

Connecting Students Transcending Gender and Culture: Paradigm Shift in the Internationalization of a University in Japan

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Introduction

This paper attempts to examine the possibility of a paradigm shift that is the key to the internationalization process of a Japanese university. I shall examine the internationalization movement of a university as part of the global shift in consciousness and discuss how we could use a new paradigm to approach this issue in a Japanese university. Bourne (2008: 3) proposes that “the emerging shift in worldview is accompanied by a corresponding shift in values,” which is, “a movement away from a materialistic to a humanitarian-spiritual orientation toward life.”¹ We exist in a time of environmental and spiritual crises, which requires us to transform ourselves and our society with an aim toward (re-)creating a sustainable world. Acknowledging the importance of connecting people across races, ethnicities, religions, and gender lines, I will examine the ways in which the challenge of internationalization at Japanese universities can be tackled - specifically, at the former national university where I have been teaching. Japan’s national universities were privatized in 2004, and this has significantly affected the manner in which each formerly national university manages its operations and develops its own educational programs. Internationalization is crucial for the survival of present-day Japanese universities.

As one of the steps toward university-wide internationalization, I will examine the possibility of creating a class in which students’ learning experience could transcend gender and culture. Creating such an environment in which students develop associations across genders and cultures is a new challenge that has been under-addressed in Japan’s formerly national universities. In addition, I intend to emphasize the significance of incorporating students’ spiritual development into both the learning process and the internationalization effort. Different universities have different strategies, and some private universities’ backgrounds differ greatly from those of the formerly national universities. My examination is limited to the current situation of a former national university in Japan, at which I have been teaching.

¹ See Bourne (2008), for example, regarding the importance of paradigm shift at a global level and the manner in which we could transform our views and take action with regard to positive change for tackling current global issues. The worldview based on scientific materialism is critically analyzed.

In today's global society, a university can play a significant role in preparing students to become global citizens. To achieve this, Japanese universities must still tackle several significant issues; most formerly national universities in Japan have struggled to integrate internationalization strategies with university management. The creation of an academic and social environment in which students can transcend cultural barriers requires a great amount of work by the entire campus community and presents a significant challenge to many universities in Japan. In my own classes, creating boundary-transcending connections among students has been a challenge - one that has given me the opportunity to reexamine what "university education" means for students in today's globalized world. In reality, most Japanese students on campus lack opportunities to interact with international students academically, socially, and personally. Despite the ideals proposed by a university, most Japanese students do not have the chance to experience the world's multicultural reality on a daily basis. A university has great potential to become a unique location in which intercultural understanding can be cultivated via daily academic and social interaction, and this goal should be given greater attention in the move toward internationalizing universities.

In order to truly internationalize a university in Japan, we need to ask this fundamental question: what can a university do to help its students become global citizens in today's multicultural world? For this, a university plays a unique role as an academic institution. Through my experiences (since 2003, I have been assisting a short exchange program at a formerly national university in Japan), I have realized both the importance of and the difficulties faced in creating opportunities for students from various cultural backgrounds to interact academically and socially. In order to truly internationalize a university, we need to create actual multicultural experiences, and this cannot be achieved simply by bringing international students to a university². When multicultural experiences and interactions are actually brought to the classroom, those experiences and interactions change the way in which students view the world and apply their acquired knowledge. This also becomes a precious opportunity for students to redefine the meaning of "university education" before they head out into the real, globalized society.

Internationalization of a University and Its Aim

² Total number of international students at Hiroshima University is 842 from 62 countries in May 2008. As of November 2008, Hiroshima University has concluded an exchange agreement with 61 universities in 21 countries, and the total number of exchange students reached 471.

Today, universities struggle to survive in an environment that practically mandates international competition in order to attract students. Under these circumstances, university internationalization has become one of the most discussed topics in Japanese university-management circles. University internationalization must be discussed within a context that reflects the reality of today's world: a place where people from different cultures encounter one another in various situations, and cross-cultural interactions take place in multiple contexts. During the course of an educational program, students need to be given the opportunity to recognize possibilities of meeting people from various cultures in various types of situations, including people from the business and academic world. In addition, they should be aware that such experiences could occur today as well as in the future.

