

2021 University of Yamanashi Graduation and Commencement Ceremony Address by the President of the University of Yamanashi

Today, with the blessings of the cherry blossoms in full bloom, I would like to offer my heartfelt congratulations to all 1,158 people who celebrated the graduation and completion ceremonies of the undergraduate, advanced, and graduate schools of the University of Yamanashi.

On behalf of all of the faculty members and current students, let me extend my congratulations not only to the graduates, but also to the families that encouraged and supported their studies, and express my gratitude for your generous support of our university.

A year has passed since COVID-19 was officially declared to be a pandemic. Inoculation using COVID-19 vaccines has spread throughout the world, and priority inoculation for medical staff has begun this month in Yamanashi Prefecture as well. However, the seemingly endless spread of the infection, and of its various mutant strains, continues to affect our daily lives in many ways.

Under these circumstances, wishing to prevent the spread of infection, while we understand that graduation and commencement ceremonies are precious and irreplaceable both for the graduates about to begin a new chapter of their lives and for their families who have awaited this moment, we have decided to limit the ceremony to award diplomas in the Ōmura Memorial Hall of the Satoshi Ōmura Museum to representatives of graduates and broadcast the ceremony live via the internet. Allow me to congratulate all of you here along with those who are watching this ceremony on the Web. Thank you very much for your understanding and cooperation.

Since you entered this university with a dream in your heart, many of you may feel that your student life passed by in the blink of an eye. During that time, through your daily academic studies you have acquired knowledge and skills along with a broad general education, and I expect you have grown significantly while overcoming the hardships that arose as a result of the pandemic.

In addition, in your laboratories and through your club activities, you have met respected teachers, seniors, classmates and juniors,

fostered great friendships, and made memories that you will treasure over the years. All these will support you as you advance to the next chapter of your life.

Many excellent students have graduated from the University of Yamanashi. One of them is Professor Satoshi Ōmura, a graduate of the Faculty of Education who received the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine in 2015. For a local national university graduate to receive the Nobel Prize is unsurpassable good news, and this became a great pride and encouragement for all of us at the University of Yamanashi.

Utilizing the opportunity that this award provided, Dr. Ōmura donated a part of his Nobel Prize award money, and with warm support from graduates, companies, organizations and the general public, the University of Yamanashi Satoshi Ōmura Memorial Fund was established to award excellent students with benefit-type scholarships every year. In July 2018, commemorating his reception of the Nobel Prize, the Satoshi Ōmura Museum was established to honor his achievements forever. We hope that students, alumni and local residents will come to love this building and use it effectively, and we will continue our efforts to operate it.

In January of last year, the University of Yamanashi Hospital conducted a simulation of accepting COVID-19 patients ahead of the rest of the country, and set up a complete PCR testing system as soon as possible. We also accepted people infected on the cruise ship Diamond Princess, and the first COVID-19 patient in the prefecture. In addition, we treated the world's first COVID-19 patient that developed meningitis, treated an infant COVID-19 patient with cardiopulmonary arrest, and published our studies in international journals. Our hospital has been actively accepting critically ill patients in the prefecture, and we have saved precious lives using advanced medical extracorporeal membrane oxygenation (ECMO). Up to now, we have treated over 90 inpatients in total. In addition, we have conducted more than 10,000 PCR tests, including Yamanashi Prefecture's first drive-through PCR test. Bearing the risk of infection, and the fears of reduced income, the faculty and staff have worked together to fight this global infectious disease.

As an individual, I have appealed for the expansion of the PCR testing system at every opportunity. Now at last, the country is recognizing its importance and adopting it as an important policy for controlling infection.

At present, the number of patients with mutant strains of COVID-19 is increasing, especially with the UK variant, but our hospital now has the capability to test for these variants as well. In the coming days we would like to take an active role in the vaccination process.

