It is nonsensical, in a millenarian sort of way, to direct this question’s answer at the seven billionth person. What is special about the number seven billion? Already, that number has grown, and by the due date for submissions to this contest, it will be greater still. But even when the population was a lesser number, it was large and, besides, what good will it do for one of seven billion to know something about being a “responsible global citizen”? Seeing as the adjective global is modifying the aforementioned citizen, what matters is what that person will do for the rest of us. Unless we assign Mr. or Ms. Seven Billion\(^1\) messianic properties, his or her knowing how to behave won’t do us very much good. And if we do assign that person messianic properties, we’re back to the whole millenarian shebang.

The millenarian aspect of this question is telling. It makes persons into numbers. People are not numbers. They are individuals who deserve not to be dehumanized as befits their human dignity. An appreciation of how it is not possible to quantify individuality and human dignity is what is necessary to be a “responsible global citizen.” As there are now over seven billion of us on this one planet, it has become even more imperative not to think of people as numbers. The impulse to do exactly this is strong, for seven billion people are an incomprehensible number of humans. Seven billion is an incomprehensible number. So when an already difficult-to-grapple-with concept is made even more difficult, we begin lose any understanding we have of each

\(^{1}\) Who exactly this is cannot be calculated, but The Guardian chose to report on Danica May Camacho, “one of several children... who will symbolically represent the global population milestone.” (Jasmine Coleman, “World’s ‘Seven Billionth Baby’ Is Born,” The Guardian, October 30, 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/oct/31/seven-billionth-baby-born-philippines>).
other. We, the global citizenry, cannot afford not to understand each other, to simply write off those not in our city, town, nation, culture, or continent as the other.

When distinct persons are numbered, discourse fails. One cannot communicate with a number. Numbers do not have needs, rights, or human dignity. They are inanimate representations. As the population increases, resources become more limited, problems proliferate, and solutions are created. With this increase, it becomes more necessary for the world to be able to work cohesively. With this increase, too, persons are more easily ignored, hidden in the masses, and so denied the resources and rights that come with their human status.

Being one myself, the concerns of students are of interest to me. Students are quantified in a not terribly totalitarian way, but nonetheless in a pernicious one. We are graded. The work that we do, as representations of ourselves, is put into numbers; those numbers are compiled, and then people in positions of power (e.g. college admissions officers—they’re even called officers) inspect them. Students are known, not as themselves, but as numbers, comparable to other such numbers. These numbers can even be subtracted.

That said, here is my advice: reject quantification and demand to be known as yourself. Any human on this earth is one of very many, yet all have human status and are endangered by any attempt to remove that. We cannot understand numbers as people, yet we seem to be able to understand people as such. We can communicate, and to be global citizens we must do just that. The very concept of a citizenry involves communication. Numbers do not communicate. They are manipulated.