In today's global environment, it is admittedly important for universities to create educational opportunities in which students can develop intercultural understanding and intercultural communication skills. Unfortunately, discussions are often so focused on the internationalization as a means toward the university's financial management and survival that they do not consider the more valuable goal, namely, to help students coexist with people from other countries and develop sustainable interdependence for themselves and the future generations. In the process of internationalizing a university, we should pay greater attention on enhancing the understanding of diverse cultural values and perspectives among students and staff on campus. Universities can offer excellent opportunities to prepare students for today's multicultural world through daily academic and social interactions.

Hence, the internationalization of universities, which has long been considered one of the most important means of a university's survival, should be considered not within the paradigm of "winning the international competition" by attracting more students for the financial benefit of the university, but instead within the paradigm of preparing present and future generations to become part of the global society. We need to consider ways in which universities could realistically assist future generations to coexist interdependently and in a sustainable world. A university could be a leader in creating an environment where students can develop cross-cultural communications with peers and staff from diverse cultural backgrounds. In reality, this challenge has not been given enough significance, despite the fact that it could be the most critical issue and a driving force in university internationalization. The important question is: how can we put this into practice?

Development of Research on Spirituality and University Education

As a part of the process of developing cross-cultural understanding as a means of university internationalization, I propose the significance of incorporating spirituality. I argue that spiritual development could be the key to interconnectedness across boundaries and to seeing the world in a new paradigm. Spiritual development significantly influences the way we view the role of the university and the people studying or working on campus. Tisdell (2003, 30) introduces Hamilton and Jackson's (1998) notion about the three fundamental themes of spirituality: the further development of self-awareness; a sense of interconnectedness of all things; and a relationship to a higher power or higher purpose. Spirituality is concerned with how we engage in the larger world by creating meaning and purpose in life, and how we develop our inner selves in relation to the outside world (Tisdell, 2003, 31; English and Gillen, 2000; Hunt, 2001; Vella, 2000). These definitions could lead us to the belief that spirituality - which plays such a significant role in students' everyday lives - is inextricably linked to the classroom experience as well. Without the spiritual health that is the solid foundation for everyday living and learning, students may find it difficult to find motivation to study. Additionally, the spirituality of the people on campus plays an important role in the internationalization process, since it creates a sense of interconnectedness in a new paradigm.

The college years, which bridge the transition from youth to adulthood, play a crucial role in the long spiritual journey. Students are trying to find connections between themselves and the outside world as the search for ultimate purpose and direction (Dalton, 2001, 17). Dalton (*ibid.*, 18) describes this as "...a time of great potentiality and vulnerability in development, when concerns about individual purpose, meaning, and commitment interact with the forces of cognitive development, maturation, and social expectations." This raises important questions for university educators. How should we develop the relationship between teachers and their students? How can we convey knowledge to students? How do we meet the students' expectations and motivate them? And, finally, how can a university create an environment in which students feel connected with the university community? The significance of spirituality applies not only to students (including international students) but also to teaching and administration staff. The campus community's approach to spiritual development is significant, since it is related to the very lives of the people working at the university and because spiritual management influences academic development and motivation for work.

Recently, there has been a significant increase in consciousness research, spanning such various academic disciplines as transformational psychology, religious studies, theology, and philosophy, as well as such science fields as behavioral science, neuroscience, cognitive science, physics, biochemistry, chiropractics, radiology, medicine, psychiatry, parapsychology, and so on. Concomitantly, the spiritual aspect has been given increasingly greater significance in many areas of research. Interestingly, spirituality has also been addressed as a significant matter in business world, and it appears to be an important issue in leadership and management analysis. Wheatley (2006: 157) points out the fascinating phenomenon of a new way of understanding the world and universe appearing simultaneously across different academic disciplines and in various locations around the world. Wheatley (*ibid.*, 158) summarizes the phenomena as: “Many disciplines, in different voices, now speak about the behavior of networks, the primacy of relationships, the importance of context, and new ways to honor and work with the wholeness of life.” Furthermore, Wheatley (*ibid.*) notes that there are parallel concepts in both science and business, and that there are similarities in the language that scientists and business people use to describe the new world; specifically, both look to understand the living systems.

