

President's Address at the 2026 Autumn Saitama University Entrance Ceremony

To all of you entering Saitama University today, congratulations on your admission. On behalf of Saitama University, I extend my heartfelt congratulations to you. I would also like to offer my sincere congratulations to your families and all those who have supported you along the way.

Assembled here today are graduate students from diverse backgrounds, coming from Japan and many other countries and regions around the world.

During your time at Saitama University, I hope that our master's students will acquire the research methods of their respective disciplines and develop the ability to formulate and solve problems on their own. And I hope that our doctoral students will take on questions to which no one in the world yet knows the answer and create new knowledge.

Now, as you begin your studies and research at Saitama University, there is one thing I would like you to keep in the back of your minds: what kind of era are we living in today?

Science and technology in our society are advancing at an unprecedented pace. Major technological innovations, sometimes referred to as the Fourth Industrial Revolution, are transforming our world, and in Japan, Society 5.0 has been put forward as a vision for the society that lies ahead. The development that most clearly symbolizes this transformation today is artificial intelligence, or AI. The world of AI is changing so rapidly that what was considered common knowledge not only a year ago, but even just a few months ago, can quickly become outdated. There is a Japanese saying that "ten years makes an era." In the world of AI, however, I am tempted to say that even "one year makes an era."

The development of AI is also opening up tremendous possibilities for academic research. In the life sciences, AI-based protein structure prediction has advanced dramatically, contributing to the 2024 Nobel Prize in Chemistry. In mathematics, AI is increasingly being used to support the verification of complex proofs and the discovery of new mathematical relations. In the social sciences, researchers are exploring new models for understanding social phenomena through the analysis of vast amounts of data. In the humanities as well, AI-based image analysis and character recognition are opening new doors for research. For example, in Nasca, Peru, AI-assisted image analysis has led to the discovery of numerous previously unknown geoglyphs.

Many of you here today may already be using AI in your research or studies. As you continue to learn and conduct research, I believe that the ability to use AI appropriately will increasingly become an essential skill. Yet precisely because AI is rapidly expanding the range of things we can do, we must confront another question: Are "what we can do" and "what we should do" really the same thing?

AI offers enormous possibilities, but it also has negative aspects. New problems have emerged, including fake images and videos generated by AI, the spread of false information, the use of AI in cyberattacks, and its application to military technology. We cannot reduce AI to a simple choice

between good and bad. We must ask not only what new technologies make possible, but also what they should be used for, how far their use should be permitted, and who should take responsibility for the consequences. The further science and technology advance, the more important these questions become.

These issues are not limited to AI. In the life sciences, research related to human life itself, such as gene manipulation and research using embryonic stem cells and induced pluripotent stem cells, is advancing rapidly. To what extent should society consider it acceptable to do something simply because it is scientifically possible? At the same time, while advances in science, technology, and industry have enriched human life, they have also placed a burden on the global environment and raised the question of what kind of environment we should leave to future generations. Issues of bioethics and environmental ethics are therefore becoming increasingly important.

Scientific and technological progress is extraordinarily fast. Human society, on the other hand, needs time to understand the implications of new technologies, consider whether and how they should be used, establish laws and institutions, and build social consensus. I believe that the growing gap between “the speed of science and technology” and “the speed of human society” is one of the major challenges of the era in which you will live.

When we confront challenges of this kind, we realize that no single discipline can provide all the answers. In considering AI, for example, information science and engineering alone cannot give us a full picture of the possibilities and challenges that AI presents. Economics and the social sciences are needed to consider its effects on the economy and employment; law and politics to consider the extent to which society should accept decisions made by AI; and psychology and sociology to consider its effects on the human mind and on human relationships. Moreover, if we are to ask what it means to be human, what intelligence is, or what it means to create, we also need the knowledge of the humanities, including philosophy, history, literature, and the arts. The reverse is equally true. To understand contemporary society from the perspective of the humanities and social sciences, it is becoming increasingly important to understand what science and technology, including AI, are making possible and how they are changing our world.

This does not mean, however, that studying your own field in depth has become any less important. Quite the opposite. I want you first to deepen your expertise and acquire solid “disciplinary knowledge.” Disciplinary knowledge does not simply mean possessing a large amount of information about a particular field. It means understanding what is known and what remains unknown, learning how to formulate questions, and acquiring the methods needed to move toward answers. In an era when AI can present enormous amounts of information almost instantaneously, solid disciplinary knowledge is more important than ever. When AI offers something that appears to be an answer, you need genuine expertise to judge whether that answer is correct and whether it is meaningful. Above all, it is you, as students and researchers, who must decide what questions should be asked in the first place.

With that solid disciplinary foundation, I encourage you to place your own field in the context of other forms of knowledge. Learn how people in different disciplines view the same question. Ask whether assumptions taken for granted in your own field are truly self-evident when seen from another

perspective. By connecting different forms of knowledge, you may come to see aspects of a problem that would remain invisible from within a single discipline. We refer to this way of bringing different forms of knowledge together as “integrated knowledge.” Integrated knowledge does not mean knowing a little about many things. It means possessing solid disciplinary knowledge, connecting it with other forms of knowledge, and reconsidering it within a broader context. It is precisely because you have deep disciplinary knowledge that meaningful connections with other forms of knowledge become possible—and through those connections, you may come to see your own field from a new perspective.

Saitama University has a particular strength in this regard. Our five faculties—Liberal Arts, Economics, Education, Science, and Engineering—and our three graduate schools—Humanities and Social Sciences, Education, and Science and Engineering—are all located on a single campus. This is Saitama University’s All in One Campus. Its value lies not simply in the fact that different academic disciplines share the same physical space. When you encounter a question that cannot be answered within your own field alone, people with different forms of knowledge and different perspectives are close at hand. I hope you will turn this physical proximity into intellectual proximity. Go beyond the boundaries of your laboratory or program and explore other fields. The different ideas and perspectives you encounter there may lead you to reconsider your own research and discover new questions.

We live in an era in which science and technology, including AI, are transforming society at a pace we have never experienced before. Precisely because we live in such an era, I hope you will become people who do not simply accept the answers you are given, but who think for yourselves about what questions should be asked. Think not only about what can be done, but about what should be done. Think not only about what your own research may make possible, but also about how it may affect people and society. To do so, pursue your own field in depth. At the same time, place your field, from time to time, in the context of other forms of knowledge and reconsider it from a broader perspective. Saitama University’s All in One Campus brings together diverse people and diverse forms of knowledge for precisely this purpose. I hope that here at Saitama University you will acquire solid disciplinary knowledge, cultivate your own integrated knowledge through encounters with different forms of knowledge, and generate new questions of your own.

I sincerely hope that your studies and research at Saitama University will be fruitful. With these wishes, I conclude my remarks. Congratulations once again on your admission to Saitama University.

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