

EVALUATION OF HIGHER DISTANCE EDUCATION
RESULTS: THE CASE OF SUKHOTHAI THAMMATHIRAT
OPEN UNIVERSITY OF THAILAND

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PART I: BACKGROUND OF THE UNIVERSITY

1. Background

The idea of establishing an open university arose from the desire to democratize higher education and from the stimulus provided by the concept of life-long education. The increasing demand for higher education during the last decade has led Thailand to look for ways of responding to this demand effectively and economically.

The distance teaching/learning system was viewed as a practical means of supplementing the conventional university system. Given existing financial constraints, an open educational system with distance teaching methods seemed to be an appropriate alternative.

Therefore, after three years of planning, Sukhothai Thammathirat

Open University (STOU for short) was established by Royal Charter in September 1978. It is the first open university in Southeast Asia which uses a distance teaching system to extend higher education to the people. Like other conventional state universities, Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University is under the guidance of the Ministry of University Affairs, enjoys a great degree of autonomy, and has the right to award its own degrees.

Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University admitted its first batch of students on December 1, 1980. The first three Schools to offer courses were the School of Liberal Arts, the School of Education Studies and the School of Management Science.

In 1982 the University increased its enrollment by admitting students in the Schools of Law, Health Science, Home Economics, and Agricultural Extension and Co-operatives. Then in the 1983 academic year the University offered courses in the School of Political Science as well, bringing the total number of Schools to nine with a total member of approximately 200,000 students.

2. Goals and Objectives

As an open University, Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University holds to the principle of life-long education, aims at improving the quality of life of the general public, seeks to increase the educational qualifications of working people, and strives to expand educational opportunities for secondary-school graduates in response to the needs of individuals and society. To fulfill these goals the University has established a distance teaching system which employs correspondence media, radio and television programmes, and other methods which enable students to study on their own without having to enter a conventional classroom.

Within the framework of the above-mentioned goals, STOU has the following objectives:

- (a) to provide and promote university and professional education so as to enable the people to raise their educational standards in response to the needs of society;

- (b) to promote research so as to generate new knowledge and to apply it to national development;
- (c) to render public service to society by disseminating knowledge so as to promote personal development and professional competence; and
- (d) to preserve and develop national culture.

3. Administrative Structure

Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University includes the following offices to provide administrative support for the operation of the University:

1. Office of the Rector
2. Office of Educational Services
3. Office of Educational Technology
4. Office of Academic Affairs.
5. Office of Registration, Records and Evaluation.

These offices have duties and responsibilities as follows:

1. The Office of the Rector is responsible for record-keeping, public relations, grounds and buildings, finance, personnel matters, planning, and the purchase and maintenance of supplies.
2. The Office of Educational Services is responsible for providing educational and vocational counselling and guidance to students, organizing tutorials, sending educational materials to students, and coordinating with STOU Study Centres.
3. The Office of Educational Technology is responsible for

producing supporting media such as radio and television programs, film, audio and videotapes, and all typed of printed matter, including books, texts, workbooks. It is also responsible for providing books and documents for STOU students and staff.

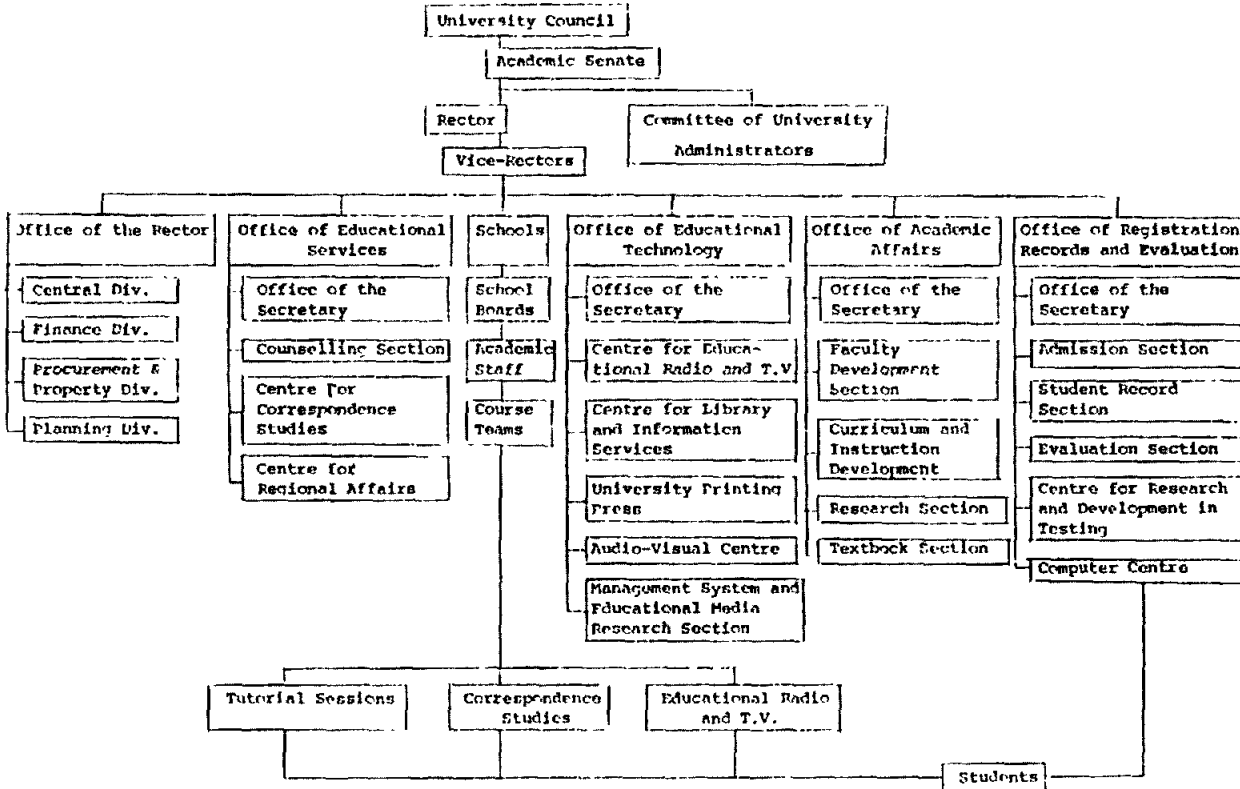
4. The Office of Academic Affair is responsible for administrative and academic work assigned to it by the Academic Senate and the Board of each school. It is also responsible for supporting research of the faculty, translating and selecting books and texts for printing and distribution, and setting up faculty training programs.
5. The Office of Registration, Records and Evaluation is responsible for admitting students, registration, keeping student records, supervising exams, and conducting research concerning and developing various test instruments.