In the late 1980s, Schneiders (1989, 679) mentioned rapid development in the study of spirituality as a lived experience; this growth had taken place over the previous 30 years. In the subsequent two decades, spirituality research has developed significantly, and today, we can observe the further proliferation of academic courses, programs, and publications related to spirituality and consciousness. I consider this to be part of the global shift toward seeing the world in more interconnected and integrative ways, and reexamining the conventional approach that underestimates the spiritual dimension of various issues. Indeed, the scientific-materialism and mechanistic view of the world has been critically reexamined in many areas of research today.

Similarly, by incorporating the awareness of spirituality, we can approach education from a new paradigm - one that could contribute to a sense of connection among students of differing cultures and genders. The significant development of the research on spirituality in higher education can be understood as part of the larger movement toward the theoretical development of spirituality and consciousness in various fields. Incorporation of the spiritual perspective across disciplines requires the ability to view the world holistically and based on a new paradigm, without being limited to the paradigm of materialism. This would provide new insight on the perspectives on international education. For example, Laszlo (2008: 124 -125) describes how people change when

they develop transpersonal consciousness: people develop deep ties with each other, the cosmos, empathy with people and cultures, and develop sensitivity toward living beings and the entire biosphere. He further argues that evolved consciousness is crucial for the future of humanity and that it needs to be incorporated in the learning environment. From this perspective, university education plays a significant role in developing students' perspectives and awareness of the world in a new paradigm.

Students' Spiritual Quest and the "Shift" in University Education

While at a university, students are searching for direction in life, as my interviews with students have clearly indicated. My interviews with both international and Japanese students revealed that students are facing uncertainty and confusion in the process of bridging their "student" life to the realities of the outside world³. Most of them expressed their uncertainty about how to create meaning in their study and how to relate their study to their future career and to the awaiting outside world. Some even expressed the belief that a university education has little usefulness for or bearing on their future career. Unfortunately, these issues have not been addressed sufficiently in university education. Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology has been officially promoting career education for the last decade, and this has become a driving force toward the establishment of internship courses⁴ and the development of career-education courses and programs. I suggest, that in addition to career education, the core issue of the students' spirituality, needs to be dealt with more expansively.

The academic sphere formed by universities has long tended to be a "different world," segregated from other professional spheres; the majority of university staffers do not have much knowledge of different professional worlds. This limited perspective may also contribute to teachers' and administrators' inability to recognize students' desire to connect themselves to various professions.

³ I am currently working on the research project titled "Paradigm Shift in the Global Society: Transformation of Consciousness through Higher Education and Career in Japan" I have been researching how people shift their consciousness in their life, and how people who have experienced university education view its meaning. This research examines the meaning of higher education in Japan from broader perspectives including the standpoints of the people who have work experiences. By incorporating the views of international students, I am attempting to locate the university education in Japan within the context of globalization.

⁴ For example, we have been offering internship course for international students in the short exchange program of Hiroshima University since 2003. For details, see Tsunematsu (2008).

Under such circumstances, students' longing to find the meaning and the interconnection between their lives and their studies often goes unaddressed - despite the fact that this longing is the driving force in their everyday learning efforts. When university education does not reach the core "self" of students, the students often perceive it as meaningless, and do not study devotedly. From this perspective, dealing with students' spirituality is absolutely crucial, even in creating meaning for their academic achievements. Through my interviews, I have come to believe that we cannot overemphasize the significance of giving students opportunities to know more about themselves and to become conscious of how they might relate their university experiences to their futures. Gidley (2006, 30) suggests that if the universities of the future are to be "agents of transformation," they will need a system of knowledge for the complex, global problems, and we need to access "higher order ways of thinking and knowing." This suggestion encapsulates the need for the new integrative and holistic approach to understand today's world, and the need to develop the holistic support system for students who will lead tomorrow's world and are expected to sustain the society with new sets of values.

The spiritual domain of the college student's life may be a very inaccessible and inward dimension of a student (Dalton 2001: 18); and therefore, despite its significance in a learning environment, educators have tended to underestimate its importance. For example, according to research by the University of California, Los Angeles (Higher Education Research Institute, 2004), an increasing number of students have expressed their need for spiritual support throughout higher education, feeling their spirituality has been ignored⁵. They feel that the spiritual dimension has not been fulfilled - despite the fact that this spiritual dimension significantly affects their everyday lives. For example, spirituality affects "empathy, ethical behavior, civic responsibility, passion, and action for social justice" (Lindholm and Astin, 2006, 1),⁶ which will become the bases for everyday life and for our constructs of the future.

