

Fall Welcome 2024

Hello, I'm Kaz Shiozaki. On behalf of the faculty and staff of the Nara Institute of Science and Technology, NAIST for short, I am delighted to welcome you all to start your postgraduate studies here. I would also like to extend my sincere congratulations to your families.

Our faculty and staff are proud that you have chosen NAIST as a place for your study. NAIST is a unique university with distinctive features and strengths. Above all, there are no undergraduate programs here. NAIST stands out from many other Japanese universities, where most graduate students are from undergraduate programs within the same university. In contrast, we admit graduates from diverse universities and technical colleges, and many international students are joining NAIST as well. Indeed, about one out of every four students at NAIST are international. Today, we welcome 79 new students from 24 countries and regions, including Japan.

As a university community rich in diversity, NAIST declared in 2022 to be a “co-creative community.” Our “Declaration of Co-creative Community” says:

“The Co-creative Community we aspire to is a community where members strive for the creation of new value through the exchange of opinions with courtesy and empathy. We value our individual differences and pursue mutual understanding and respect while rejecting discrimination.”

The entire Declaration is on our university website and also posted at the entrance of each Division building. Please make time to read it.

As a graduate student, you will be at the forefront of scientific and technological developments through your thesis research. I cannot emphasize enough that science and technology have been advanced by global communities of researchers rather than individuals, which is why we believe the concept of a “co-creative community” is so important.

The scientific community is not limited to those currently engaged in research activities; it also includes pioneers who have made significant contributions to the field. Isaac Newton once wrote, “If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.” Indeed, the first step of research is to understand an existing scientific theory or technology accurately. Those are the products of endeavors by esteemed predecessors of the field. So, you first need to get on the shoulders of giants. Then, if you succeed in refuting a theory or pointing out a problem with a technology, it is a discovery. If you can present a new alternative theory or invention, it is another discovery. This is how science and technology have grown and progressed. The scientific process is a perpetual cycle of criticizing and revising existing theories and technologies.

Therefore, we can say the history of science is a history of mistakes and failures despite the best efforts of the researchers of the time. So, all work, including those by any genius and experienced researchers, has to be validated and corrected, if necessary, by members of the scientific community. In other words, the basis of scientific progress is a community that promotes communication for mutual validation and discussion among its members.

However, mutual criticism involves pointing out each other's errors. It is not uncommon to feel hurt when we are criticized. That's why Article 3 of our "Declaration of Co-creative Community" states, "We affirm that the different ways of thinking and various experiences of our community members support multi-faceted perspectives and unique approaches. Through sharing issues and ideas, discussion with mutual respect, and collegiality, we will propel the co-creation of new value."

Upon joining our co-creative community at NAIST today, you are encouraged to observe the following two principles. First, when you criticize hypotheses, new models, or inventions by others, please do so with respect, courtesy, empathy, and collegiality. On the other hand, when your professor or colleague students point out issues with your research activities, don't be upset, but be assured that you are in a scientific community that supports the progress of your research through the exchange of opinions and discussions.

Before I close, let me introduce our school motto to those new to our campus:

"Outgrow your limits."

That's our university motto.

"Outgrow your limits."

I want you to remember that you don't know your full potential yet. Don't set limits on yourself. NAIST has a remarkable environment for you to "outgrow your limits" beyond what you think your limits are. In 2018, the three graduate schools of NAIST, in Information Science, Biological Sciences, and Materials Science, were integrated into one. This bold reorganization of the university aims to promote interdisciplinary research and education. Of course, we didn't stop there. NAIST has been continuously inventing itself toward new goals set by "President's Vision 2030." I urge you to take advantage of this extraordinary environment. You can find endless opportunities to get involved with projects and diverse people whose interests align with yours: students, faculty members, staff, and our local and international collaborators.

I cannot wait to see how you will develop yourself, what you will achieve, and how you will collaborate with the diverse members of the NAIST community to make this world a better place.

Have fun and outgrow your limits!