



Committed to Helping the Next Generation of Engineers

For Akira Yamamura, a 1967 meeting with the late Professor Arthur Foster, then chairman of Northeastern's Department of Mechanical Engineering, turned out to be a life changing encounter—one that set him on a path to professional success and with a commitment to help future engineering students succeed.

After earning a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering from Keio University in his native Japan, Yamamura travelled to the U.S. to find a university where he could continue his studies. His close high school friend, also studying in the U.S., introduced Yamamura to his aunt, who was the owner of a Japanese grocery store in Cambridge, Mass. She, in turn, encouraged him to visit Northeastern where he met Foster. Impressed by the young man's potential and drive, Foster offered Yamamura a teaching assistantship, and the opportunity to pursue a master's degree in mechanical engineering.

In Yamamura's view, "It worked out quite well." That turned out to be an understatement. Today, he serves as president and representative director of Ferrotec Holdings Corporation, a successful international technology company which he founded and has led since 1980. Based in Tokyo with customers in the U.S., Europe, and Asia, Ferrotec is a pioneer in magnetic fluids and a key supplier in the electronics industry.

Finding success, giving back

Looking back at his two years at Northeastern, Yamamura chuckles as he recalls the day he learned that Japanese and U.S. students were a bit different. Unable to teach a class because of illness, he assumed his students would be happy for the break. "In Japan, they would welcome a day off to play mahjong or something," he says, "but my students were upset they were missing class, and a few of them demanded a refund."

Yamamura persevered, and when he graduated from Northeastern in 1969, Foster steered him towards the thermoelectric field. Yamamura soon joined Cambridge Thermionic Corporation where he wrote the first thermoelectric handbook. The job sparked Yamamura's lifelong interest in the field and eventually led him several years later to establish Ferrotec whose core technology is thermoelectric modules, which today represent 25 percent of the company's sales.

"I am a very lucky man," he says, "and I am grateful to Professor Foster for pointing me in the direction I was meant to travel. I learned not only thermoelectrics. I learned what I should be doing."

His decision to give back by funding the Akira Yamamura Fellowship for PhD students in mechanical engineering, as well as an engineering scholarship in his name, is an expression of the gratitude he feels for the opportunities he had at Northeastern. "I have been given many things because of the teaching assistantship Professor Foster gave me," he says. "I am happy to do as much as possible to support those students."

Yamamura returned to campus in 2018 for a brief visit. "I was impressed with Northeastern when I was a student, and I'm impressed now, particularly by how much the university has grown," he says. While visiting the school, he was especially gratified to meet one of the students who benefitted from his generous support. "The student thanked me for his scholarship and told me he was able to start his own business," he says. "I'm glad what I'm doing is helping Northeastern students."

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