Spies (2000, 27) proposes the significance of a balance between the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual development of a student, and emphasizes the value of new knowledge for human welfare.

⁵ The Higher Education Research Institute of University of California, Los Angeles conducted a large-scale longitudinal study of spiritual development in college undergraduates. This research includes a pilot study, initiated in spring 2003, of 3,700 students enrolled at 46 colleges and universities, which was followed by a full-scale assessment of 90,000 students enrolling at 150 institutions, which was initiated in fall 2004 (www.spirituality.ucla.edu).

⁶ For the research development on spirituality, see, for example, Lindholm and Astin (2006, 1), DeSouza (2003, 269-279), Harris and Moran (1998).

From this perspective, we must question the approach to merely acquire specialized knowledge in compartmentalized academic departments. Spies (ibid.: 27-28) contests the significance of the interdisciplinary studies for acquiring the depth of knowledge and thinking skills necessary for human progress, and also for the practical research of complex problems. Spies (ibid.) suggests, “problem-(or task-) focused multi-disciplinary schools, rather than disciplinary-focused departments or faculties” as a crucial element for the development of universities in the twenty-first century. The question is whether students could see the issues from multiple perspectives (and actually *solve* those problems) if they continue to view the matters from within a singular discipline. Incorporation of these multidisciplinary approaches could make the learning environment much more interesting for students by opening their eyes to examine the life’s issues in more realistic ways. The shift in emphasis from specialized knowledge to integrated knowledge, in various academic areas, is crucial for viewing the human life holistically in the global framework.⁷

In order to balance out their intellectual, emotional, and spiritual development, we need to be more attentive to the neglected inner dimension of university students. The imbalance of the devotion to the “exterior” and “interior” aspects of students’ lives in higher education (Astin 2004, 34) has actually been an unrecognized issue that needs more attention. We experience incongruency and disorientation when the outer and inner dimensions of ourselves are not balanced. The “outer” development (e.g., in science, medicine, technology, and commerce) has been more visibly appraised than our “inner” development, which is “the sphere of values and beliefs, emotional maturity, moral development, spirituality, and self-understanding” (ibid.). Dalton’s comment (2001, 19) that “[e]ducation that does not connect with and integrate these spiritual dimensions of learning and development is ultimately less engaging and lasting for a student” encapsulates a significant theme in education. Palmer (1998/1999: 8-9) suggests that students show an attitude of indifference toward their studies when they cannot connect what they are learning to their own lives. This fundamental issue in education has often been underestimated, despite the fact that so many students long for knowledge that can be connected to their lives. This makes us question how the curriculum should be designed with a view toward incorporating a student’s “life.”

With the increased understanding of students’ spiritual quest, which heretofore has been invisible and even trivialized, there has been greater recognition that students’ spiritual lives need careful

⁷ I am aware of the warning that academic progress requires concentration on specific specialized area. Bauer (2001: 2) proposes, progress necessitates the concentration on ultraspecialized techniques, theories, and facts in many fields, whereas to see the whole picture, to be holistic, to be interdisciplinary is important.

attention. For example, Miller's (1999, 46) question makes educators reconsider what education is all about: "do we want students who are clever and compete well on tests or students who have compassion for all forms of life and a sense of responsibility that goes beyond personal achievement?" He warns that the main goal of schooling tends to be to prepare students to compete in a global economy, which is achieved via a competitive environment in our society and schools. The concern is that students are not taught compassion but rather competition, with a particular emphasis on testing. Rather than merely passing information to students from them to absorb, teachers' roles can be defined differently in this new holistic paradigm, which views people and living beings as connected and a part of the whole. The integrative approach to understanding interconnectedness in all walks of life and living systems carries the potential for us to view life and our relationships with others differently. From this standpoint, we question the curriculum based on industrial efficiency, such as "fragmentation, memorization, textbook orientation, teacher as controller" (Iannone and Obenauf, 738).

