

Fall 2026 – President's Commencement Address

Parents and families, our distinguished faculty and dedicated staff, I am honored to join you today in congratulating the members of this graduating class. Just moments ago, I had the privilege of conferring 39 doctoral degrees and 26 master's degrees.

First and foremost, let me extend my heartfelt congratulations to each and every one of our graduates. I know the road to this day has been a long one. With enthusiasm, determination, and perseverance, you have worked toward one of life's most significant milestones you reached today. I salute you. I could not be prouder.

Today, we've gathered to celebrate your hard work and remarkable achievements. But none of you arrived here alone. You earned your degree because so many people believed in you, encouraged you, and stood beside you along the way. This is a fitting moment to thank everyone who supported you throughout your time at NAIST. To your parents and families, your friends, your professors, and the supportive staff of NAIST, please join me in giving them a well-deserved round of applause.

You are about to depart from NAIST and take your first step into the next chapter of your lives. Some of you may feel a measure of anxiety about what lies ahead. But let me remind you: the uncertainty of the future is nothing to be afraid of. It is simply a sign that your journey has only just begun. And life, as you will come to discover, is never a linear journey.

As you embark upon your career, you may be interested in an article published last December in the journal *Science*, titled "Recent discoveries on the acquisition of the highest levels of human performance."

The team of psychologists who authored this paper compiled the developmental histories of approximately 35,000 of the world's most outstanding active professionals, including Nobel laureates, Olympic medalists, chess grandmasters, and world-class classical composers. The researchers sought to understand how individuals who reached the pinnacle of their respective fields achieved such extraordinary success.

Their findings were remarkably consistent across a wide range of disciplines from science and athletics to mind sports such as chess. Their study found that those regarded as the most talented young people among their peers do not necessarily remain at the top later in their careers. Indeed, those who ultimately attained world-class status tended to develop slowly and unevenly in the early stages of their careers. Many went unnoticed for years, overshadowed by those around them. So, I can tell you that you don't have to be a star when you finish graduate school.

An even more striking finding was that those who would eventually become the very best in their fields rarely specialized in one narrow area from the outset. Before

focusing their efforts on a particular field, they explored a broad range of academic disciplines, sports, and artistic pursuits.

An outstanding career does not necessarily blossom early, nor does it unfold in a straight and clearly visible line. Rather, it is often cultivated slowly, through exploration, through detours, and through experiences whose value may not be immediately apparent. Those around you may look upon such a period impatiently and call it nothing more than a “time of uncertainty.” But you don’t need to rush. What matters far more is that you absorb diverse experiences and carry their lessons forward so that you can apply them in new and unexpected circumstances.

For example, I want you to think about your experiences at NAIST. Reflecting on what you have experienced here and translating those experiences into lessons for the future will allow you to internalize them as assets you can draw upon in different situations or contexts. In educational psychology, this process is known as the “transfer of learning”.

You need to translate your efforts and achievements so that you can recognize what you have gained here and apply it to the next challenge, the next opportunity, and the next stage of your career. In doing so, you will be able to draw the most out of all that you have learned at NAIST. This process of translation will help shape your career, even when your future does not unfold along a straight or predictable path.

Now, look at you. I see the beginning of countless exciting stories yet to be written. NAIST is immensely proud of its newest alumni. Today, you join a community of over 10,000 alumni who have learned here at NAIST and are striving to make this world a better place. The NAIST Alumni Association is a global network that connects our graduates. I encourage you to take an active part in this community to stay connected with NAIST. Even after you graduate, you will always be a member of the NAIST community.

We assure you that the diploma you received today will only grow in value and prestige with time, as NAIST is an institution on the move. Like each of you, NAIST will continue to change and evolve.

Again, congratulations to you all. Let me close my commencement address with my parting wish for you: May the future that awaits you be rewarding and fulfilling!