

University of Tokyo 2013 Entrance Ceremony Speech

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Thank you for inviting me to speak today.

To all you new students, congratulations. I wish you the best from the bottom of my heart.

I would especially like to offer my deepest congratulations to those of you who are from Fukushima, Miyagi and Iwate Prefectures - and Takeru Inamura of Soma High School in Fukushima Prefecture, and his parents. I also wish to express my feelings of gratitude to Mr, Matsumura, Takeru's teacher.

Quite some time ago, I myself graduated from the Faculty of Medicine here at the University of Tokyo. After several years of clinical training, I went to the United States of America, where I spent years in academic institutions – teaching, doing research and being involved in patient care as a physician. There, as an independent individual, I built a career that was outside the sphere of Japanese organizations.

During that time, I was able to observe Japan from a distance. This allowed me to see the country more clearly, and I began to discover both good and bad aspects that I had not considered while living in Japan. I cared deeply about this country, of course, because I am a citizen.

After fifteen years, in an unexpected turn of events, I returned to Japan. Since then, I have been the recipient of many diverse opportunities. My perspective throughout has been to see “Japan as a member of the world community,” and I have considered my responsibilities and taken action based on this framework. This has led me to sometimes be outspoken about Japanese society and universities.

Some of you may know that I served as the Chairman of the National Diet of Japan Fukushima Nuclear Accident Independent Investigation Commission in the recent past. And some of you may have wondered, “What kind of person *is* this Chairman?” Well, you can find out the answer to that by Googling me.

I would like to express my gratitude to President Hamada and others who have invited me to speak here today.

The University of Tokyo is Japan's top university, and it is one of a select group of the most

prestigious universities in the world. Yet, we can see the beginnings of a shadow being cast over the institution.

The recent reconsideration of the university admission process and the allowance of autumn admissions reflects the sense of crisis that this university recognizes. But this reconsideration of admission process and autumn admission may be a necessary step on the way to reaching higher, more important goals. The University of Tokyo bears a special responsibility to Japan – because when “Todai” makes an announcement, it makes the newspaper headlines, it is talked about at the dinner table, and most importantly, it can be a catalyst for social change.

In the past ten years, the top universities of the world, which so many passionate students of the world strive to enter, have greatly transformed their undergraduate programs. They have begun to place more weight on being global and diverse, with more emphasis on the overseas and cross-cultural experiences of their undergraduate students. What is behind this transformation?

In the past twenty years, since the time you were born, the Japanese economy has ceased to grow, and you have probably not heard many positive things about the country. But all around us, the world has become globally connected – and increasingly inter-dependent. It has changed faster than anyone could have expected, and it is likely that this change will only become more rapid. The balance between the world economy and politics has begun to shift. National governance and finances, industry and economy are all undergoing fluid and dynamic changes. The disparities and differences in race and religion have increased potential conflicts and the world has become more vulnerable. A small, regional confrontation can have a huge impact on the world.

We are moving from a vertical to a horizontal global society, with more flexible and dynamic organizations. In this new world, diversity, difference, and people whose voices are dissident and unique have high value and potential. In this “flat world” where every individual’s strength and capacity can be easily assessed, the world will watch and evaluate universities by their students.

The world’s best universities know that there are things that are fundamental to the world’s future. They include the deepening of mutual understanding among youth from around the world, as well as creating diverse and multi-dimensional connections between individuals. For these reasons, universities are making an effort to develop individuals who can view

themselves and the world from many angles.

I know that it is difficult for organizations that value uniformity to recognize the diverse and multifaceted ideas of this new world. Here are some statistics on you students who were admitted to the University of Tokyo: One out of four of you graduated from one of the top ten high schools in Japan. Two out of five of you graduated from the top twenty high schools. Many of you spent the past six years of your middle and high school education studying in the same schools, and were selected through the same entrance exam.

Less than nineteen percent of you are female. It's interesting that this average has remained around twenty percent over the last ten years, despite the fact that the rate of being admitted is about the same for males and females. It means, therefore, that few women take the entrance exam in the first place, which points to the fact that there are social factors at work here. Here's a final statistic: The female-to-male ration at this university is the lowest among the major universities in Japan.