The development of a curriculum that is not isolated from the outside world, and could therefore prepare students to participate in a global society, is a challenge in university education. Dalton (2001, 18) argues that, when the long-range outcomes of higher education (such as future goals and career choices) are examined, students' spiritual commitments become very important. Iannone and Obenauf (1999, 742-743) propose that the only subject matter for a spiritual curriculum is "life itself," and introduce Clark's (1997, 39) suggestion: "If we are to redefine curriculum as life in all its manifestations, we must all redefine the classroom to include the home, the community, and the world." Lindholm and Astin (2006, 3) propose the significance of faculty attitudes both within and outside the classroom to help students with their career and work. My interviews with university students have led me to the conclusion that understanding students' lives from a holistic perspective - i.e., in connection to the world—should definitely be a greater part of university education.

Palmer (1998/1999, 8) suggests that spiritual questions are embedded in every discipline, from humanities to science, and that they are at the heart of every subject. Finding the connection between the subject and the learner's personal life, and finding the intersection between the "big story" and the "little story" by touching the spiritual dimension of each student's life, is a challenge in the educational environment. Formal settings such as classrooms should not merely be places to absorb the fragmented knowledge of a rigid discipline, but rather places where students' lives become the center, and teachers and students approach issues holistically across various disciplines.

In this way, the university could become a unique place, offering social and academic environment in which students and staff from various cultural backgrounds interact, interconnect, and learn holistically in a global context. This concept needs to be incorporated into the process of university internationalization. I suggest that in order to internationalize the campus, we need to bring about a paradigm shift in the consciousness of the students and staff.

Universities for Tomorrow’s Leaders: Connection and Interdependence Across Culture and Gender

I have proposed that we need a shift of paradigm in order to create connections among students; only by making connections across culture and gender can we achieve the internationalization of a university. If we truly wish to create opportunities for students to experience cross-cultural communication, we need to bring new interactions into the classroom. Also, if we wish to create a society where both men and women can work together, respecting each person’s dignity, we need to discuss these issues collectively in the classrooms and allow everyone to present their own experiences. International students’ participation could also add new insight to these discussions that tend to be limited to the domestic view. The classroom is a place in which people can share actual experiences and feelings, and we should optimize this to enhance intercultural understanding. Without the interactions of people of both sexes and various cultures in an educational environment, students rarely have the opportunity to discuss gender issues and experience multiculturalism. Further, in order to enhance cross-cultural and cross-gender understanding, we should incorporate spiritual development into actual classrooms. In today’s environment, where universities in Japan have been experiencing significant changes regarding globalization and international mobility of students, incorporation of spiritual development becomes a key for students to be mindful of the world. Awareness of the current global need to shift the materialistic paradigm to the humanitarian-spiritual paradigm gives us a new framework for internationalizing a university.

Kelly (2000: 161 referred to Gale 1997: 107) proposes that globalization and interdependence among countries has created “the need for people who can operate across national boundaries, outside familiar environments.” We must create a class environment that incorporates diversity in order to give students opportunities to see the world from multiple perspectives⁸. Furthermore, in

⁸ See also, Gursewak Aulakh et al. (1997) cited in Kate Patrick, ed. (1997: 6).

this environment, students can learn to appreciate differences and develop ways to see the world in a broader context. This can lead to the development of a sense of interconnectedness, transcending the framework created by perceived differences. My proposition is that if we intend to educate students to be cosmopolitan citizens who could lead the future world, university educators need to reconsider the ways in which we have been teaching the materials. I myself have been surprised to observe how little cross-cultural experience most of the Japanese students have in a formerly national university - not only in the classes, but also in the campus community⁹. To understand culturally diverse perspectives, learning from textbooks and written materials is not enough. A university could offer an intercultural learning environment in which students could study diverse perspectives from real students and staff from various countries.

Through my teaching experiences, I have become aware that students need a place where they can develop a worldview by hearing actual voices. For example, when I taught a graduate course titled “Comparative Study of Education and Gender” in 2008 and 2009, Cambodian, Russian, Mongolian, and African students attended the class together with Japanese students. In this type of multicultural classroom setting, students were inevitably put in a situation that allowed them to hear new perspectives on gender and education from students with different sets of values. In this setting, the reading materials about cultural differences and different standpoints became a real experience. Further, the outspokenness of some of the international students gave a surprising level of stimulation to the class, where most of the Japanese students had been accustomed to the style of a class where they just sat and listened to the lecturer. This “live” experience, facing real people who express different views based on their own experiences, significantly affected the Japanese students who never had actual academic interactions with students from other cultures. One of the most prominent hindrances for Japanese students to expand their scope is that they are too used to monolithic cultural perspectives and do not have opportunities to be exposed to different views from other cultures. Through the actual observation of international students’ different opinions and different attitudes in the class, Japanese students could not help but realize the reality of differences in perspectives and attitudes. This type of experience is very different from textbook learning and becomes a precious asset for students in their future.

