

Being a Global Citizen

No man is an island, so the saying goes. We exist in a community. The community of family, school, town, state, country and the world. In today's world of technology, there is a potential for individual to develop themselves and move to any part of the world if they set their hearts on it. What are the enabling factors? Does our current educational system cater for this? Of course, relying completely on the educational system alone will not suffice. Extraordinary individuals thrive despite the circumstances they are in.

A global citizen should be able to move beyond one's locale and worldview. A global citizen is not confined by geographical boundaries or mind set. Two characteristics of a global citizen will be discussed. The first characteristic of being a global citizen is the ability to understand the worldview and beliefs of others. Every individual grows up with a set of beliefs and values. We may not agree with each other, but we can choose to respect each other's beliefs. Different social groups with different cultural practices related to notions of love, respect, and spirituality express them differently. For example, if one disagrees with another on a decision or criticizes his or her work, it might be taken as "he/she does not like me" in one culture. However, in another culture, one can debate ideas and opinions and still go for a friendly drink together after that. Being a global citizen means being able to adapt to another's culture. Not trying to make another person be like you but accepting others for who they are. A global citizen is able to see the beauty in different environments



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and contexts. A global citizen is able to mediate and come to a resolution without resorting to violence.

Secondly, a global citizen is concerned about the well-being of the world including both humanity and nature. This concern influences the individual's economic and political viewpoints. Do we care about humanity enough to offer a helping hand when needed? Does our economic policy embrace the lower working class? We are entrusted with a limited amount of natural resources. The subject of sustainable development had been discussed in the recent years. The United Nations hosts the Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) to reconcile economic development and environmental goal. The Jeffery Sachs Centre on Sustainable Development at Sunway University aims to develop executive programs focusing on sustainable development. One of the goals of sustainable development is the eradication of poverty. A global citizen acknowledges the fact that natural resources are a gift to everyone.

Returning to the question asked at the beginning of the article "what are the enablers to be a global citizen?" I believe the American Education by offering subjects beyond the major subjects and providing the flexibility to change major is a good platform to develop a global citizen. Through the General Education (GenEd) subjects, students are exposed to studies of arts, communications, humanities, social sciences, natural sciences and mathematics. Students need to take subjects beyond their majors. This would help them appreciate other disciplines better and help with future transdisciplinary communication and projects. Under the natural sciences subjects, "environmental study" is one of the sub-

jects that highlights the importance of protecting nature, which is entrusted to mankind.

A global citizen is one who knows him/herself, and his/her surroundings. They should have the opportunities to discover their strengths and challenges. They should be given room to explore and discover. This is possible with the American Degree. Students may join the program undecided about their major, and make up their mind after studying subjects from different majors. In addition, students may opt for other majors during the duration of their studies, without having to start all over again. The American Degree is coursework-oriented. This means students work on reports, assignments, projects, etc. as part of their assessment. Studying is a course of self-discovery, rather than having a final exam as the sole determinant of one's effort for the whole semester.

It is also important for the student to do at least one semester of abroad study when possible. This will help reconcile classroom theory to practical experience in understanding the worldview and beliefs of others. In conclusion, a global citizen can find a home wherever he or she goes. In fact, the world is his or her home. Global citizens are versatile and have skills to adapt as and when needed. They care about people around them and are conscious that it takes a team effort to overcome problems together.

The American Degree Transfer Program in Sunway University has transferred students to the U.S., Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and Malaysia. Seventy-five percent of our students transferring to universities in the United States are in the top ten percent of nationally ranked universities. ■