

President's Address at the Saitama University Graduation Ceremony for the Academic Year 2025

To all of you who are gathered here today for the Saitama University Graduation Ceremony and Graduate School Completion Ceremony, please accept my heartfelt congratulations on your graduation and completion of your studies.

On behalf of the faculty and staff, I would also like to extend my sincere congratulations and deepest gratitude to your families and to all those who have supported and watched over you up to this day.

Today, 1,517 undergraduate students, 598 students in the master's program, and 26 students in the doctoral program will leave this place of learning and set forth on new paths. Among them are 97 international students who have come to our university from various countries and regions, including China, Korea, and Sri Lanka. As a university, we take great pride in the fact that students of such diverse backgrounds have learned together and have reached this important milestone today.

As President, I receive this opportunity to send you forth with great joy and deep emotion. Today, as one who has walked his own path both as a researcher and as a human being, I would like to speak to you about effort.

In recent years, much has been said about how younger generations think about effort. What I sense from these discussions is not that your generation makes light of effort itself. Rather, it is that you are earnestly trying to discern whether a given effort truly has meaning, and whether it is genuinely of value in your own life. In an age when the future is difficult to foresee, you think carefully about where to devote your limited time and strength. That attitude is one I can fully understand and sincerely respect.

At the same time, however, the meaning and significance of effort in life do not always become clear at once. When I look back on my own path, there were efforts whose results appeared quickly, but there were also endeavors that seemed like detours at the time and only later proved to be what had sustained me. The fruits of effort often reveal themselves only after time has passed.

Allow me to share a little of the experience through which I came to think this way.

I began my professional life as a high school teacher. My days spent working with students were irreplaceable, yet at that time I could not always see how those efforts would bear fruit in the future. Later, while continuing to teach at high school, I studied at a research institute in the evenings, and in time I made the decision to enter the world of research. In that new world, I found not only the inherent difficulty of research itself, but also the challenge of finding my own place in an unfamiliar environment.

And yet, as I now look back, I can see that my experience of working with students, the days I spent continuing to learn, and the time I devoted to repeated trial and error all broadened my horizons and became the foundation that supported my next challenge. Efforts whose meaning I could not immediately perceive were transformed into a strength that sustained my growth. I have come to feel deeply that the value of effort often discloses its true worth quietly, and only with the passage of time.

At the same time, through these experiences I also learned that growth, in many cases, does not occur when life is easy. In educational psychology, there is the concept of "desirable difficulties," advanced by the cognitive psychologist Robert A. Bjork. It suggests that methods of learning which may at first appear

burdensome or indirect—such as spaced repetition or deliberately taking on difficult tasks—are precisely what lead, over the long term, to deeper learning. Originally, this idea was proposed in discussions of how we learn, but I believe it also offers an important insight into how we live.

As we make our way through life, everyone encounters things that do not go as hoped, experiences failure, and passes through times of uncertainty. Yet it is precisely through such experiences that we cultivate the ability to think for ourselves, come to understand the pain of others, and develop resilience and perseverance.

That is why what matters in life is not choosing a path without hardship, but having the wisdom to choose worthwhile challenges that help us grow. And the attitude with which we face such challenges is, to my mind, the very core of effort.

Of course, the effort I speak of here does not mean driving oneself mercilessly and wearing down one's mind and body. Effort that does not allow one to care for and cherish oneself can never be sustained for long. Accepting challenge and breaking oneself are not the same thing.

What matters is to discern, from a broad and long-term perspective, the tasks that are truly meaningful for you, and then to face them with sincerity. The steady accumulation of such effort will, in time, become the true strength that supports you.

There is one more thing I would like to say: effort often bears fruit in the form of trust. Even if results do not appear immediately, and even if no one seems to notice for the moment, the sight of someone devoting themselves earnestly to something remains in the hearts of others. Effort accumulated with sincerity not only strengthens you yourselves, but also gradually gives rise to the feeling, “This is someone to whom we may entrust this task,” and is stored up as genuine trust. That trust, at important moments in life, will sustain you and also become a force that opens new doors.

Whether the wind is at your back or against you, the learning and experience you have cultivated until today are surely alive within you. Each step of your journey will not only deepen your own life, but in time will also become a source of strength that supports others in society. Wherever you may go, may you devote your abilities with sincerity, nurture bonds of trust with many people, and walk your own path with steadiness and conviction.

With my heartfelt prayers for abundant happiness in your future, I now conclude my address. Once again, congratulations on your graduation and completion of your studies.

March 25, 2026
Takafumi Sakai
President, Saitama University