

## Continuing and Distance Education

by

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It is universally recognized that there is a constant need for the updating of knowledge and skills in our rapidly changing world of today. In recent years, there have been changing attitudes toward education, especially with respect to the adoption of the concept of life-long education. It has been felt that education should be provided for all on demand to compensate for missed opportunities in early life and to improve the quality of life. The desire for self-improvement that will bring about promotion, higher status, and higher income seems to be an insatiable one; hence the demand for possibilities of retraining and advanced professional training. At the same time, there has been increased awareness that previously neglected groups of the populace, such as housewives and people in remote areas, should also be better-informed and better-educated. In a developing country like Thailand where resources are limited, the use of distance education seems to offer a solution to at least three main problems: increased demands for university places, lack of higher educational opportunities in remote and disadvantaged areas, and limited possibilities of having further studies and training without leaving employment.

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The growing concern for equality of Educational opportunity and life-long education were major factors contributing to the establishment of an institution of distance learning in Thailand. It was felt that the method of imparting knowledge employed and the programmes provided by conventional universities were inadequate for working people seeking higher education. They needed alternative study possibilities or a new system of education that would enable them to study on their own with minimum class attendance and to continue their normal occupations while undertaking university studies. One such possibility was the provision of distance higher education by an open university. Determined to come to grips with the problem of access to higher education and lack of appropriate continuing education opportunities, the Government decided to set up an open university.

After three years of planning, the Open University was finally created by Royal Charter on the 5th of September 1978, under the name of "Sukhothai Thammathirat University", as an open educational institution having as its objectives, "the provision of education and promotion of academic and advanced professional knowledge, research, provision of academic service to society and preservation of culture."

The establishment of Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University, STOU for short, marked the first adult home-based university studies programme to operate in Thailand. STOU holds to the principle of life-long education and aims at improving the quality of life and work of the general public in response to the ever increasing demand for higher education.

The University seeks to provide equal access to university education for people in all walks of life as an extension of the Thai Government's policy of the democratization of education, making the best possible use of the existing infrastructure in the country to develop human resources.

STOU employs the distance education system to impart instruction. To enable the student to undertake independent study with a minimum of assistance, the University uses a combination of different media integrated in such a way as to render teaching as effective as possible.

The teaching media consist of printed self-instructional course materials, audio cassette tapes, and a certain number of radio and television broadcasts along with varying amounts of face-to-face tuition at local study centres. Although printed material constitutes the principal medium of instruction, it is deemed advisable to provide audio cassette tapes as well as radio and television programmes as support media to reinforce the content of the print, to stimulate the student; and to make him feel less isolated in his study.

The establishment of STOU, the youngest of the Thai universities and Southeast Asia's first Open University, can be considered a major step in the democratization of education in Thailand. The distance learning system used by STOU has helped to satisfy the increased demands for education. Through the integrated media, briefly described earlier, university education and professional improvement courses can reach a larger number of people who otherwise would have been confined to only

a low or inadequate level of education acquired before employment. Through distance teaching techniques and relevant teaching media employed by STOU, working people in various professions throughout the country, especially those in remote areas, are being given an equal opportunity to have access to both higher education and professional training at low cost, without having to stop working while studying.

In the 1984 academic year beginning July 1<sup>st</sup>, the number of working adults and high-school graduates enrolled as students in all the schools of the university was 87, 741 with some 200, 716 of the previous years' intakes continuing. The schools of the University, established so far, are liberal arts, educational studies, management science, law, economics, home economics, agricultural extension and cooperatives, political science, health science, and communication arts.

In accordance with its objectives and belief in life-long education, STOU offers two types of programmes of study: degree and non-degree programmes. The course offerings are related to the major national needs and their compatibility with the University's distance teaching system. For non-degree programmes, specially designed courses are offered as an educational service to the general public so as to promote career development and professional competence. With the belief that people need to be educated from birth to death and that education constitutes one of the main necessities of life, STOU makes great efforts to design courses for prospective learners to choose according to their individual needs.

One important overall objective of Thailand's Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University (STOU) is to provide educational services whereby knowledge can be disseminated to the public in order to improve the quality of life and work of people generally. Out of this objective have grown STOU's "Continuing Education". These programmes aim to bring the chance for higher education directly to the less-privileged in rural areas, to those who traditionally have not had an equal opportunity for such education.

Continuing Education can be divided into three types:

1. Certificate-of-Achievement Programme,
2. Co-operative programmes with other agencies, and
3. Nationwide radio and TV broadcasts.

The Certificate-of-Achievement Programme enables people from all walks of life to earn certificates for successful completion of individual courses without having to register as regular students of the University. Thus working people can acquire practical knowledge to enhance their performance on the job without having to interrupt their career to study full time. Farmers, labourers, government officials, company employees, self-employed individuals and housewives have all availed themselves of this opportunity to bolster their knowledge in their spare time.