The overall structure of STOU supportive organizations in shown in Chart 1.

4. Academic Structure

1. **BOARDS OF STUDIES.** Each school has a Board of Studies which consists of a Chairman and 3-7 members elected by the full-time staff of that school. Each Board of Studies is in charge of all the academic and administrative matters of the school, as well as other assignments entrusted to it by the University Council of the Academic Senate.
2. **ACADEMIC ASSESSORS.** Each school has some 5-11 Academic Assessors to advise on academic standards, curriculum development, instruction, evaluation, and educational services. Academic Assessors are appointed from those considered outstanding in the academic community.
3. **METHODS OF INSTRUCTION.** STOU does not have its own classrooms, relying instead on its regional and local study centres to provide study facilities for students in various parts of the country. To help students study on their own,

CHART 1 ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE



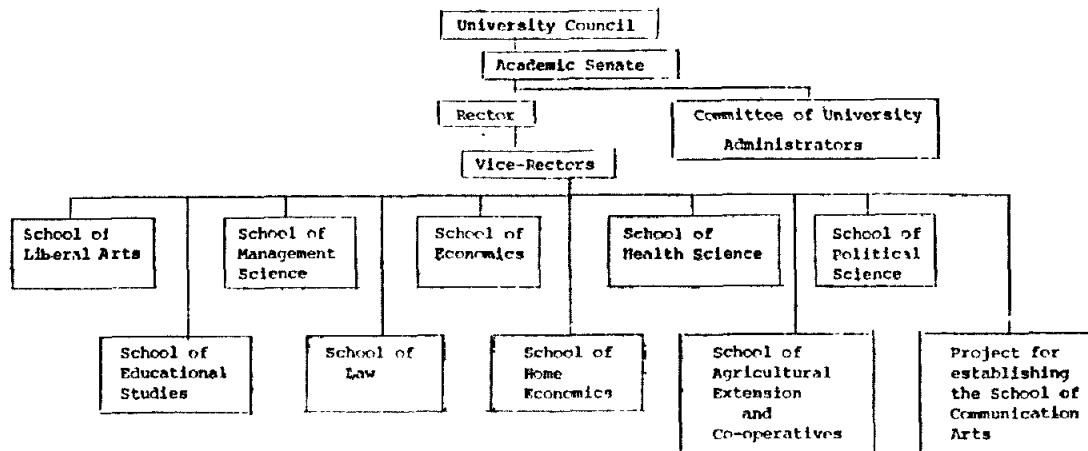
STOU employs distance learning techniques and uses the following teaching media to impart instruction:

- a) main media: correspondence texts, workbooks, broadcast handbooks, etc.;
- b) supporting media: radio and television broadcasts, including broadcasting of video-tapes, and course materials recorded on tapes and gramophone records; and
- c) tutorial and counselling sessions at various regional and local study centres.

From 1980 when STOU admitted its first batch of students until 1984, courses offered include those in the following areas:

1. Educational Studies
2. Management Science
3. Law
4. Economics
5. Home Economics
6. Agricultural Extension and Co-operatives
7. Health Science
8. Political Science
9. Liberal Arts.
10. Communication Arts.

CHART 2 THE ACADEMIC STRUCTURE



5. Personnel

The University's personnel is composed of full-time faculty, full-time administrative staff, and part-time faculty. Staff distribution is illustrated in the following tables:

Table 1

Full-time Faculty

School	Educational level		total
	Doctor's degree	Master's degree	
1. Liberal Arts	3	15	18
2. Educational Studies	11	15	26
3. Management Science	1	17	18
4. Law	2	10	12
5. Health Science	1	8	9
6. Economics	2	5	7
7. Home Economics	1	5	6
8. Agricultural Extension and Co-operatives	1	5	6
9. Political Science	2	2	4
Total	24	82	106

Table 2

Full-time Administrative Staff

Office	Educational Level			Total
	Associate or lower	Bachelor's degree	Master's degree	
1. Office of the Rector	56	49	3	108
2. Office of Educational Services	24	19	10	53
3. Office of Educational Technology	67	42	28	137
4. Office of Registration, Records and Evaluation	41	22	8	71
5. Office of Academic Affairs	38	19	5	62
Total	226	151	54	431

PART-TIME FACULTY

The University has invited approximately 3,000 qualified individuals from universities and various agencies to serve as course producers and part-time tutors in the various Schools.