An encounter with international students is the moment when students realize that the “fragmented

⁹ Except particular universities which have been founded as international university, creation of an environment where students could interact cross-culturally and develop intercultural understanding is a challenge for most of universities in Japan.

knowledges” they have acquired need to be assimilated to understand the varied knowledge and experiences of people from different cultures. If a university could be a leading place where students could acquire “knowledges” from multidimensional perspectives through these real-life experiences, it could help students to prepare themselves to face the global world in more realistic ways. Also, in this way, a university could become a uniquely important place that could offer these precious experiences academically, socially, and spiritually. In order to develop a course where students could be connected beyond gender and cultural differences, actual people and their live experiences should be given more significance. In this way, students can have more live intercultural experiences in a university which is actually a global community. We cannot emphasize this enough: as part of the process of internationalizing the university, we must recognize the importance of presenting materials that reflect diverse cultural perspectives to students and give them the chance to hear multicultural perspectives from fellow students.

Furthermore, if we wish to create a society in which people can coexist and be interconnected, we cannot ignore the significant development of feminist theories and global education. Milojevic (2000: 176) argues that gender is a crucial factor for the way we define education, and we are currently facing the crisis of universities which are required to shift their paradigm as an institution. The perspective of feminism, which advocates giving a voice to marginalized people and reexamines construction of knowledge, suggests that we could shift our attention from seeing the world within the established and dominant framework toward seeing the world from different or marginal perspective. We can refer to the critical analysis of the structure of power, dominance, competitions by feminist writings in our process of creating a learning environment where people could be spiritually inspired and connected. In order to create the environment for global education it is significant to hear marginal and ignored voices more. Feminist theories have attempted to include multiple voices and the perspectives each woman has had. The university should aim at becoming a place where we value different cultural perspectives and appreciate each student’s standpoint and views. This becomes the basis for global education and a significant step toward internationalizing a university.

Conclusion

In order to internationalize a university in Japan, it is important to develop a curriculum that can provide students with the opportunities to experience cultural sensitivities and various perspectives

through actual intercultural interactions. Thus, it is desirable to create courses that reflect cultural diversity. Cultural exchange can be promoted to some extent through informal gatherings or casual interactions; however, through my experiences and observations, I suggest that a deeper level of intercultural communication requires academic interactions in formal settings such as a class or seminar. Without these settings, the communication tends to end only in a very shallow and superficial conversations, which may not necessarily be actual intercultural communication or a source for the development of intercultural communication.

Milojevic (2000: 176-177) problematizes the current Western and patriarchal worldview, which tends to focus on greed, competition, usefulness, ranking, and hierarchy; he argues that these views have brought about the development of the current problematic situation of higher education. We might need to stop seeking the immediate results, and think of long-term consequence in a larger framework for a sustainable future. To achieve this, university should be developed as places where a sense of connection could be created among students transcending gender and cultural barriers, and students could work together to find the meaning of their lives and determine how they could contribute to their community, society, and the world. With the spiritual development and the awareness of their relationships with others in the broader framework of the entire human community, students will get more opportunities to find the purpose of their study and determine how they could lead satisfying lives.

I have proposed a significant challenge to universities, namely, developing a sense of community and mutual assistance, transcending cultural and gender barriers. These opportunities are still very limited and are not often accessible to most students and staff members. Creating opportunities to share each other's views within the campus communities is a significant step in internationalizing the campuses. I would like to emphasize on a paradigm shift in higher education - from focusing on the survival of a university as a corporate entity toward focusing on creating an educational entity for the future generations who could view the world holistically and sustain it by cooperating with others across boundaries. The classroom could be a place where everyone brings his/her life, spirit, and awareness, and the boundaries could dissipate through the active interactions and lively exchanges of views. This sense of holistic connection could actually be extended outside classrooms. As one step towards internationalizing campuses, we will need to shift the existing paradigm to a new global, universal paradigm that extends the scope of our universities beyond the created framework.

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