

Introduction to Sophia International Review special issue Globalization as an Educational Focus

Jim McKinley

There has been much debate about the role globalization plays in higher education. From one perspective the discussion focuses on the way globalization and the Internet can level the playing field and provide access and knowledge interdependence across borders. From another perspective globalization is seen as creating further imbalance and turning higher education corporate. For higher education in Japan there are the added pressures of a declining birthrate and the increase of discerning consumer attitudes held by students and their parents.

In this volume of Sophia International Review, the three contributions highlight, in various ways, the impact that the development of globalization as an educational focus has had on our program in the Faculty of Liberal Arts. Before introducing the contributions, I want to first discuss the relevance of this focus today, as it is significant for a number of reasons. One reason is that Japan's global appeal experienced a dramatic shift after the Tohoku earthquake and tsunami in March 2011. International attention toward Japan became one of concern—for people's health and safety; and admiration—for their resilience and optimism. Another reason is that Japanese higher education continues to be in flux. The Ministry of Education is seeking to create more international appeal through an increase in English language programs and content courses, such as have been provided in the Faculty of Liberal Arts for decades. This development is due to the decreasing numbers of Japanese students as the birthrate continues to decline and more Japanese students head overseas (especially to the US) for their higher education. Also, in the past decade, Japanese national universities have gone corporate and private universities are competing with them for government funding, leading to more interest in the development of more globally accepted English language education based programs. But what exactly does a "global education" mean for our students?

Globalizing is different for this generation—it is self-directed, with some sense of fulfilling obligation, but doing it in a way that is something truly of interest. Professors cannot tell students how the world is; the students have to discover it for themselves. They have to explore as many routes as they can to their end-points in order to confirm what direction they want to go in. People have a natural desire to be acknowledged for their talents, and with access to the world via the Internet they find they may not be as talented as they thought. Somewhere there is an 11 year old who already did what they did, and did it better. This makes them not even want to try. It is the initiative of the professors to encourage students' interests and help them take

responsibility for their own decisions, use their critical thinking skills, develop their talents and reach their potential.

This volume of Sophia International Review provides three aspects of the rising awareness of globalization and its impact on higher education. In the first article, Jean-Pierre Richard presents the results of a qualitative study in which the students in his English Composition 2 course were asked to provide their own definitions of the concepts of globalization and global citizenry. The responses showed a positive attitude toward globalization and a certain sense of responsibility in terms of encouraging a balance of more universal achievement. In the next article, Thierry Jean Roboüam (SJ) offers an account of his time spent at a research center and a training center in Sri Lanka, where the impact of globalization has an entirely different interpretation. We are provided with critical insight into the impact this experience had on his conceptualization of the study of religion at Sophia. In the final article, John West reflects on his experiences of teaching at Sophia and gives careful consideration to the impact of globalization. He highlights three “global aspects”: the role of the new globally integrated enterprise, the need for a multidisciplinary approach, and the importance of global citizenship.

The impact of globalization is upon us. It is of moral imperative that we find a way to interpret it, and encourage our students to navigate it, negotiate it, interpret it, and understand it for themselves.