6. Admission Procedures

Application for admission is made by post. The regulations and procedures governing admission are announced before each registration period.

7. Requirements for a Degree

STOU uses a two-semester system and allows its students 4 to 12 years to earn a degree. Courses are arranged in blocks to provide an integrated study of interrelated subjects. Each block is worth 6 semester credits. A student must take at least one block (6 credits) but cannot take more than three blocks (18 credits) each semester. Credits are accumulated until they reach the number required to qualify for a degree. The number of credits needed for a bachelor's degree varies from 132 to 144.

8. Programmes

STOU offers two types of programmes of study: one for Degree purposes and the other for Non-degree purposes.

For Degree purposes, the kind of courses and study areas offered are based on the manpower and social needs and their compatibility with the University's distance learning system.

Eligible for enrollment as students in the Degree programme without entrance examination are:

- (a) those who have completed 12 years of schooling or their equivalent; or
- (b) those who have completed 10 years of schooling who have had 5 years of work experience after receiving their certificates and who are over 20 years of age; or
- (c) holders of diplomas or degrees of any level.

For Non-degree purposes, STOU offers short courses in various study areas as continuing or adult education. The aim is to enable working people to develop their skills and gain the kind of knowledge essential for their professional competence.

The group of courses available at this stage comprises those

related to Humanities, Education Studies and areas that do not require a great deal of laboratory work.

9. Joint Programmes with other Agencies

The University has also co-operated with various agencies in setting up programmes of personnel development for the respective agencies using the distance teaching system. These co-operative programmes are as follows:

- 1) Co-operation with the Police Department in establishing a bachelor's degree programme for non-commissioned police officers seeking promotion to the rank of commissioned police officer. The University inaugurated this programme in July 1982.
- 2) Co-operation with the Department of Local Administration in establishing an education and training programme for staff of the Department as well as for sub-district and village-level administrators and their wives and others who are involved in administrative work. This programme was established in order to increase their knowledge and work capability and improve their leadership capacity for effective local rural development. The University inaugurated this programme in July 1983.
- 3) Co-operation with the Department of Lands in providing staff development for those who have not received a bachelor's degree in order that they might have better knowledge of the law. This programme is entitled "Certificate in Land and Property Law" and was inaugurated in July 1983.
- 4) Co-operation with the Ministry of Agriculture and Co-operatives in improving the qualifications of the Ministry's agricultural extension and co-operatives officials.
- 5) Co-operation with the Office of the National Committee on Elementary Education to provide in-service training for 33,000 elementary school administrators throughout the

country.

- 6) Co-operation with the Bangkok Bank Ltd. in training Bank employees to produce self-instructional texts to be used in staff development programmes at the Bank.
- 7) Co-operation with the Department of Non-formal Education in establishing "STOU Corners" in provincial public libraries throughout the country in order to provide services for students and the general public.

PART II: STUDENT PROFILE

Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University admitted its first batch of students in December 1980. In that inaugural year there were a total of 82,139 students, including 68 Buddhist monks. In 1982, new schools were added and 69,561 new students were admitted. In 1983, the University admitted 50,110 more students. This brings the total number of students to about 200,000.

1. Total Enrollment

Enrollments in each semester vary. Normally the number of students enrolled in the first semester is greater than in the second semester. In the first semester of this academic year (1983), there are 111,583 students enrolled in nine schools. The distribution of students by schools is presented in Table 3.

It can be seen from the Table 3 that the majority of students register in three schools: Educational Studies (25.8%), Law (27.2%) and Management Science (19.2%). School of Economics has the least enrollment. A distribution of new students by schools in each academic year is provided in Table 4.

From the Table 4, it can be seen that the percentage of new students by schools varies. In the inaugural year, 91.7 per cent were teachers and 8.3 were in construction management. In 1982 Academic Year, when five new schools were added, the proportion of the new intakes changed. In this year, almost half of the total number of new students registered in the School of Law. In 1983 Academic Year, when the School of Political Science opens for its

Table 3
 Enrollment by Schools,
 First Semester, 1983.

Schools	Number	Per cent
Educational Studies	39,950	35.8
Management Science	21,731	19.5
Law	30,392	27.2
Health Science	4,078	3.7
Economics	2,558	2.3
Home Economics	3,841	3.4
Agricultural Extension and Co-operatives	4,941	4.4
Political Science	4,092	3.7
Total	111,583	100.0

Table 4
Distribution of New Entrants by Schools

Schools	1980-1981		1982		1983	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
1. Educational Studies	75,334	91.7	10,328	14.9	12,055	24.0
2. Management Science	6,805	8.3	16,225	23.3	11,160	22.3
3. Law	-	-	29,827	42.9	14,913	29.8
4. Health Science	-	-	3,985	5.7	2,064	4.1
5. Economics	-	-	1,553	2.2	1,933	3.9
6. Home Economics	-	-	2,287	3.3	2,352	4.7
7. Political Science	-	-	-	-	3,731	7.4
8. Agricultural Extension and Co-operatives	-	-	5,356	7.70	1,896	3.8
Total	82,139	100.00	69,561	100.00	50,110	100.00

first admission, the proportion of law students decreases. However, the three schools: Educational Studies, Law, and Management Science still have the high proportion of new intakes. About 75 per cent of new students registered in these schools.

