

October 1, 2020

President's Message to Students Matriculating in October 2020

Yuji Oie, President, Kyushu Institute of Technology

Due to the widespread impact of novel coronavirus infections (COVID-19) recently, we made the decision to cancel the October 2020 entrance ceremony out of an abundance of caution for the health and safety of everyone involved and to help limit the risk of infection as much as possible.

While the decision makes us extremely sad, especially given how much students, their guardians, and everyone else involved looked forward to the ceremony, we ask for your understanding regarding the decision, as it was made to ensure everyone's safety and prevent further spread of infection.

Nevertheless, despite these circumstances, I want again to congratulate you on your entrance to the university and convey my great respect for the great effort you have made to arrive at this point. It is our greatest joy to welcome each of you to the Kyushu Institute of Technology. On behalf of all our faculty members, congratulations.

Out of the 60 students who are being admitted to our university today, 55 students, approximately 91%, are international students from 17 countries and regions. Given the current circumstances, we are especially delighted to have so many students from such a large number of countries and regions.

On this occasion, I would like to take stock of the present and reflect on what future learning will be like. The world in recent years has witnessed remarkable technological innovations with the advance of globalization. Often it is characterized by the acronym VUCA—volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity. All the more so now, as we face the global spread of such viral infections and find ourselves not only severely limited in our physical movements but also significantly impacted in our various social and economic activities. It seems fair to say that ours is an increasingly volatile, increasingly uncertain world. Moreover, future society will be significantly transformed by technologies that do not yet exist in the world and there will be a need to find solutions to issues that we cannot even imagine today.

Such are the conditions in which you will study to acquire disciplinary knowledge and skills and begin to conduct research to address unresolved issues. I hope you will take the knowledge, skills, and

experiences you gain and use them to help build a future society full of hope. As you pursue your studies and research, I believe it is worth knowing the skills that innovators before you have possessed—specifically, these five skills: associating, questioning, observing, networking, and experimenting.¹

Of these, when faced with new knowledge and issues, it is “questioning”—the ability to think issues through and to entertain doubts—that is important if we are to deepen our understanding of them. Through thinking, rather than just taking knowledge and issues at face value, we become active participants and make that knowledge and those issues our own. Better questions lead to better understanding and have the potential to produce creative ideas. By all means, cultivate your skills at questioning.

Next, there is “associating”—the ability, for instance, to connect one body of knowledge with that of another discipline—thanks to which, numerous innovations have been achieved. As you deepen your disciplinary knowledge, be sure that you also develop a flexible mind, one that takes opportunities to engage with, connect, and combine knowledge from different fields. Through association, the value of such knowledge increases and the ability to produce something novel grows. By all means, take the time to discover connections and make associations.

Precisely because the future is obscure today and objectives are hard to define, it will not be computers and AI, but rather people in all their diversity, all possessing different sets of knowledge, skills, and experiences, that will be capable of producing the innovations needed to overcome these challenges by coming together and sharing what they know.

In closing, although we may feel confined as we continue to hold lectures and research meetings online for now, it is my sincere hope that each of you entering the university today will be mindful of your health, remain intellectually curious, take advantage of the many learning opportunities and environments available here, pursue a meaningful life as a graduate student, and be confident that your decision to attend Kyutech was the right one. Once again, welcome and congratulations.

1. Jeffrey H. Dyer, Hal B. Gregersen and Clayton M. Christensen. *The Innovator's DNA: Mastering the Five Skills of Disruptive Innovators*. Harvard Business School Press, 2011.