



News

Collaboration with Jesuit-based higher learning institutions in Myanmar and Thailand

[HOME](#) / [Information](#) / [News](#) / Collaboration with Jesuit-based higher learning institutions in Myanmar and Thailand

NEWS

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Collaboration with Jesuit-based higher learning institutions in Myanmar and Thailand

In recent years, two Jesuit schools have been established in Myanmar and Thailand to offer higher learning to minority students belonging to diverse ethnic, linguistic and religious groups. These schools are located in areas that are challenged by poverty, income disparity, inter-ethnic coexistence and lack of educational access, the key issues of sustainable development addressed by Jesuit education. Sophia University recently began collaborating with these two institutions to tackle these issues.

On February 5-6, 2018, Taro Komatsu, director of the Center for Global Education and Discovery and a professor in the Department of Education at Sophia University, visited the St Aloysius Gonzaga (SAG) Institute of Higher Studies in Taunggyi, a hilltop town located in the State of Shan, Myanmar. SAG Institute of Higher Studies was established in 2011 to provide access to quality higher learning opportunities to youth in the country. Currently, the government of Myanmar does not recognize higher education offered by a private entity. The institute provides social science studies in English, following the curriculum used in a Jesuit university in Indonesia. Students of diverse religions, including Buddhism, Christianity and Islam, attend the school and share learning within and outside the



Professor Komatsu delivered a lecture
at SAG Institute of Higher Studies

[About](#)

[Academics](#)

[Admissions](#)

[Global](#)

[Campus Life](#)

[Research](#)

classrooms and in the dormitory. This has special meaning, given that inter-group tension still continues in some places in Myanmar, a highly multi-ethnic society.

At the request of the SAG Institute, Professor Komatsu delivered a lecture on “education and peace” for some 120 students enrolled at the institute, and later discussed issues pertaining to education with a group of minority students. A plan is underway to bring together students from SAG Institute and Sophia University in an online discussion of common interests during the coming spring semester.

On March 2-3, 2018, Yasushi Hirotsato, a professor of the Faculty of Global Studies at Sophia University, visited Xavier Learning Community (XLC) in northern Thailand with a group of Sophia students. The visit was planned as part of a study tour that aimed to enhance students’ understanding of social and economic changes occurring in the regions along the Mekong River. On the first day, ten Sophia students, along with XLC students, visited villages inhabited by minority ethnic groups, then discussed the issues faced by these villagers on the following day. XLC was established by a Jesuit society in 2017 and currently works towards becoming an established higher education institution by the year 2022. Most of the subjects are taught in English and its curriculum is aimed to strengthen students’ English competency in the social science fields.

As in the case of the SAG Institute of Higher Studies in Myanmar, the region surrounding XLC is faced with the challenges of overcoming poverty and achieving inter-group harmony. Both students of XLC and Sophia are planning to continue their joint learning on-line after the Sophia students return home. Sophia University, in collaboration with XLC, is also planning to develop a service-learning program in northern Thailand in the near future.



Students of diverse backgrounds are learning at the Institute



Students of XLC and Sophia University joined for a field trip



Sophia students and minority students engaged in discussion