

Tokyo University of Marine Science and Technology degree and certificate conferment ceremony for AY2023
(Undergraduate School; Advanced Onboard Training Course for Mercantile Marine; and Graduate School)
President's Address

To all students who have graduated from undergraduate studies, and all students who have completed the Advanced Onboard Training Course for Mercantile Marine, a master's course or a doctoral course, I would like to offer you my heartfelt congratulations on your accomplishment. Today, on this day of commencement, a vast ocean spreads out before you. I hope you will venture forth into this new domain in high spirits, meeting new friends and co-workers and joining forces with them to achieve new goals and missions as you navigate toward a fulfilling future.

Looking back on your days, you no doubt recall a range of difficulties that you were confronted with due to the prolonged three-year COVID crisis, including things that didn't turn out the way you wanted or circumstances where you felt let down. You may think it was very bad luck that you had to struggle through a pandemic during such an important stage of your life. The experience, however, forced you to seriously consider whether certain problems could be solved in an alternative way or what should be done in the moment, eventually allowing you to overcome the predicament and achieve your goal. I therefore firmly believe that this depreciated experience will actually become a valuable asset for you as you move through life. So I do hope you will take pride in yourselves and take on new challenges during the voyage you are about to embark upon.

On a side note, I am a little skeptical about the recent tendency to pursue cost performance and time performance in everything we do. Do you all intend to assess your days here at TUMSAT based on cost and time performance? Money and time, of course, are extremely important for everyone, so cost and time performances are key indicators that deserve to be valued. Ideally, the indicators should be used to assess the level of outcome or satisfaction gained in proportion to the money or time spent, but the way the words are used today gives me the impression that people are simply competing to cut cost and time for the sheer sake of it. Consider the indicators as expressed in the form of a fraction, with time or cost as the denominator and the result obtained as the numerator. You can increase the value of the fraction by decreasing the denominator while keeping the numerator steady. However, excessive efforts to increase the value of the fraction will, ironically, eventually lead to a smaller numerator, meaning a decrease in cost or time performance and thereby a substantially diminished outcome or less satisfaction.

The notion of enhancing time performance became viable on the back of progress in digital and information technology, which has, for example, given us online search, double-speed video playback and, more recently, remote meetings and generative AIs.

By using such tools, you are extracting essential information from huge volumes of data, which naturally means that other information is excluded. When you truncate data yourself, you are still processing all the information in your own head before summarizing it, but when you use a tool to do this, you will not even be aware of the data that has been left out.

To prevent any inadvertent elimination of important data, data should be extracted based on an assessment standard, or "measure." Furthermore, you need to consider whether a single measure is enough for the data extraction process, and whether the chosen measure is accurate. In a remote meeting, for example, only the speakers' facial expressions and voices are captured and shared, with the voices of other participants muted and their cameras even turned off at times. In such a meeting there is none of the shared atmosphere that would have

arisen unconsciously in a face-to-face meeting. It is partly through general “vibes” or reading the room that you sense whether participants are for or against an idea, so in a remote meeting it remains questionable if the speakers’ facial expressions and voices alone are sufficient. Also, when using ChatGPT, you need to enter appropriate instructions into the input field to tell the generative AI what you want it to do, in other words, you need to formulate a prompt, which can be regarded as a way to increase the number of measures used to extract the data.

In a more familiar example, students who have completed the Advanced Onboard Training Course for Mercantile Marine have acquired the set of skills needed to navigate a ship safely and on schedule. You have learned how important it is to gather information about the voyage and engine using all kinds of on-board equipment, to make comprehensive decisions, and to take appropriate actions. The aim of the course was to teach you that each piece of information has its respective “measure,” and to train you not to overlook key information required for safe navigation.

Those of you graduating from the undergraduate and graduate school have no doubt learned, through your graduation research and master’s and doctoral research, how much value is ascribed to the significance, novelty and originality of your research findings. Cost and time performances are also important in research activities, so I presume your supervisors have toiled to decrease the denominator of the fraction by cutting costs and time as much as possible, while students have made constant efforts to increase the numerator, as measured by the significance, novelty and originality of their research.

To come back to where I began, I think it would be unwise to conclusively characterize the three years of your studies undertaken amid the pandemic as simply having been “distressful” or “disappointing.” If you reevaluate your experience by applying another “measure,” you may in fact find that your numerator has increased beyond your expectation. A close reflection from another viewpoint may show you that you have absorbed extensive knowledge, acquired diverse perspectives, and achieved significant growth as a person.

The vast ocean upon which you are about to set sail will not always be kind and welcoming. At times, you may find yourself stuck in the middle of a ferocious storm, unable to move forward. People around you may tell you to grit your teeth and persevere, but if you reconsider the situation by applying a different measure, you will notice that there are alternative choices available, such as making a major change in your course heading, “heaving to” to buy time, or evacuating to a nearby port.

Let me say this again: Through having a wide range of experiences, you have achieved major growth. I would urge you to not become engrossed in the short-sighted pursuit of enhancing cost and time performance, but to instead venture out on your voyage by marshalling all of the numerous measures you have acquired through your own efforts.

Lastly, I would like you to know that we will be putting more efforts into continuing education. Whenever you feel the need to acquire a new “measure” in your life going forward, I urge you to contact your supervisor or the TUMSAT Fellowship Association. TUMSAT is here to provide you with unwavering support whenever you need us. We look forward to seeing you again, with a smile on your face and a genuine zest for life.

September 28, 2023

Toshio Iseki

President of Tokyo University of Marine Science and Technology