2. Distribution of Students by Regions

The distribution of students is fairly good compared with the distribution of population by regions, as presented in Table 5. The North-East, which has 34 per cent of the total population, shares 27 per cent of the total number of students. The North, which has 20 per cent of the total population, shares 18 per cent of the students. Similar percentages are found in the Central, South, East and West. The exception is Bangkok which has 21 per cent of students while having only 10 per cent of the population.

A distribution of new students by regions in each academic year is presented in Table 6. It can be seen that in 1980-1981 when the University admitted its first batch of students in Educational Studies and Construction Management, only 11 per cent of the students were in Bangkok. The rest were in the provinces. In 1982, Bangkok shared 24 per cent of the total enrollment while having only 10 per cent of the population. This was due to the opening of new schools which allowed adult working people in Bangkok register. In 1983, the proportion of Bangkok students drops to 21 per cent. The proportion of students from the North-East becomes the greatest.

Table 5
Distribution of students
by
Regions, 1983

Regions	Students		Population %
	Number	%	
Bangkok	23,643	21.2	10.9
Central	9,679	8.7	8.1
North	20,371	18.2	20.4
South	16,940	15.2	12.4
East	5,382	4.8	6.1
West	9,057	8.1	7.8
North -East	26,511	23.8	34.4
Total	111,583	100.0	100.0

Source: (1) Enrollments, STOU Academic Year 1983

(2) Population Census, 1980

Table 6
Distribution of Students by Regions

Regions	1980-1981		1982		1983	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Bangkok	9,362	11.4	17,136	24.6	10,538	21.0
Central	7,730	9.4	5,403	7.8	4,350	8.7
North	15,105	18.4	13,187	17.5	9,060	18.1
South	15,075	18.4	10,138	14.6	7,061	14.1
East	4,681	5.7	4,540	6.5	3,302	6.6
West	7,286	8.8	5,181	7.5	4,154	8.3
North-East	22,900	27.9	14,976	21.5	11,645	23.3
Total	82,139	100.0	69,561	100.0	50,110	100.0

3. Characteristics of Students

3.1 Distribution of New Students by Sex

With regard to the distribution of students by sex, Table 7 reveals that on the whole males have a high participation rate than females. In 1980-1981, female students represented 49.2 per cent. In 1982, the percentage of new female students dropped to 32.8. This was due to the greater proportion of male students in the School of Law and the School of Agricultural Extension and Co-operatives. In 1983, the percentage of new female students increased to 44.3. Compared with the record for 1982, the percentage of new female students in 1983 increased in all schools, including the School of Home Economics which has 99.3 per cent of female students.

3.2 Distribution of New Students by Age

Students of Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University are mainly working adults. As shown in Table 8, the majority of new students are between 26 to 30 years old. Still few are over 70. The median age of new students in 1980-1981 was 28.2 years. In 1982 the average age of the new intakes increased to 29.4. This was due to the great number of adult students entering the School of Law. In 1983, the average age drops to 26.7. In this year, the University has started to admit high school graduates into Schools of Law, Management Science, Economics, and Political Science. Therefore, there is a slight decrease in the average student age.

3.3 Distribution of New Students by Occupations

With regard to the distribution of students by occupations, Table 9 reveals that most of the students are government employee. In 1980-1981, 83.9 per cent of new students were government officials. The percentage of government officials dropped to 69.6 in 1982 and 59.2 in 1983. As more schools are added, more people from the private sector enter the University. It should be also noted that the University has started to admit high school leavers in 1983. This may explain the high percentage of not-specified category.

Table 7
Distribution of New Students by Sex

Schools	1980-1981		1982		1983	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Educational Studies	46.6	53.4	43.3	56.7	41.8	58.2
Management Science	98.2	1.8	46.5	53.5	40.9	59.1
Law	-	-	91.2	8.8	82.6	17.4
Health Science	-	-	46.7	53.2	29.4	70.6
Economics	-	-	67.7	32.3	56.5	43.5
Home Economics	-	-	0.9	99.1	0.7	99.3
Political Science	-	-	-	-	76.6	23.4
Agricultural Extension and Co-operatives	-	-	89.0	11.0	81.9	18.1
All Schools	50.8	49.2	67.2	32.8	55.7	44.3

Table 8
Distribution of New Students by Age

Age	1980-1981		1982		1983	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
17 - 22	4,171	5.4	5,849	8.4	10,090	20.1
23 - 25	19,626	25.6	13,601	19.6	12,095	24.2
26 - 30	27,195	35.4	19,963	28.7	12,293	24.5
31 - 35	12,358	16.1	13,982	20.1	6,573	13.1
36 - 40	6,946	9.1	8,540	12.3	4,051	3.1
41 - 50	4,674	6.1	4,972	7.1	3,090	6.2
51 - 60	713	0.9	651	0.9	424	0.9
61 - 70	49	0.1	43	0.1	17	-
Over 70	24	-	23	-	5	-
Not specified	974	1.3	1,937	2.8	1,472	2.9
Total	76,730	100.0	69,561	100.0	50,110	100.0

Table 9
Distribution of New Student by Occupations

Types of Occupations	1980-1981		1982		1983	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Government official	68,984	84.0	48,457	69.7	29,672	59.2
State Enterprise	942	1.1	5,457	7.8	2,953	5.9
Private Sector Employee	6,552	8.0	9,659	13.9	7,069	14.1
Private Business	275	0.3	1,438	2.1	2,183	4.4
Agriculturist	43	0.1	89	0.1	567	1.1
Others	57	0.1	932	1.3	1,621	3.2
Not specified	5,286	6.4	3,529	5.1	6,045	12.1
Total	82,139	100.0	69,561	100.0	50,110	100.0

3.4 Distribution of New Students by Monthly Income

The distribution of new students by monthly income is presented in Table 10. This Table reveals that the majority of students have the monthly income between 2001 to 3000 baht (87 to 130 US dollars). The median monthly income of the new intakes was 2625.6 baht in 1980-1981, and 2850.8 baht in 1982. In 1983, the average salary is 2956.8 baht. The average monthly income rises as more working adults from private sectors enter the University.

