

2023 Spring Commencement Address

On behalf of the faculty and staff of the Nara Institute of Science and Technology, I would like to congratulate the 343 students entering the master's courses and the 78 new and continuing students entering the doctoral courses of the Graduate School of Science and Technology today, along with their families.

I would also like to extend my sincere thanks to all the distinguished guests who came to congratulate you on your new start.

Now, you have enrolled in a unique university with distinctive features. First of all, the name "Nara Institute of Science and Technology," or "narasentankagakugijutsudaikuindaigaku" in Japanese, is one of the longest names of any university in Japan. If you feel that getting the whole name out without making a mistake is difficult, when talking to your friends about here, you may use the abbreviation "NAIST" or "narasentandai," both of which have been trademarked for public relations purposes.

The Japanese name "daigakuin" means graduate school and this in the title denotes the fact that there are no undergraduate programs at NAIST. In general, most graduate schools in Japan are attended by students who have entered the universities' undergraduate programs, but at NAIST graduates of various universities, faculties, and technical colleges, as well as working adults enroll. Many international students are joining us from abroad as well, and among the new students admitted today, there are 45 international students from 14 countries and regions around the world, making NAIST an international campus with about one out of every four students enrolled being from overseas.

Diverse attributes, knowledge, and experiences produce creativity of ideas and flexibility to change, which are essential for scientific and technological research. In addition, by engaging with diverse people, we can objectively reexamine our own previous values and expand our possibilities. We have formulated the Declaration of Co-Creative Community, which states our philosophy of fostering a community culture that respects the differences and individuality of each person, with all members recognizing the value of diversity, which is a characteristic of NAIST. The Declaration has been published through our website and other means. We encourage everyone to read it.

"Co-creation" in this Declaration of Co-Creative Community means to create together. I think this concept of "co-creation" has something in common with the Great Buddha of Nara. Each individual makes a flower bloom and we together decorate the world with various flowers, which is called Zokegonjo, and the Vairocana Buddha of Nara, or the Great Buddha, embodies the entire world or universe decorated with various flowers. Significantly, NAIST is also located in Nara, where diverse students, faculty, and staff aim to realize the mission of the university through co-creation with their own flowers blooming.

In addition to the diversity of its community, another characteristic of NAIST is its relatively small size. Compared to nearby Kyoto University and Osaka University, NAIST has about 1/20th the number of students. According to a study by the American psychologist Angela Bahns, small universities tend to create networks among students with different ideas, behaviors, and beliefs. In contrast, it is said that in universities with a large number of students, "fine-tuning of one's social networks" is repeated to find people who are as similar to each other as possible, and networks of similar people tend to be formed.

The same thing is known to happen on the Internet, where "fine-tuning of social networks" is easy. The Internet can connect diverse people from all over the world, but on social networking sites, groups of people with similar opinions and perspectives are formed. When people express their opinions within these groups, there is an "echo chamber" phenomenon in which they are met only with an agreement or similar opinions. As a consequence, certain information and beliefs are amplified, increasing the risk that people within such a group believe things that seem completely crazy from the outside.

As a student at NAIST, with its diverse faculty and staff, I urge you to create a network with people who have experiences, perspectives, and backgrounds different from your own. We hope that you will expand and deepen your "inner diversity" as part of your studies at NAIST, thereby enhancing your multifaceted perspectives and creativity. Also after your graduation, please try to make use of the human networks you have created at NAIST.

Finally, I would like to introduce to you some characteristics of NAIST as seen by those outside the university. According to the "Survey on the Image of Universities from the Perspectives of Corporate Human Resource Managements" published last year by Nikkei Inc. and Nikkei HR, NAIST students ranked first among universities in Japan in terms of "ability to take initiative". They were also first and third in terms of "having a spirit of challenge" and "working independently," respectively, which constitute the ability to take initiative. This makes a perfect sense, as NAIST focuses on a type of learning where students work on their own dissertation research in cutting-edge scientific and technological fields. These are the evaluations that our graduates have received from companies, but they are also the qualities that you can hone and polish here at NAIST.

NAIST's motto is "Outgrow your limits", which means "Break through your own limits". In addition to "ability to take initiative," "a spirit of challenge" and "independence," you must have great potential that you are not yet aware of. NAIST is a place that will enable you to discover your new potential and grow beyond your assumed limits.

Welcome to NAIST!

April 5th, 2023
Kazuhiro Shiozaki
President