

“Diversity & Inclusion”: Sophia’s Initiatives and Challenges

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Abstract:

As the environment surrounding universities grows increasingly severe, Sophia University also faces needs and challenges to work to improve the quality of our school’s attractive education and research activities, while recognizing the needs of the society and its issues, and to disseminate the outcomes of these activities in a more visible form. Since the past few decades, education institutions have recognized and taken initiatives of inclusive education and have gone far regarding its implementation. Considering Japanese society in the future, we have recognized the issue as a serious matter in our institution. Here we just take up some initiatives and issue of Inclusive education today from the perspectives of “Diversity & Inclusion”.

Sophia University has been a front runner with inclusive education initiatives while having our physical/facility and economic as well as location limitations to implement them in full scale. University’s Student Affairs and Facility management departments have been cooperating to fulfill the needs of the following aspects. Recently we have established Diversity Promotion Office to include various socio-religious diversities:

1. Support for Differently Abled (physically, psychologically and intellectually) people

- i. Support for hearing challenged students (material support and note taking help etc)
- ii. Support for visual challenged students (same as above)
- iii. Physically challenged students (barrier free class room, toilet, elevator etc)
- iv. Students of developmental disorders (supports of note taking help, noise cancelling headphone, class environment change etc)

2. Gender Equality Office → Diversity Promotion Office

- i. Baby-care room service (with university support(partial) for payment) for all students
- ii. Gender equality office (男女共同参画), has been changed into Diversity Promotion Office from 2017 with a view of including gender diversity, and gets involved in awareness and education activities by publication, seminars etc.
- iii. The new Office takes initiatives of various inclusion aspects like the LGBTQ issues and leads awareness- education programs

3. Socio-religious Inclusion (Religious & Minority Accommodations)

- i. Prayer room in the university campus and dormitory for everybody and especially for

Muslim students

- ii. Halal food restaurant from 2016, and have Vegetarian food service from 2017
- iii. Our international hostels provide prayer facilities and cultural inclusions in daily life

4. Barrier free Campus

- i. All the elevators are equipped with Braille guide and the campus is equipped with Braille block guidance
- ii. Multipurpose toilets are installed in most of the buildings in the campus (around 37)
- iii. 8 building facilities have its entrance with slope for wheelchair students, 8 buildings have elevators, and 6 building facilities have wheelchair/multipurpose toilets.

Future and Challenges:

1. Our school opened a cafeteria serving halal food last year. This was partly out of consideration for our increasing number of Muslim students, and also partly because we accept and include other religions and cultures. Also, we view Sophia Soshigaya International House and the international dormitory that we are about to start building in Shinanomachi as symbols expressing the importance of mutually recognizing and accepting a diversity of cultures. We believe that our school must further deepen the “diversity & inclusion” that been developed thus far.
2. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology “Project to Support the Creation of Super Global Universities”—or so-called “SGU Plan”—that was started in FY2014 overlaps with our progress related to further globalization and university reform achieved under Grand Layout 2.0. We have nearly reached the three-year targets set forth in the plan related to ratios of foreign faculty and female faculty and staff, and quantity of courses offered in foreign languages.
3. There is no doubt that our campus, which receives many foreign students from around the world, is a “microcosm of the world.” As the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and Paralympic Games approaches, it will be necessary to receive more foreign persons in Japan than ever before. As such, we are faced with the question of how to cooperate with such persons while accepting differences related to race, religion, ethnicity, and language, etc. as simply differences.
4. At one hand the government recently has enforced differently-abled discrimination law for private universities, the demands for executing them is more while on the other hand the cost/physical difficulties to implement them is heavy.