Table 10
Distribution of New Students by Monthly Income
(in Baht)

Monthly Income	1980 - 1981		1982		1983	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Under 1,000 baht	526	0.7	1,683	2.4	1,450	2.9
1,001 - 2,000 baht	14,007	19.6	8,144	11.7	6,113	12.20
2,001 - 3,000 baht	42,452	55.5	24,054	34.6	18,290	36.5
3,001 - 4,000 baht	12,561	16.4	16,300	23.4	10,072	20.1
4,001 - 5,000 baht	4,200	5.6	7,675	11.0	5,562	11.1
5,001 - 6,000 baht	1,024	1.3	4,035	5.8	2,879	5.7
6,001 - 7,000 baht	573	0.8	2,199	3.2	1,754	3.5
Over 7,000 baht			3,457	4.9	2,706	5.4
Not specified	45	0.1	2,014	2.9	1,284	2.6
Total	82,139	100.0	60,561	100.0	50,110	100.0

Note: 1 US\$ = 23 baht

PART III: EVALUATION SYSTEM

1. STOU's Evaluation System

Evaluation of the progress of STOU students is carried out in three ways.

1.1 Performing assigned activities

In studying their textbooks, students must perform an assigned activity at the conclusion of each major topic. These activities must be sent in to the person who wrote the activity, and they account for 20 per cent of the final examination grade.

1.2 Final Examination

A final examination is given at the end of every semester. A re-examination is also provided for those who fail in the final examination. Those who fail in the re-examination have to re-enroll in that course. Evaluation and decision concerning the examination have the following characteristics:

1.2.1 The Criterion Reference System is used.

1.2.2 Four grades are given, namely:

H (Honours) = Score of 76 and above

S (Satisfactory) = Score between 60 and 75

U (Unsatisfactory) = Score below 60

I (Incomplete) = Work not yet complete, missed examination

1.2.3 The Awarding of Honours

(1) In order to receive 1st-class Honours, the student must receive a grade of H in three-fourths of the courses in his programme, must not receive a U in any course, and must complete his programme in the required time.

(2) In order to receive 2nd-class Honours, the student must receive a grade of H in at least half of the courses in his programme and meet the other requirements specified in (1).

1.3 Intensive Workshop and Professional Experiences

Every STOU student who is about to complete his studies must take part in an intensive workshop in order to enrich his professional experience in his career.

These intensive workshops can be divided into 2 types, namely:

1.3.1 Those that are part of the curriculum. These provide supplemental knowledge and experience which the student cannot obtain from distance materials, working in a group, for example. The School of Educational Studies has courses of this nature, and students in this school must take part in an intensive workshop in one of the following courses according to their majors: Professional Experiences in Teaching, Professional Experiences in Education, and Professional Experiences in Educational Administration.

1.3.2 Professional Experiences for the Graduate. This is an intensive workshop for any student who has completed the curriculum. Students from various schools are required to attend this intensive workshop for about a week before their graduation.

2. Results thus far

2.1 The overall survival and dropout rate

Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University admitted the first batch of students in December 1980. The second batch was admitted in July 1982, and the third in July 1983. The cohort analysis of all degree students is provided in Table 11. From this table it can be seen that the dropout rate was high in the beginning year. For the first cohort in 1980-1981, the dropout rate was 36.2 per cent between the first and the second semester. For the second cohort admitted in 1982, the dropout rate was 25.5 per cent. Thus the survival ratio of the second cohort is higher than the first group: 74.5 per cent against 63.8 per cent.

2.2 Dropout Rate by Programmes

2.2.1 Dropout Rate of the First Cohort (1980-1981) by Programmes.

The dropout rate of the first cohort of students is presented in Table 12. From this table it can be seen that the dropout rate between the semesters in the first year of studying is higher than in the second year. Also the dropout rate is higher in four-year programmes than in two-year programmes. For example, the dropout rate of students in the four-year programme of Primary Education is 48.9 per cent compared with 36.2 per cent in the two-year programme.

2.2.2 Dropout Rate of the Second Cohort (1982) by Programmes

The dropout rate of the second cohort (1982) students varies by schools. In general, the dropout rate in four-year programmes is higher than in two-year programmes, as revealed in Table 13. The high dropout rates are found in the following programmes:

Elementary Education (4 years) 41.3%

Agricultural Extension (4 years) 39.5%

Secondary Education (4 years) 36.3%

Certificate of Teaching (1 year) 36.1%

Economics (4 years) 35.5%

Table 11

Survival and dropout Rate of Degree Students

Cohort	Year	1980-1981*		1982*		1983
		1	2	1	2	1
1980-1981	Survival	80,410 (100.0)	51,295 (63.8)	39,399 (49.0)	36,645 (45.6)	23,584 (29.3)
	Dropout	-	29,115 (36.2)	11,896 (14.8)	2,754 (3.4)	6,112 (7.6)
	Graduate	-	-	-	-	6,949 (8.6)
1982	Survival	-	-	69,561 (100.0)	51,795 (74.5)	37,875 (54.5)
	Dropout	-	-	-	17,766 (25.5)	13,920 (20.0)
	Graduate	-	-	-	-	-
1983	Survival	-	-	-	-	50,110 (100.0)
	Dropout	-	-	-	-	-
	Graduate	-	-	-	-	-

* It should be noted that the dropout rate between the first and the second semesters in the first year is high in both groups. The dropout rate declines after the first year. It seems once students get through the first semester, they tend to stay in the system.

