

President's Address at the 2026 Saitama University Entrance Ceremony

Congratulations on your matriculation, everyone, and welcome to Saitama University. This spring, 1,634 undergraduate students, 644 master's program students, and 59 doctoral students enrolled at the university. On behalf of the entire faculty and staff, I extend our heartfelt welcome to each of you. I would also like to offer my sincerest congratulations to your families and those who have nurtured and supported you with deep affection.

To begin, I would like to say a few words about Saitama University, where you will pursue your studies.

Saitama University is a comprehensive university in which all five faculties, Liberal Arts, Economics, Education, Science, and Engineering, and all three graduate schools, Humanities and Social Sciences, Education, and Science and Engineering, are brought together on a single campus. The university's distinctive "All in One Campus" is not merely a geographical concept, meaning that five faculties and three graduate schools are located in one place. Saitama University encompasses the three major academic domains of the humanities, the social sciences, and the natural sciences, from foundational to applied studies, and it also includes the Faculty of Education, which prepares teachers to nurture the next generation, it not only cultivates the ability to pursue one's field in depth, in other words, "specialized knowledge," but also naturally provides fertile ground for organically linking those fields together. Through classes and extracurricular club activities, everyday dialogue and collaboration across disciplines generate new perspectives and foster the ability to view society from a broader perspective. In the course of everyday university life, specialized knowledge connects with other forms of knowledge and develops into what we call "integrated knowledge."

The foundation of learning at university lies in acquiring deep, specialized knowledge in one's respective field. Specialized knowledge is, so to speak, the knowledge that forms your own intellectual core, acquired through in-depth study in your respective faculties or graduate schools. However, many of the issues facing contemporary society cannot be resolved by any one academic discipline alone. For example, many social challenges, such as global environmental issues, energy issues, the declining birthrate and aging population, and the sustainability of local communities, as well as changes in society and industrial structures brought about by AI and data science, cannot be resolved by the natural sciences alone nor by the humanities and social sciences alone. Society now requires us to connect knowledge and perspectives from different fields and create new value. We call this "integrated knowledge." Integrated knowledge, as the term is used here, is a way of knowledge grounded in specialized knowledge and directed toward addressing the challenges facing society by connecting those different areas of learning. The "All in One Campus" environment at Saitama University makes possible a form of learning in which students can firmly acquire specialized knowledge while also connecting those strands of knowledge and developing them into integrated knowledge.

At Saitama University, we offer a variety of university-wide educational programs designed to foster this kind of integrated knowledge. Among the liberal arts, skills, and literacy courses that you will study first are interdisciplinary courses that span multiple academic fields and active-learning courses that emphasize problem-solving. In addition, we offer many other educational programs that allow students to learn across faculty boundaries under specific themes, including the Global Youth Program, which aims to foster a sound understanding of the ideals of the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) and prepare students to play active roles as global citizens; the Diversity Problem-Solving Program, which cultivates the ability to confront social issues in which diverse positions and values intersect and to seek solutions through dialogue and collaboration; the Entrepreneurship Education Program, which develops individuals who can create new value in society; the Mathematics, Data Science, and AI Education Program, which cultivates the ability to apply data and AI in society on a mathematical foundation; and the Multicultural Collaborative Learning Program, through which students explore issues shared by both the global and local communities together with international students and members of the local community. Along with pursuing your own field of specialization, I hope you will engage actively in these courses and programs so that, while deepening your specialized knowledge, you can connect

those areas of learning and develop them into integrated knowledge.

As you begin this new chapter of university life, I would like to share, based on my own experience, something I very much hope you will keep in mind. It is about three essential tools for understanding the world, people, and society more deeply.

The first tool is language, the medium we use in everyday life. Language here includes not only Japanese but also foreign languages such as English. Language is the most basic tool we need to connect with one another, share knowledge and experience, and work together in society. At university, you will have many opportunities not only to listen to lectures, but also to write reports, engage in discussions, and present your research findings. Developing the ability to express your own ideas accurately in words and to understand the ideas of others through language is a fundamental part of learning. In today's increasingly globalized society, the ability to connect with people around the world through foreign languages such as English is also important. Dialogue with people whose histories, cultures, and religions differ from our own gives us valuable opportunities to reexamine Japan and to reaffirm values that are universal across the world.

The second tool is mathematics. Needless to say, the range of things that can be expressed through mathematics is limited. Once something is expressed in mathematical form, however, it can be understood universally across national and cultural differences. Newton's equations of motion and Einstein's theory of relativity are likewise shared throughout the world in the form of the same mathematical expressions. Today, mathematical ways of thinking are used in many areas of society, including statistics, data science, and AI. Mathematics is one of the most universal languages shared by humankind. Of course, not everyone needs to become an advanced specialist in mathematics. Some of you may feel that mathematics is not your strength, yet what matters here is the way of thinking that mathematics embodies. The habit of thinking logically, coherently understanding things, engaging in discussion, and persuading others will be a great strength to you, regardless of your field.

The third tool is culture and the arts. You all have probably had moments when a piece of music stirred your heart, when your eyes were fixed on a painting before you knew it, or when a work of literature led you into deep reflection. That said, music, painting, and literature may be received differently by each person. At the same time, they have the power to let us share profound emotion and empathy that everyday language cannot fully express, transcending differences of East and West, age and gender, nationality, race, religion, and cultural and historical background. Even for those studying in the sciences, exposure to culture and the arts nurtures the sensitivity needed to understand people and society from many angles. No special talent is required. What matters is encountering a wide range of cultures and the arts in everyday life and responding to them through your own sensibility. Through culture and the arts, I hope you will refine your own sensibility, perceive the sensibilities of others, recognize that ways of feeling different from your own exist, and learn to respect them.

I have spoken about three essential tools: language, mathematics, culture, and the arts. I studied physics as a student, and after becoming a faculty member, I conducted research on algorithms for solving mathematical problems using computers. For me, language and mathematics were tools I used in my daily life. I must thank my parents for my encounter with culture and the arts. My parents bought a piano as they wanted my older sister to learn, but it was I who truly fell in love with it. From before I entered kindergarten to this very day, the piano has been an irreplaceable close friend to me throughout my life. At times, it has comforted me. At other times, it has given me courage. At still other times, amid the busyness of everyday life, when one can easily become short-sighted, it has reminded me to soften my gaze, not to hurry, and to move forward slowly.

I very much hope that each of you will come to appreciate the importance of these three tools. The first, language, connects people and society. The second, mathematics, gives us a universal means of understanding the world. The third, culture and the arts, expresses the depths of the human heart that everyday language cannot fully convey. Developing

these three tools will provide an important foundation for deepening your specialized knowledge while also connecting it within a broader perspective and developing it into integrated knowledge that creates new value. I hope that, through these three tools, you will cultivate the ability to engage with the world, gain perspective on yourselves, discover your individuality, and discern the course of your future.

Make full use of Saitama University's "All in One Campus" environment to hone these three tools, deepen your specialized knowledge, cultivate integrated knowledge, and forge your own future. On behalf of the entire faculty and staff, we will do our utmost to support you so that your university life will be fruitful and rewarding. In closing, I sincerely hope that each day from today onward will become part of a rich university life in which you encounter something precious that will serve as a lifelong source of support. With this wish, I conclude my address.

Once again, congratulations to all on your matriculation.

April 4, 2026
Takaomi Shigehara
President, Saitama University