This programme uses the regular distance teaching/learning system of the University. Students use the multi-media materials provided by the University and do not need to enter an actual classroom. These materials include text and work books for self-study, 17 radio broadcasts,

and seven television programmes per course. In addition, students can do further study in the STOU libraries providing services in every province.

At the conclusion of the course, the student will be evaluated through a final examination. He will be tested together with students of the University who have registered for that course. If he passes the exam, he will receive a special certificate noting his achievement in the particular course. Thus far approximately 4,000 individuals have earned certificates of achievement.

The co-operative programmes with other agencies involve more course work and are tailored to specific target groups. The first step is to analyze the educational needs of various target groups in order to ensure that the knowledge they acquire will be directly beneficial to them in pursuing their careers. The University works jointly with relevant agencies in identifying the target groups and assessing their educational needs. The idea for some programmes has originated with the University; in other cases the idea has come from a particular agency.

Upon completion of the educational needs assessment, the Board of Studies of the appropriate School of the University will formulate the actual programme of study. In producing texts and other materials, emphasis is placed on an interesting, easy-to-follow presentation of the content.

One such co-operative venture involves the University's School of Political Science and the Department of Local Administration, a governmental agency. Certificate programmes have been set up in Sub-district and Village administration and in Government and Administration. These programmes are designed for local administrators, most particularly sub-district chiefs and village headmen.

On the one hand, these sub-district and village administrators are representatives of the government. They receive and implement the government's policies passed on to them by different governmental units which provide local services. On the other hand, they are representatives of the people in their respective sub-districts and villages. They serve as spokesmen for the people in presenting their needs to the government and at same time also take care of various concerns of the people.

The knowledge and capability of these local administrators is an important factor in determining whether their communities can escape from conditions of underdevelopment, poverty, and exploitation and move toward a better way of life, one in which the people will have a higher income and a capacity for effective self-government.

The certificate programmes are thus aimed at improving the capability of these local administrators so that they can shoulder their heavy responsibilities more effectively. These programmes are each composed of eight courses and take from one to three years to complete. Course content involves general knowledge, politics and administration, basic technology, economics, law, and agricultural development. There are currently 3,000 administrators enrolled in these programmes, 2,000 of

whom are expected to earn their certificates this year.

A second joint undertaking involves the University's School of Home Economics and the Community Development Department, which have established a certificate programme in Basic Home Economics. The target audience is composed of wives of local administrators and various local women's groups throughout the country.

The idea is to focus on development of the family, the smallest unit of society, as a first step in the development of the community, the society, and ultimately the nation. This programme is likewise composed of eight courses and takes one to three years to complete. Course offerings include basic nutrition, family management, general health, family finance and business, female leaders and rural society, maternal and child health and family planning, vocational guidance and training, and the Thai way of life. There are presently 500 women enrolled in this programme.

A third joint programme is that undertaken by the University's School of Law and the Police Department. The target group here is non-commissioned police officers, and the dual objective is to provide opportunities for their career advancement as well as to enable the Police Department to have more capable officers. This programme is a full four-year bachelor's degree programme in law. Altogether 24 courses must be taken. There are at present 10,500 police enrolled in this programme.

A fourth joint programme again involves the University's School of Law, this time in co-operation with the Department of Lands. This Department is concerned with the registration of various rights and legal documents and has increased the number of land offices and spread them throughout the rural areas. However, one segment of the Department's civil servants, particularly those without at least a bachelor's degree, have insufficient knowledge of the law.

Thus a special two-year certificate programme in Property Law has been set up for these employees of the Department of Lands. Among the 12 courses are civil law, and environmental law.

Those who complete this programme will receive a certificate from the University, be considered for higher positions, and be able to continue their studies at the bachelor's-degree level in the School of Law. The programme will also develop the system for registering rights and legal documents concerning the land. This in turn will lead to better service to the public. Current enrolment in the programme is 2,500.

The third provision is the nationwide broadcast of radio and television programmes produced by the University. These programmes not only impart knowledge to students enrolled in the University's various Schools, but they also disseminate information to the public at large. Programmes are telecast daily and transmitted throughout the country through the Department of Public Relations network.

Through this three-pronged continuing education effort, STOU is expanding educational opportunities to all regions of the country. By using various integrated mass media, the University can bring education directly into the home. The University's present efforts to promote the dissemination of knowledge and provide special certificate and degree programmes enable the general public to partake of university education. The continuing education programmes thus constitute a means of developing the quality of life in accordance with the University's educational philosophy, that of life-long education.