Table 12
Dropout Rate of the First Cohort
(1980-1981) by Programmes

Semester Schools/Programmes	1/ 80-81	2/ 80-81	Drop- out Rate	1/ 82	2/ 82	Drop- out Rate
Educational Studies	75,334	47,184	37.4	35,651	32,870	7.8
One-year Programmes (Cert in Ed.)	1,729	1,152	33.4	652	297	54.5
Two-Year Programmes (B.Ed.) Primary Ed.	25,960	16,561	36.2	13,507	12,696	6.0
Four-Year Programmes (B.Ed.) Primary Ed.	3,634	1,855	48.9	930	702	24.5
Two-Year Programmes (B.Ed.) Sec. Ed.	23,351	14,260	38.9	10,682	9,987	6.5
Four-year Programmes (B.Ed.) Sec. Ed.	1,545	821	46.9	397	316	20.4
Two-Year Programmes (B.Ed.) Ed. Administration	19,115	12,535	34.4	9,483	8,872	6.4
Management Science	6,805	5,263	22.7	4,400	4,072	7.5
Construction Management	6,805	5,263	22.7	4,358	4,026	7.6
Business Administration	-	-	-	42*	46*	-
Total	82,139	52,447	36.5	40,051	36,942	7.7

* Students changed major to Business Administration

Table 13
Dropout Rate of the Second Cohort
(1982) by programmes

Schools/Programmes \ Semester	1/82	2/82	Dropout Rate
Educational Studies	10,328	7,922	23.3
Certificate in the Teaching Profession (1 year)	515	329	36.1
Elementary Education (2 years)	3,920	3,165	19.3
Elementary Education (4 years)	803	471	41.3
Secondary Education (2 years)	1,829	1,424	22.1
Secondary Education (4 years)	305	194	36.4
Educational Administration (2 years)	2,956	2,339	20.9
Management Science	16,225	11,989	26.1
Construction Management (2 years)	1,683	1,318	21.7
Business Administration	14,542	10,671	26.6
Law	29,827	22,233	25.5
Law (3 years)	8,756	6,842	21.9
Law (4 years)	21,071	15,391	27.0

Table 13 (cont.)

Schools/Programmes \ Semester	1/82	2/82	Dropout Rate
Health Science	3,985	3,033	23.9
Public Health	3,985	3,033	23.9
- Public Health Administration (2 years)	-	-	-
- Public Health Administration (4 years)	3,985	3,033	23.9
Economics	1,553	1,001	35.5
Economics (3 years)	-	-	-
Economics (4 years)	1,553	1,001	35.5
Home Economics	2,287	1,786	21.9
Community Nutrition (2 years)	2,287	1,786	21.9
Child and Family Development(2 years)	-	-	-
Agricultural Extension and Co-operatives	5,356	3,831	28.5
Agricultural Extension	4,750	3,405	28.3
- Agricultural Extension (2 years)	3,497	2,648	24.3
- Agricultural Extension (4 years)	1,253	757	39.6
Co-operatives	606	426	29.7
- Co-operatives (2 years)	159	126	20.7
- Co-operatives (4 years)	447	300	32.9
Total	69,561	51,795	25.5

From the above figures we can see that the dropout rate for the 1980-1981 academic year is quite high. But in the second period, the 1982 academic year, the dropout rate has fallen down.

As for the causes of dropouts, a study of our data indicates that there are 2 major points to be considered.

1. Causes arising from the University, which consist of:

(a) Problems concerning textbooks. Since STOU textbooks are produced specifically for use in STOU's teaching/learning system and since the production procedure is rather long and complicated, there may be delays in sending the books to the students. Thus they are not satisfied and drop out.

(b) Problems concerning work procedures. In distance teaching there must be coordination among all sectors—materials production, student relations, and evaluation. Each level must work together effectively and harmoniously. Yet it appears that in the initial stages all systems have not functioned as well as they should. This has caused the students to become disappointed.

2. Causes arising from the students, which can be summarized as follows:

(a) Unfamiliarity with the system. In the distance education system students for the most part have to study on their own using various materials stipulated by the University. But since students are unfamiliar with this system, a portion of them were not able to adjust to it.

(b) Uncertainty concerning the system. Students are not sure when they begin their studies in this system whether they will be able to complete their programme successfully and earn a degree.

(c) Difficulty of the courses. Some of the students encounter problems with the course content due to the fact that they have no prior background in that area coupled

with the unfamiliar manner in which the material is presented. This causes their test scores to fail to measure up to their expectations.

After approximately one academic year STOU rectified the aforementioned problems and improved public relations and counselling. The students thus better understood the system, and the dropout rate decreased accordingly during the 1982 and 1983 academic years.

2.3 Passing Rate By Courses

It is mentioned in the previous section that as students understand the system better, the dropout rate decreases and thus increases the holding power of the University. The percentage of students passing the examination increases as the University has more experiences in providing distance education. Table 14 shows the percentage of students passing the examination by courses. The five courses are foundation courses required for all students in four-year programmes.

