

MODULE: 6c) ODL Example: Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University (STOU)
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This section contains one of a series of case studies of open and distance learning (ODL) institutions in Asia. The range of ways in which ODL is provided by these institutions provides useful models for other organisations to consider.

EXAMPLE/C: Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University (STOU), Thailand

Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University (STOU) was established by Royal Charter in 1978, to provide the Thai people with increased educational opportunities at university level. His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej, King Rama IX, bestowed the University's name in honor of King Rama VII, one of whose titles before his accession to the throne was Prince Sukhothai Thammaraacha. As the eleventh state university, STOU has all the honors and privileges of other universities. It was the first open university in Southeast Asia to use a DE system.

Organisation of Studies

As STOU uses DE methods to transfer knowledge and skills to students, curriculum contents are arranged into self-instructional packages, which integrate related material and experience into sets known as *course blocks*. Each block is worth at least 6 university credits for the bachelor's degree and five for the master's degree. STOU operates on a semester basis, each semester comprising at least 15 weeks. Students must enroll in at least one course block per semester, with a maximum of three course blocks per semester for bachelor's degree and two for master's degree. They must complete all the required course blocks within a timeframe no more than three times the period of study stated in the curriculum.

Currently, STOU has 12 schools headed by Chairpersons or Deans: Liberal Arts, Educational Studies, Management Science, Law, Health Science, Economics, Human Ecology, Political Science, Agricultural Extension & Cooperatives, Communication Arts, Science & Technology, and Nursing. Unlike other Thai universities, STOU's schools are not divided into departments. STOU was established to utilise existing human resources and to prevent departmentalism as found in most traditional settings. STOU organises its courses into the following levels.

- STOU's School of Educational Studies offers 5 *doctoral degree programmes* in the fields of Curriculum and Instruction, Educational Administration, Educational Evaluation, Guidance and Counseling Psychology, and DE.
- *Masters degree programmes* require a minimum of two years study. Applicants must hold a bachelor's degree in a relevant subject or hold a bachelor's degree in an unrelated subject and have relevant professional experience.
- The University offers one-year *graduate diploma programmes* in the fields of Educational Administration and Retailing.
- Completion of a *bachelor's degree programme* usually requires 4 years of study. For those already possessing a certificate, diploma, or bachelor's degree in another discipline, STOU offers a bachelor's degree programme that can be completed in 2-3 years.

- The University organises 1-year and 2-year *certificate level courses* in fields of study including English for Specific Careers, Thai Studies, and Land and Property Law.
- *Continuing education programmes*. A fundamental aspect of STOU's policy is to provide educational services to the general public in the form of continuing education. In particular, STOU organises the Certificate of Achievement programme, giving individuals, regardless of their educational background or qualifications, the opportunity to study up to three course blocks each semester for personal and professional self-improvement. Those wishing to receive a Certificate of Achievement take the same examinations as regular students studying for bachelor's degrees.

The qualifications of graduates from all STOU programmes are endorsed by the national Office of the Civil Service Commission and are equal to the qualifications held by graduates of other universities. If graduates enter government service, they are employed as civil servants in the same posts with the same rate of salary as graduates of other universities. Students enrolled at STOU can enroll simultaneously in other institutions because STOU is an open university, and students do not have to attend conventional classes but can study by themselves.

The STOU Distance Learning System

STOU employs a system that enables students to study by themselves without having to enter conventional classrooms. This is known as the *Distance Learning System*. It presents students in different regions with the opportunity to study by themselves according to their individual circumstances and interests.

1. Educational Media

Under STOU's DE system, students receive self-instructional materials by mail and can choose from a variety of support media.

- *Textbooks* contain explanations on the course, course objectives, list of teaching units, study methods and the course content.
- *Workbooks* contain instructions on how to use the workbooks, details of the teaching units, self-evaluation before and after studying, spaces for recording important information, doing exercises and reports, and tests for each unit.
- *Radio programmes*. Each semester STOU produces more than 200 radio programmes of 20-minute length in a variety of formats such as interviews, documentaries, drama and docudrama. The content of each programme is designed to enrich course blocks.
- *TV programmes* are used TV programmes to supplement its academic courses. For each academic course there are five 20-minute educational TV programmes. These are produced in different formats such as dramas, discussions, interviews and documentaries.
- *Satellite TV Programmes*. STOU has a cooperative agreement with the national Distance Learning Foundation (DLF) in order to develop DE and to support and expand educational opportunities for members of the public who reside in remote areas. STOU has been granted permission to broadcast daily from the DLF's Distance Learning TV station, on topics including science, technology, environment, arts, culture, and music.
- *Computer-Assisted Instruction (CAI)*. STOU produces CAI as supplementary media for students and the general public. CAI service centres have been set up at STOU headquarters, at ten STOU regional DE Centres, and at the Police Cadet Academy in Nakhon Pathom province. Users are not required to pay any additional expenses or to have any previous computer knowledge.
- *Audio and Video on Demand*. STOU offers students the opportunity to view and listen to its educational radio and TV programmes, and to satellite tutorial broadcasts via the STOU web site (www.stou.ac.th).

