding your horizons and thinking about things in more depth. In addition, to the graduate students, continue to develop your expertise even further, based on what you have learned up to this point. That path will not necessarily be a smooth one, and you may suffer. However, you will gain experience by overcoming those difficulties, and your confidence will grow. I encourage both undergraduate and graduate students to think about studying abroad. By experiencing everyday life in a different culture and interacting with the people who live in that culture, your own common sense will sometimes be overturned, and this will enhance your perspective. At the same time, through the experience of listening to and discussing opinions that differ from your own, then making decisions based on what you think you should do, your ability to think will grow stronger.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, as various restrictions have been imposed over these past two years, we have once again been made aware that we all have different learning styles. At the same time, the significance of studying at university is being debated once more. Going forward, we will continue to hold discussions and seek out a new form for Saitama University. However, irrespective of the era, it is an unchanging truth that studying on campus with a diverse group of people, and interacting with your peers and university faculty, will deepen your knowledge even further and help you grow as a person. All of Saitama University's faculties and graduate schools are located on one campus. This means that students and faculty members with diverse backgrounds are near at hand. Please utilize this environment to the fullest.

No matter the circumstances, we faculty and staff members will do our utmost to support you in your days of learning and research, and we will also move forward each day for better learning.

Once again, congratulations on your admission to our school.

April 6, 2022

Takafumi Sakai
President, Saitama University