

## Editors' Pick—Book Review: *Global Sustainability and the Responsibilities of Universities*

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Weber, L.E., & Duderstadt, J. J. (Eds.). 2012. *Global sustainability and the responsibilities of universities*. Paris, France: Economica Ltd. 283 pp. ISBN 978-2-7178-6113-6

In May of 1998, a group of academic leaders from Europe and North America convened in Glion, Switzerland, to discuss the future of higher education. At issue were the challenges facing universities as they moved inexorably towards the 21st century in an increasingly globalized and networked world. Led by Professors Luc Weber (University of Geneva) and Werner Hirsch (University of California), the Glion Colloquium's first publication of its conference proceedings, *Challenges Facing Higher Education at the Millennium* (1998), was an attempt to "take stock of its [the university's] present status, explore the challenges of the future and evaluate promising initiatives to meet these challenges."

In the past 14 years, the Glion Colloquium has met every two years to publish its findings in a series of works that continues to look to the future and to challenge the notions of how higher education should function in a global environment. Dealing each year with a singular thematic concern ranging from Research, Innovation, Knowledge Economies, and Governance, the Colloquium has established itself as a forum for addressing the major issues confronting higher education in the new millennium. The Colloquium now includes the voices of international business and government agencies from Europe, North America and Asia, as well as other stakeholders.

The eighth title in a series begun in 2001 that focuses particularly on universities, *Global Sustainability and the Responsibilities of Universities* (2012), tackles the hydra-headed topic of global sustainability. Economic models of consumption based on unlimited growth in hand, with a global population that has grown from six billion in 1999, the year of the first Glion Colloquium publication, to seven billion in 2012, is pushing the availability and cost of resources into margins never before seen. Yet editors Professor Weber and Professor James J. Duderstadt (President Emeritus, University of Michigan) seek to expand the concept of sustainability beyond the relatively common notion of "economic development in relation to the environment." The vision of global sustainability, as cultivated by the book as a whole, is one of practical governance issues in relation to higher education.

In a very real sense, this is not a new argument (the "Ivory Tower" vs. the "Real World"), but what is different is what is at stake—a point is never far from the mind of the numerous scholars who contributed to the research making up the chapters of the book. The contributors assert that the stated missions of many universities must be realigned to produce students and citizens who are aware not only of the global challenges that face them, but of the need for interdisciplinary collaboration in devising solutions. As contributors Winckler and Fieder explain, "As the arising challenges are multidisciplinary, they cannot be the subject of a 'single' scientific approach, but will need different contributions from various fields in order to be addressed fully" (p. 197).

The actionable focus of the research presented in *Global Sustainability and the Responsibilities of Universities* is perhaps its strongest suit. In seeking to expand the concept of sustainability to a broader definition that encompasses both a societal and an environmental dimension, the contributors identify multidimensional aspects of the looming crisis and the realms of scholarship that must be linked in order to solve the sustainability issues that confront us. The role of universities from the vantage point of the book is a cross-disciplinary one—humanities and sciences all compris-



ing, as Weber asserts in chapter 1, “key Pillars of global Sustainability”—and should find wide appeal in the disciplines of readers from the realms of humanities, business, law, economics, science, and environmental studies. The tone of the work is reasoned, measured, and articulate, as befits the quality of the writers included in the book. Though the urgency of the authors and editors is disciplined, they issue a clear call to action based on the notion that universities have a distinct role to play in global affairs. As Anne-Marie Leroy, Senior Vice President and General Counsel, World Bank Group, and contributing author asserts, “in order to build sustainable societies, legal scholars and the academic community should be participating more actively in the identification of cutting-edge legal and justice challenges at the country, regional and global levels, respectively, focusing their research at developing creative solutions through inter- and multi-disciplinary approaches” (p. 52). Leroy is echoed by contributors Winckler and Fieder, who explain that “as the arising challenges are multidisciplinary, they cannot be the subject of a ‘single’ scientific approach, but will need different contributions from various fields in order to be addressed fully” (p. 197).

In laying out the book, the editors have followed a model commonly used to study sustainability issues: examine the status quo, identify outcomes, and then look to transitional strategies. *Global Sustainability* supplies chapters exploring ideas for new curricula in Business Schools focused on sustainability; the need for research paradigms focused on actionable problems of sustainability related to energy, health, or biodiversity; and the necessary engagements and alliances that must be forged if sustainability as a global concern is ever to be meaningfully addressed beyond the walls of classrooms. The twenty-one chapters are organized under the major headings of Elements, Challenges, Innovations, and Engagement, making it easy for a reader to review and select those chapters of most interest and utility, though the content’s accessibility would be improved with the addition of an index.

*Global Sustainability* does have one more serious fault, however. Given the phenomenal growth of economies in Asia, it is surprising that, with the sole exception of one Japanese researcher and an excellent chapter by M.S. Anarath on the role of the Indian Institute of Technology Madras Research Park, there is a paucity of research from the Pacific Rim or the Economic Tigers of Asia. The organizers of the Colloquium would be well served to include more scholars from a broader global base to enrich and inform the perspective gleaned from those representing Eurocentric economies.

In keeping with core issues of sustainability, six of the seven books published by the Glion Colloquium series, begun in 2001, are available for free on the web through the auspices of the University of Michigan’s open access depository DeepBlue at <http://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/>. *Global Sustainability and the Responsibilities of Universities* is an excellent addition to the series underway and a fine example of the type of collaborative work that modern 21st century universities are capable of producing.