

2021 Okayama University Graduation Ceremony Congratulatory Speech

It is a great honor and pleasure to attend the Okayama University Fall 2021 Graduation Ceremony along with our other academic and executive staff. I would like to congratulate all of you on the completion of your undergraduate and graduate programs. Although your families and friends are unable to attend due to COVID-19, we are very happy to see that you are here and in good spirits today.

Of the 180 graduates today, 101 have completed doctoral programs, 28 have completed master's programs, 2 have completed professional degree requirements, and 49 have completed undergraduate programs.

I am sure that COVID-19 has changed life significantly for you and your families. Indeed, the road to graduation must have been extremely difficult. In spite of these difficulties, however, the hardships have provided us with valuable opportunities for learning. One vital lesson we have learned is that many of the major challenges we will face in the future will have the momentum and ferocity to engulf the entire planet in an instant. In order to solve these issues, it will be important for innovators from various academic disciplines and cultures to create partnerships that transcend generations and physical location.

Okayama University is currently promoting the UN SDGs through an institution-wide approach. Okayama University has integrated the SDGs into our institutional vision and strategic development plan and how we are incorporating the SDGs into society through our educational and research enterprises.

The first step in this process is *back-casting*, in which we proactively envision definite goals for the future that will guide our mission and practices. In the second step, called *outside-in*, we share the social issues and needs of the society around

us. The third step involves Okayama University taking the initiative to engage in *open innovation* with multiple stakeholders. The final step is *social implementation* in which we develop the academic outcomes derived from our human intellectual activities in order to furnish solutions for societal issues. These four steps, coupled with resilient partnerships rooted in diversity and inclusiveness, will enable us to face difficult challenges such as planetary health and COVID-19.

Okayama University has established a global alumni network including 55 alumni associations in various locations around the world. I hope you will participate in alumni chapter activities in your home countries. In order to realize the mission of the SDGs and to broaden and deepen partnerships among the university, alumni, and communities, we plan to ensure alumni interactions through internet communication technology. Of course, whenever you feel the need to further your intellectual journey, you will always be welcomed back to Okayama University.

Finally, we hope that you will be proud of what you have learned at Okayama University and what you have accomplished in obtaining your respective degrees. We wish you a lifetime of success, health, and happiness in your future.

I once again express my heartiest congratulations to everyone on your graduation today.

Hirofumi Makino,
President, Okayama University
September 24th, 2021