

Congratulatory Message for the Enrollment Ceremony at the Nara Institute of Science and Technology

Congratulations to all students entering the Nara Institute of Science and Technology (NAIST), and to their family and acquaintances who have supported them to this day.

More than two years has passed since COVID-19 spread throughout the world. Although vaccination and the development of therapeutic drugs are progressing in Japan and around the world, fundamental solutions have yet to be found.

The virus continues to mutate and is still raging around the world; as of early March 2022, it had infected approximately 450 million people worldwide and killed more than 6 million. Human beings have been fighting against the threat of infectious diseases throughout our long history, and I am sure you are aware that not only the new coronavirus but also every time an unknown infectious disease spreads, the expectations of us, the scientific community, have increased. While being physically separated from each other, scientists around the world utilizing virtual communication tools to diligently pursue their shared goals through developing vaccines and new drugs, simulating airborne droplet dispersions, etc.

How should we put an end to this pandemic? How should we organize our society afterwards? These are difficult questions. As the world goes through a whirlwind of change, should we be conducting research the same way as before? When we, scientists, who lock ourselves up in our laboratories in pursuit of mastering a narrow segment of science, are confronted with such a catastrophe as the COVID-19 pandemic, society is bound to ask us to produce results that will contribute to the betterment of our society. We must consider what kind of research can be added to the various research currently being conducted in other parts of the world, so as to further overall research progress and benefit society. To those present at today's enrollment ceremony, I would like to ask you to envision the ideal future, and ask yourself throughout your student life, what you can do or should do to realize it.

It is important to perform research and other work by yourself, not delegating it to others.

Dr. Shinya Yamanaka, winner of the Nobel Prize in 2012 for his work on induced pluripotent stem cells (iPSCs), is a researcher who has also trained at NAIST. Dr. Yamanaka, even to this day, maintains his strong passion to make use of iPSCs in order to ensure the survival of humankind and to improve quality of life through combating diseases. He has made rejuvenating cells that can make different body tissues—a phenomenon that sounds like a mythological tale—into reality. There are still many unknown areas in science. I am repeating myself when I say this, but I feel that when pursuing research in primordial areas, it is of key importance to think how the results will help people and society.

What will help you in your life is the knowledge, experience, and thoughts that you gain through your hard work. Think not to avoid, but to face your challenges and overcome them. See them as opportunities for self-growth. I would like to leave you with the word, *jitan jiji*, which expresses my own personal philosophy. The difficulties you experience in your youth will nurture your growth. Strengthen yourself and strive for self-reliance.

To those entering NAIST this spring, I wish you a wonderful student life. Pave the way for your own future. Lead the way for the future of NAIST, which celebrated its 30th anniversary last year. Improve yourself and draw on your experiences to help you thrive and bloom, year after year. Repeating this process shall bring you success. With these words, I conclude my congratulatory message.

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Director

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