Foundation English had the low passing rate. Of the total examinees sitting for the examination in the first semester of 1980-1981, only 8.3 per cent passed the examination. The passing rate increased to 17.4 per cent in the following year. For other courses: Man and Civilization, Man and Society, Science and Society and Thai Studies, the passing rates of the final examinations in the second semester of 1982 were much higher than in the previous semesters. In the special semester, the passing rate was very high. Science and Society had the highest passing rate, 89.8 per cent while Thai Studies had the lowest in the group, 77.3 per cent.

In the second semester of Academic Year 1982, STOU offered 49 courses, including four foundation courses. The examination of the passing rates of these courses reveals a similar pattern of improvement.

Table 14

Percentage of Students Passing the Examination by Courses

Courses	1980-1981		1982		
	1	2	1	2	Special
10111 Foundation English	8.3	-	17.4	-	-
10121 Man and Civilization	15.0	-	18.8	69.5	79.1
10131 Man and Society	-	20.0	42.4	63.5	84.8
10141 Science and Society	-	40.6	35.8	69.6	89.8
10151 Thai Studies	54.2	-	28.7	65.3	77.3

2.4 The First Batch of Graduates

In the 1983 Academic Year, students in the two-year programmes admitted for the first time in 1980-1981 will comprise the first batch of graduates. The Table 15 shows the number and percentage of students who successfully completed their programmes.

From this table, it can be seen that on the whole, about 9 per cent of the cohort complete their studies within the specified minimum time. The number above has been approved by the Academic Senate, and it is expected that approximately 2,000 additional students will finish in the special semester, bringing a total number of the first batch of graduates to about 9,000. This would raise the graduate percentage to about 10 per cent of the student cohort or 20 per cent of those who survived.

As presented in Table 9, all students admitted in 1980-1981 were working adults. Therefore, there is no problem of graduates unemployed. The direct benefit STOU graduates have is that they have additional qualifications and experiences which enhance their opportunities for professional and career advancement.

Table 15

Number of Students and Graduates

Schools/Programmes	Number of Students (1980-1981 cohort)	Number of Graduates (in 1983)	Percentage of Graduates
Educational Studies (2-Year programmes)	68,426	6,018	8.8
Primary Education	25,960	2,058	7.9
Secondary Education	23,351	1,866	8.0
Education Administration	19,115	2,096	11.0
Management Science (2-Year programmes)	6,805	931	13.7
Construction management	6,805	931	13.7
Total	75,231	6,949	9.2

2.5 Completion of Courses by Associate Students.

Besides offering courses in the various schools to students who have the required background STOU also offers courses to associate students who do not have such a background. This is called the Certificate of Achievement Programme. Associate students are allowed to study one course per semester. The University allows students to take any courses without stipulating any basic qualification requirements whatsoever. When students have successfully completed a particular course, they will receive a Certificate of Achievement for that Course. Students in this programme use exactly the same materials and sit for the same

examinations as regular students of the University.

Table 16 shows the number and percentage of associate students passing the examinations in 1980-1981. It should be observed that students who have only elementary education (7 years) are able to complete the course. The passing rate in the first semester was almost the same as the rate of those completing lower secondary and vocational education. In the second semester, they performed better as shown in Table 16.

3. Feedback from students

3.1 Sources of data

STOU attempts to collect and compile data which comes directly from the students as well as from various sources of the University's operations. There are thus many ways of obtaining data, such as:

- (a) Letters from students. These are sent either to the individual schools or to other offices concerned with the students such as the office of Registration or the office of Educational Services.
- (b) Tutorial sessions. Tutors who conduct these sessions will listen to the problems and suggestions of the students, and at each session the Study Centre will provide for an evaluation both of the instructor and of the services rendered by the Centre.
- (c) Professional Experience Workshops. The intensive Professional Experience Workshops in Teaching, Education, and Educational Administration afford students and faculty of STOU the chance to interact on a close personal basis. This is thus an excellent chance to gather data and suggestions from the students.

3.2 Problems and suggestions of the students.

From data collected from the different sources, it is possible to summarize the students' problems, suggestions, and opinions as follows:

Table 16

Number and Percentage of Associate Students Passing the Examinations

Education Background	1 st Group (1 st 1980-1981)			2 nd Group (2 nd 1980-1981)		
	Number of Examinees	Number Passing	Percentage Passing	Number of Examinees	Number Passing	Percentage Passing
Elementary Education	61	22	36.1	75	20	52.3
Lower Secondary Education	176	66	37.5	92	44	47.8
Upper Secondary Education	58	35	60.3	28	17	60.7
Vocational Education	55	20	36.4	27	9	33.3
Diploma	48	21	43.8	23	16	69.6
Bachelor's Degree	79	55	69.6	39	33	84.6
Higher than Bachelor's Degree	5	4	80.0	7	6	85.7
Not specified				13	2	15.4
Total	482	223	46.3	304	147	48.4

- (a) In the early stages, particularly the first year, there was considerable delay in sending textbooks to the students.
- (b) In the early stages, students faced considerable delays in securing information from the University and at times they were unable even to establish contact with the University.
- (c) Students felt that the tutorial sessions were essential and that the tutors were generally doing an excellent job.
- (d) Students felt that the Professional Experience Workshops not only increased their knowledge and experience but also created close ties between the students and teachers, among the students themselves, and between the students and the University.
- (e) The students felt that STOU's teaching/learning system was a good one and provided them with an opportunity to increase their knowledge. It really expanded educational opportunities right to their doorstep.