Although local national universities have been placed in an increasingly harsher environment due to the pandemic, our university has been leading the country in various types of reform. Last year, to promote cooperation with Yamanashi Prefectural University, we launched the General Incorporated Association University Alliance Yamanashi. Also, in February of this year, we established the Regional Human Resources Development Center, to improve efficiency at work and promote closer cooperation. The General Incorporated Association University Alliance Yamanashi is scheduled to be certified by the Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology as the first University Collaboration Promotion Corporation, and including the opening of inter-university collaborative classes next fiscal year, we can utilize the special measures this collaboration provides to develop various inter-university collaboration projects.

These positive efforts for university reform have been highly evaluated by the Cabinet Office and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, and the year before last, our university was the only one selected to receive the subsidy for the creation of national university innovation from the Cabinet Office. This subsidy gives us 300 million yen over two years, and last year, a number of financially large-scale projects have been adopted, including our acquisition of 200 million yen as a national university reform strengthening promotion subsidy from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology.

Furthermore, our newly established Market Research Team is promoting cost-cutting projects through a major review of expenditures, and has achieved a reduction of hundreds of millions of

yen. We are planning to use these financial resources to make investments that will lead to a brighter future.

The catchphrase of the University of Yamanashi is “Creating the Backbone of the Community and Developing Citizens of the World.” Our faculty and staff are working together to provide high quality education and research, and to contribute to our society. We hope that you will continue to keep an eye on us, and support us as you can in future days.

The situation of the world today is chaotic. Due to the Fourth Industrial Revolution and the Digital Revolution DX (Digital Transformation), the world economy is undergoing major transformations caused by new technology, such as IoT, big data, AI and robotics. In addition, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change and global warming, and our declining birthrate and aging population are all factors that cause us uncertainty and render predictions about our future difficult.

Despite all these factors causing us uncertainty, in order to realize a sustainable world, developed and developing countries are now working together to tackle global issues and achieve the so-called SDGs, Sustainable Development Goals. As a university, we also must consider the challenges facing this world and how we can respond to the rapid changes in our society.

In the future ultra-smart society known as Society 5.0, you may be engaged in work that you cannot even imagine now, and you will need the ability to generate new ideas and ways of thinking that cannot be replaced by AI. In addition, as we enter an age in which living to the age of 100 is not only a dream but an actual possibility, the knowledge we have learned will become obsolete rapidly in the midst of our rapid social changes, and it will be necessary to continually learn new knowledge. Recently we have launched a program for certification of university-based ventures, and a program to support women, which we hope can prove useful for future endeavors. The society that awaits you is not only rosy; it can also be very harsh, but we hope that based on the problem-solving, normative judgment and logical thinking abilities that you have acquired in the course of your studies

at this university, you will continue to learn in various ways, and live on vigorously in your society.

Believe in yourself, and courageously take the first steps to pave the way to building your own life. Needless to say, as individuals we should pursue our own happiness, but at the same time, as a person with a higher education, I hope that you will live your life with a sense of mission, considering how you can improve society. As your alma mater and your port in a storm, our faculty and staff will continue to provide sustainable opportunities for lifelong learning and support you as we can.

Among the graduates this year are 61 international students from 9 countries around the world. Even disregarding the obvious language difficulties, differences in culture and customs must have made an environment in which study became difficult at times. To honor those students who have overcome these difficulties and graduated today, I would like to send a message in English.

Among today's graduates are 61 international students from 9 different countries.

You have made it to this day after studying hard, and overcoming the difference of languages, lifestyle and food here in Japan.

I congratulate you on your great efforts, and I wish you every success in your future endeavors.

I hope that you will look back on time you had here in Yamanashi with fondness, and treasure the memories of the people you met and the things you learned at our university.

COVID-19 infection has spread all over the world, and the situation is still unpredictable. I believe that you can overcome difficulties and I wish you the best of luck in your endeavors.

Thank you.

In conclusion, I pray from the bottom of my heart that those of you who graduate today will be active for your region, for Japan, and for the world as you set forth on the road to creating your own lives. Congratulations on your graduation.

March 23, 2021
President, University of Yamanashi
(National University Corporation)
Shinji Shimada