

President's Address at the Saitama University Graduation Ceremony for the academic year 2022

As we come together on this auspicious March day, with new buds beginning to sprout on the campus zelkova trees, I would like to extend my heartfelt congratulations to all those who are graduating from Saitama University and completing their graduate studies. And to the families and supporters who have watched over and supported these students with deep affection, and on behalf of our faculty and staff, I offer my congratulations and gratitude.

Today, 1581 undergraduate students, 511 master's students, and 22 doctoral students will graduate and complete their studies. Included among our graduates are x international students, who come from China, Korea, Bangladesh, etc.

Although the novel coronavirus pandemic that began three years ago is finally showing signs of ending, many constraints have been placed on your student life during this time, and there have been times when communication with classmates and teachers was difficult. Despite these challenges and conflicts, I want to express my sincere respect to all of you for overcoming them and pursuing your studies and research tirelessly to make it to this day.

Over the past three years, we have witnessed significant divisions and conflicts that will go down in history, not only with the outbreak of the novel coronavirus, but also with Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the attacks on the Capitol in the United States and Brazil. In our complex and strongly interconnected world of today, the political, economic, cultural, and social issues faced by each country have a global impact, and we must always be aware of the risk of division and conflict.

On the other hand, the rapid progress of science and technology has begun to greatly change our ways of living and thinking. In recent years, the application of AI, the utilization of big data, and the introduction of metaverses have undoubtedly changed our lives. Considering the major waves being made in the world and the accelerating development of science and technology, even in the near term, we cannot predict the future of society as an extrapolation of the past, and it is inevitable that we would face a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous era known as VUCA.

Today, I would like to talk to you about the importance of respecting diversity as a way to survive these times and achieve well-being for each and every one of us.

In 2019, Matthew Syed, a columnist for the UK newspaper The Times, published "Rebel

Ideas: The Power of Diverse Thinking,” which was translated into Japanese as “The Science of Diversity: Organizations That Decline Due to Uniformity and Organizations that Solve Problems with Multiple Perspectives.” In this book, Syed noted that one of the factors that led to the failure of the CIA, the US foreign intelligence agency, to prevent the simultaneous terrorist attacks that occurred in the United States on September 11, 2001, was the lack of a multi-faceted perspective due to being composed of a homogeneous group in terms of race, gender, social class, education, and other factors. Additionally, he stated that when attempting to solve complex problems, such as developing new products, treating diseases, and addressing issues such as climate change and poverty, it is necessary to step back and view things from a new perspective that is different from what has been done before, and that “diversity” is important for the healthy development of things and projects.

Indeed, I believe that the quality of decision-making declines when a highly homogeneous group of people gather for discussion due to their similar basis of thought. Each individual has their own narrative and unique perspective, and in an organization composed of people with diverse backgrounds, different opinions and ideas are more likely to be presented, allowing for multidimensional considerations. Recently, there has been a greater emphasis on the importance of diversity, including gender and race, and it can be said that ensuring diversity in knowledge, experience, and culture is an important condition for the growth and development of society and organizations. The principle of “leave no one behind” at the heart of the “Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)” formulated in 2001 includes diversity. Respecting diversity leads to the elimination of all discrimination and inequality, contributes significantly to the realization of a society where everyone can live well, and leads to the realization of our individual well-being. So what is required of each of us to live in such a society or organization? The answer is to not hold prejudices against people with backgrounds or values that are different from our own. However, humans cannot avoid having some biases, which leads to prejudice. That is why it is essential to consider things under the recognition that we have biases ourselves, and it is the power of education that helps us recognize our biases. On the other hand, to allow diversity to be demonstrated, it is also important to establish a “self” that can think, judge, and act independently, rather than blindly conforming to others. Therefore, I hope that you will continue to maintain an attitude of aiming for a diverse society by establishing yourself, and understanding and respecting others’ narratives.

Saitama University, from which you are all graduating, began its history in 1873, when the Saitama Prefectural Government started a teacher training program. This year marks the 150th anniversary of its foundation, while one of the university’s predecessors, the former Urawa High School, opened its doors 101 years ago. It has been more than half a century since the campus was relocated to its current location in Okubo, and throughout this long history,

the campus has been covered with lush greenery and has offered magnificent views in every season. I hope you always remember the cherry blossoms and budding trees in spring, the deep greenery and shade in summer, the autumn leaves, and the dignified appearance of the trees in winter. Through your education at the greenery-rich Saitama University, you have gained the necessary knowledge and skills to pave the way for a new era and build a peaceful world, and have fully developed the ability to succeed in society. Be proud of this achievement, and confidently walk towards your future.

I sincerely wish that your future days will be filled with hope and brilliance.

Congratulations to you all.

March 24, 2023
Takafumi Sakai
President, Saitama University