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## Preface

In the eight years since its establishment in 1978, Sukhothai Thammarathirath Open University has attracted world-wide attention for its innovative, multi-media approach to distance education. Under the dynamic leadership of its founding Rector, Dr. Wichit Srisa-an, the university has captured the imagination of the Thai people and the educational world at large by its varied assortment of degree and non-degree programs. These programs have enabled adults to have a second chance at higher education, have allowed civil servants to upgrade their qualifications, and have disseminated knowledge to the public at large.

As STOU's reputation has grown, Dr. Wichit has been in increasing demand as a speaker at international conferences, where he has articulately expressed the achievements of STOU thus far while never seeking to shy away from the inevitable problems that accompany such a bold, new adventure. It was felt that if several of Dr. Wichit's papers were collected together in a single volume, it would provide a provocative, insightful overview of distance education generally as well as an in-depth analysis of the case of STOU in particular.

The four articles presented in this volume were originally presented at conferences and subsequently published. They have been updated and revised slightly for this present publication, but the substance of the articles remains as originally written. The first article, "Higher Education Development in Thailand," sets the establishment of STOU in historical perspective and traces the expansion and consolidation of Thai higher education. The second article, "Distance Education Through Multi-media," surveys the strengths and weaknesses of various media and discusses the media mix currently employed by STOU. The third article, "The Distance Teaching University: The Case of Sukhothai Thammarathirath Open University," touches on some of the problems facing the fledgling

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university and raises several issues vitally important to any distance university such as intended audience, appropriate teaching/learning system, and maintenance of high academic standards. The final article, "The Management and Economics of Distance Education. The Case of Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University," gives a detailed description of the inner workings of STOU – its administrative and academic structure, course production methods, programs offered, enrollment statistics, and cost effectiveness.

Taken together, the four articles provide a clear, candid picture of developments at STOU as well as a searching, philosophical analysis of many of the larger issues currently facing distance education. Dr. Wichit is the first to print out that there is no single "model" of distance education that can be transported across cultural and linguistic boundaries and replicated in its entirety. Yet, at the same time, the experiences of pioneers in the field should not be ignored; for in planning a new institution or modifying an existing one, valuable lessons can be learned from those who have embarked on a similar path. It is thus with the hope that these articles can be of some benefit to those in the field of education generally – and to those in distance education particularly – that they are presented for your consideration.

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