



Friday, July 6, 2007

## Need for a division of labor

Yone Sugita

The eighth University Kansai Forum was held at Club Kansai on March 25 and was sponsored by the Yomiuri newspaper. The discussion at the forum concerned prospects and challenges for professional schools. The United States, which puts strong emphasis on practical learning, has been the leader in professional schooling, particularly in three areas: medicine, law, and business.

In contrast, Japan has not had a strong tradition of professional schools. However, once the 21st century began, professional schools began to become popular in Japan, spurred by the establishment of law schools, which as of spring 2004 had enrolled about 5,600 students.

The "professional school boom" now appears to be in full bloom. A variety of professional schools have cropped up like mushrooms after a rain across a range of educational subject areas: accounting public policy, technology management, intellectual property, midwifery, welfare management, clinical psychology, and more.

Profit-making private corporations and private vocational schools have also tried to take advantage of the boom, creating such educational institutes as the LEC Tokyo Legal Mind University, the Graduate School of Digital Content, the Kyoto College of Graduate Studies for Informatics and others.

Because of Japan's severe economic troubles in the 1990s, Japanese banks and corporations had to make drastic changes to their management systems, including the termination of lifelong employment and seniority systems and of paternalistic relationships between managers and workers, which increased unemployment and resulted in a more flexible labor force.

People, especially the younger generation, recognized quickly that they could no longer depend on corporations to guarantee stable employment.

In its place, the importance of acquiring new professional credentials was realized. For this purpose, people have been willing to invest a great amount of time and money on greater educational advancement.

This is a very positive development, and I greatly admire the courage and hard work of those who have decided to study at a professional school. However, in the field of professional schooling, there are many problems on the supply side. Let us consider two major problems: The qualifications of faculty members and the relationship between professional schools and universities.

Can professional schools find the needed number of qualified faculty members? Traditional university faculty members are not practical generalists but academic scholars who focus on specific subjects in a narrowly defined academic field. They normally consider their own research as their primary interest and education as a "teaching burden" or "teaching load."

Moreover, at a university, the promotion of faculty members is normally decided by a committee

organized to assess academic achievement. "Academic achievement" generally means publication of monographs in academic journals, books, and presentations, but not including applied work, such as corporate consulting, non-university-related education, nor contributions to the local community.

In this sense, if current university faculty members join the faculty of professional schools (which is quite typical), and the university methods of evaluation and academic practice put to use at professional schools, then those who become faculty members of professional schools will not have any incentive to devote their time and energy to educate students to become practicing professionals.

What, then, should be the proper relationship between professional schools and the traditional academic university? First, they should be separated from each other. A traditional academic university should be the institution that provides the highest standards of scholarship, under which faculty members and students pursue the discovery of truth without being influenced by secular world concerns of power, private interests, and authority. The ideal purpose of the traditional university is to advance civilization and cultural enrichment. As such, the university represents a long-term investment that benefits the entire society.

Professional schools, on the other hand, are closely connected to the secular world. Their purpose is to train people to become "professionals" in order to earn a livelihood. As long as these trained professionals can earn a salary, they are not obligated to participate in any process of cultural enrichment. In short, hard work is to be equated with making money.

Professional schools are not academic institution but merely preparatory schools designed to help people get good or better jobs. They are not universities but serve the interests of business and professional educational associations. Thus, for example, if Japan needs more qualified attorneys, the Japan Federation of Bar Associations should probably get involved in establishing more law schools to train more attorneys. If Japan needs more professional business managers, business associations should establish more of their own business schools to train a larger number of managers.

The purpose of a professional school is qualitatively different from that of a traditional academic university. Consequently, a division of labor is required. The professional school should pursue its secular interests and its faculty members should be professional enough to meet the school's specific requests. On the other hand, the traditional academic university should devote itself to the pursuit of truth and contribute to the development of human beings. The academic university and its faculty members need to be sheltered from secular world interests in order to maintain its integrity and independence.

April 6, 2005

---

Copying or using text, photographs, illustrations, video or images appearing on this site without permission is prohibited.  
All rights reserved.