Harvard, Cambridge, Stanford, Princeton – the universities that come to mind when you think of the world's best – all have an equal male-to-female ratio of undergraduate students. On top of that, the Presidents of four out of the eight Ivy League universities in the U.S. are women.

So there is a weakness at the University of Tokyo, and it is the institution's focus on uniformity at the expense of diversity and an international mind-set. While there are many male faculty and students, there are few women and foreign faculty and students.

It is incredibly important for you to be aware of your strengths and weaknesses within the context of the global situation, and you can only learn this by going out into a different environment. By understanding your weaknesses, you will not suffer from overconfidence or arrogance: instead, you will become humble. And it is this humility that allows you to make full use of your weak points and build true confidence.

“Be humble, not arrogant.” That is the attitude that will lead you to true confidence no matter what you do or where you go in this globally connected world.

There are many astonishing things happening in the world. And I would like to bring your attention to one of them: the Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC), which are an innovative educational method that belongs to this digital age.

MOOC makes it possible for anyone, anywhere, to take the courses of Stanford, MIT, Harvard and Berkley. It is also possible to share and evaluate your grades with those

universities' students as well as other students from all over the world. In fact, there are some courses that are being taken by thousands, or tens of thousands of young people. So take advantage of this. Use it to understand your strengths, open your eyes, and feel your world expand.

In Japanese universities, the evaluation of the curriculum and educators has not been taken seriously, and there are many teachers that oppose it. However, with MOOC, the assessment of classes and professors has become more open to the world, and it is reforming the meaning of university education.

Universities have become open learning spaces for students and professors alike. Digital technology has the power to enable individuals to pursue their full potential beyond their social standing, nationality and national borders. MOOC empowers anyone to further advance their potential.

If you participate in the MOOC courses, you may find yourself wanting to go to a university abroad. It may sound outrageous now, but it is a distinct possibility, and it is up to each one of you to choose.

Creating your own value in this global world is the first step in building your own unique career. I would also like to recommend taking time off from university. Because no matter how much knowledge you have, if you do not have any experience, it is merely a part of the virtual world within your own imagination. There is nothing as important as actual experience. And meeting people of your own generation who will carry the future of the world on their backs is extremely important for you and your future. Make friends like that all across the world, and you can keep in touch with them through the internet. You can become a "hub" for connecting talented people in Japan and countries overseas.

This, I believe, is the message and purpose of the change to autumn admissions and graduation at the University of Tokyo. This should make it easier to experience different parts of society and explore different worlds. In particular, I would like to strongly recommend going abroad.

Why abroad? Because you will have a much better chance to discover the challenges that face the world and realize your own potential. It will also give you a wider framework to see both Japan and yourself objectively from the outside which, as I said earlier, enables you to better understand the good points, the strengths and the weaknesses. You will feel your awareness change and develop. So don't turn away; you should actively pursue such opportunities.

There might be moments when you feel that “this is something I want to do.” Whether it is a gut feeling or intuition, it can awaken a passion in you because it will be your inner voice speaking. There are going to be endless opportunities and choices that you can act upon: studying at a university abroad, participating in an exchange program, interning for a company, the government, an NGO, volunteering, interning abroad through AISEC, taking a gap term, taking a gap year, and many more. Taking time off from university is also a smart option.

I know many young people who have found their dreams or goals by going abroad. I know many such students at the University of Tokyo. After these experiences, these students show sudden and remarkable change. This is why I recommend going abroad and taking time off from university. It is recommendation of taking time off to find your own world.

It is impossible for anyone to predict how the world will change. Today, you are standing at the start line of your new life. There is an American film called *The Dead Poets Society*, about the bonds formed between a teacher and his students at an elite boarding school. I was very moved by this film. There are many wonderful and memorable quotes from this film. One of them, “*Carpe diem*,” which means, “Seize the day” or “Live in the moment” has stayed in my heart.

Every time I am asked to sign someone’s book or a card, that is what I write: “Carpe diem, seize the day.” If you live each day according to that phrase, you will live each day to the fullest.

So, that is what I want to leave you with today:  
Carpe diem, seize the day.

And once again, congratulations to all of you.