PART IV: COSTS

Costs are here discussed in two aspects: institutional and private costs. The former is borne by the University and the latter is borne by students.

1. Institutional Costs

1.1 Total institutional costs.

Institutional costs are costs of operating the University. In Thailand, about 90 per cent of the expenditures of government universities are drawn from the government. For STOU, the reverse is true. The proportion of government budget allocated to STOU is minimal when compared with the total budget for all government universities. From Table 17, it can be seen that in 1980, STOU expenditure accounted for 0.5 per cent of the total higher education budget in 1980. The percentage rose to only 1.6 in 1983.

In addition to the budget drawn from the government, STOU uses its own revenues for the operation of the University. It can be seen from Table 18 that about 75 per cent of the total expenditures comes from its own source.

Compared with the average institutional costs of conventional universities then, the average institutional cost of STOU is about one-third of their average institutional cost. If only the institutional cost drawn from the government budget is compared, the average institutional cost of STOU is much lower than that of conventional universities.

Table 17

Government Budget Allocated to STOU, 1980-1983

Years	1980	1981	1982	1983
Total higher education budget	3,475,909,500	4,019,747,300	4,453,835,850	4,433,144,820
Budget allocated to STOU				
operation	8,468,100	19,652,900	38,217,400	48,766,700
capital	9,263,700	27,205,000	16,820,400	20,881,100
total	17,731,800	46,857,900	55,037,800	69,647,800
Percentage	0.5	1.2	1.2	1.6

1 US \$ = 23 baht

Table 18

STOU EXPENDITURES 1980

Unit : baht

Expenditures	1980	1981	1982	1983
From the Government	17,731,800	46,857,700	55,037,800	59,647,800
		(30.8%)	(24.6%)	(23.7%)
From the University Revenues		105,480,000	168,931,800	225,400,000
		(69.2%)	(75.4%)	(76.4%)
Total	17,731,800	152,337,700	223,969,600	295,047,800

1.2 Cost per head

Operating cost per head is summarized as follows:

Table 19

Operating cost per head

(Unit : baht)

Years	Source		Total
	Government	University Revenue	
1981	387.65	1,881.91	2,269.56
1982	489.22	1,911.01	2,400.23
1983*	540.13	2,331.12	2,871.25

* Estimated

From the above table, it can be seen that the University bears a greater proportion of the average cost. In conventional universities in Thailand, the operating cost per head is much greater. The average institutional cost per year in conventional universities varies from 30,920 baht in medical science to 7,875 baht in education. Compared with other universities, STOU average cost is only about one-third.

2. Private Costs

Private or personal costs are costs borne by individual students while studying at the University. The expenses include the followings:

2.1 Expenses for Fees and study Materials

Expenses for fees and study materials charged by the University

are:

- (a) Admission fee 150 ฿ (6.5 US \$) (once on entering).
- (b) University fee 150 ฿ (6.5 US \$) per semester.
- (c) Tuition fee 200 ฿ (8.7 US \$) per course.
- (d) Educational materials 200 ฿ (8.7 US \$) per course.

Educational materials are self-instructional materials provided for students to study at home. They include textbooks, workbooks, and recorded cassette tapes.

On the average, students take two courses per semester. For a student takes two courses, he pays 150 ฿ (6.5 US \$) for the University fee, 400 ฿ (17.4 US \$) for the tuition fee and 400 ฿ for study materials. His total expenses for fees and study materials are 950 ฿ (41.3 US \$). Compared with the average monthly income of 2,956.8 baht (128.6 US \$) as presented in Table 10, the expenses for fees and study materials represent 7 per cent of the income earned during that semester. A student who takes full load per semester (3 courses) pays 1,350 ฿ (58.7 US \$), or about 9 per cent of his income earned during that semester.

2.2 Personal expenses

Personal expenses are composed of the followings:

- (a) Travel expenses for tutorial sessions, final examinations and intensive workshops and training.
- (b) Other expenses such as cost of re-examinations, mailing and requests for information.

As STOU provides tutorial sessions, final examination and re-examinations in every province throughout the country, travel expenses are minimal.

As presented above, students taking the full load pay 1,350 ฿ (58.7 US \$) for fees and study materials. If personal expenses

are added, students on the average spend approximately 1,500 Baht (65.2 US \$) per semester. This is about 10 per cent of the income earned during that semester.

3. Opportunity Costs .

As STOU provides home-based education, working adults can study at homes and continue their jobs. There are no opportunity costs or forgone earnings. STOU students are generally in full employment and contributing to the GNP of the country.

CONCLUSION

Even though STOU has been in operation for only about 5 years and has just had its first batch of graduates in the 1983 academic year, evidence indicates that the University has been rather highly successful. This can be seen from the following:

- (1) It has provided an educational opportunities for those who were unable to study at conventional universities.
- (2) It has expanded educational opportunities for those in all walks of life by offering courses in many different fields.
- (3) It has made maximum use of existing resources by using secondary schools, teachers colleges, conventional universities and public libraries as Educational Service Centers.
- (4) It has put existing technology to good use in establishing educational programmes for the true benefit of the public at large.
- (5) It has assisted both governmental and private agencies and organizations in using STOU's methods and materials in order to develop their own staff.

As more STOU graduates are entering the labour market, more evaluation of the results of distance higher education is needed. This is the challenge for Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University in the years ahead.