

## President's Address at the 2023 Saitama University Degree Awarding Ceremony

I would like to extend my congratulations to all of you here at Saitama University's Degree Awarding Ceremony who have graduated or completed your studies today. On behalf of the faculty and staff, I would also like to extend my sincere congratulations and appreciation to your families and all of those who have kindly watched over and supported you thus far. Today, 18 students have graduated from the undergraduate program, 38 students have completed the Master's course, and 24 students have completed the Doctoral course. These numbers also include 56 international students.

With the arrival of today's Degree Awarding Ceremony, I wonder what thoughts are going through your minds. Pride in the time that you fully devoted to study and research as students here at Saitama University? Hopes and anxiety regarding society or the new realm of academia that you are stepping into? A day like graduation, which is when one is able to see both the path one has taken and the path one will take, is a clear turning point that one seldom encounters in one's life.

What I am about to share with those of you who stand at that turning point are words of congratulations for your days of hard work thus far and a message to those of you in the future.

That message is "Keep learning." This is my ardent wish, summed up in a phrase.

At first glance, these words may seem contradictory to those of you who have completed your studies and who are now entering society. However, I would like to offer these words because they are important to all graduates.

All of you have come this far in your various fields of study by sincerely facing days that were sometimes painful and harsh days and putting forth your best effort. Even during normal times, one might feel lonely or anxious as one treads the path in the search for truth, and your effort particularly during the global COVID-19 pandemic must have been extraordinary. I would like to express my sincere respect to all of you for your perseverance in the face of the dual challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and your studies. Because you have overcome these difficulties, I am confident that you will use the expertise you have acquired and build on your cross-disciplinary education to fully contribute to society now that you have graduated. I hope that you will take pride in your efforts and achievements thus far and demonstrate your abilities to the fullest where you go in the future.

Nonetheless, there is something that I want you to always be mindful of, and that is the changes in our society that you are entering. The fact is that current scientific and technological progress is unfolding at an unpredictably rapid rate and to an unpredictable extent, so you must bear that in mind. For example, generative AI is less than a year old, but its emergence is taking the world by storm at an astonishingly rapid rate. And what does the fact that generative AI is still just beginning signal? A few years ago, if you had acquired specialized knowledge and skills, you could work in the same profession or specialty for the

rest of your life. In the society of the future, however, you may face a situation in which the expertise you have acquired is abruptly outpaced. In some cases, this also means that you may lose your job to AI.

You will have to enter a society that is changing markedly. Society will not allow you to stay in the same place in every field, and it will do so at an unpredictably rapid rate. Please keep this firmly in mind.

I am sometimes gripped by the fear that these marked changes will have a destructive influence on our society in the future and the people who live in it. Of course, your future is no exception.

Hence, “Keep learning.” This is my wish for you.

Continuing to learn is a powerful compass that will guide you in this markedly changing society. After graduating and completing your studies, you should continue to actively explore your own work and specialty as well as other fields and continue to interact and collaborate with people from different cultures and fields. Continue to broaden your educational frontiers while remaining inquisitive, and take many detours for personal enrichment. That is also learning. If you are always learning throughout your life, you should have no trepidation about the fears I mentioned earlier. If, however, you are at the mercy of the events of the day and you stop learning as soon as you enter society, you will lose the compass that will help you to survive in society.

Fortunately, hopeful advances in information technology now grant us access to top-class learning from around the world via the Internet at anytime and anywhere. You should always continue to access learning with a willingness to actively incorporate new knowledge and technology through recurrent education and reskilling. I am sure that all of you, having endured the last three years of the COVID-19 pandemic tirelessly exploring various approaches, will be able to do so. I believe that your continuing to learn is the hope that will render my fears groundless.

In closing, even though you have left this University please remember your time on campus, your friends, and our faculty and staff throughout your life. The time you spent here will surely help you in the future. I hope that your recollections of the beautiful autumn leaves and fresh greenery of the Okubo Campus will cheer you up when you are going through difficulties at various points in your life.

I sincerely hope that all of you, as graduates of Saitama University, will become people who build a better world and that you live the rest of your lives resolutely and cheerfully.

Congratulations on your graduation and completion of your studies today.

September 22, 2023

Takafumi Sakai

President, Saitama University