- *Online Learning* is a new DE system for STOU, utilising hypermedia technology to present texts, slides, pictures, sounds, graphics, animation and videos in an integrated multimedia format. Interactive activities and exercises for student self-assessment are provided, with contents divided into modules. Students conduct discussions online and post questions for tutors to answer online or in the classroom.
- *Webcasting* is another new channel for students and the general public. It offers live and on-demand educational radio and TV programmes, satellite tutorials, and special conferences and seminars on the web (ctestream02.stou.ac.th).

2. Study Centres

To ensure that educational services reach students in all parts of the country, STOU has established 82 provincial study centres throughout Thailand. These are usually located at the main provincial high school, and serve as the site for examinations, tutorials, orientation, and educational and vocational counseling sessions. STOU has also established special study centres in cooperation with government agencies, to provide specialised practical training in fields including nursing and agriculture.

3. Tutorials

Tutorials are academic services that STOU provides at study centres in every province of the country. The purpose of tutorials is to expand students' knowledge and understanding of course content, which they study on their own. The tutorial instructors answer students' questions in print materials and other media. The instructors may arrange exercises to be undertaken by students during the sessions. Tutorials are held at weekends and are not compulsory for bachelor's degree students, who can make their own choices about whether they attend classes at the study centres. Normally, a student attends class 2-3 times per semester for a total of 10-15 hours. Tutorials timetables are sent to all students.

The sessions are conducted by qualified instructors from STOU or other universities and agencies. STOU also organises special tutorials for prisoners who are STOU students, and tutorials by appointment for students to request through student clubs. STOU also provides interactive satellite tutorials via the Distance Learning TV station.

4. Library and Information Services

STOU's Office of Documentation & Information provides library and information services at the following three levels.

- *Central Services.* The STOU main library is on the University campus and serves University staff, students and the general public. It collects books, periodicals, reference databases, and archival and audio-visual materials that support teaching and research in the humanities, sciences and social sciences. Reference services, document delivery service, circulation, interlibrary loans and current awareness services are provided. The library has developed a wide range of electronic library services including e-books and e-journals.
- *Regional Services.* Library and information services are also offered at the regional level through ten STOU regional DE Centres. In addition, two educational resource centres providing research resources for STOU graduate students have been set up in Songkhla and Prachuab Khiri Khan.
- *Provincial Services.* The University has established 87 *STOU Corners* in metropolitan and provincial libraries throughout the country. STOU Corners are resource centres offering STOU library and educational media services to students and the local community, including textbooks, workbooks, reference books, and audio tapes. These materials can be used at the library and on loan. Further STOU Corners have been established at in Bang Kwang Central Prison, Klong Prem Central Prison, and the Central Women's Correctional Institution.

5. Counseling Activities

The University arranges counseling and guidance services and a wide range of activities for students from the time of their enrolment until the completion of their studies.

- *Guidance for Interested Persons in General.* This service provides information to people interested in continuing their education at STOU. Advice is given on the selection of study areas to ensure that they are compatible with the students' professions and interests. Counseling in cooperation with schools and educational institutions is arranged upon request.
- *Orientation for Newly Enrolled Students.* This activity provides the students with news and information of benefit to them in their preparations for studying at STOU. Orientation is provided through orientation booklets, and radio and TV broadcasts. In addition, STOU academic staff members visit students in local study centres in Bangkok and nearby provinces.
- *Educational and Professional Counseling Services* advise students on how to adjust to the DE environment and independent study. Individual and group counseling on specific learning problems, and information on professional development are provided to help the students meet their goals.
- *Graduate Counseling Services.* STOU graduates may receive guidance on how to continue their education and professional development beyond the bachelor's level.

6. Student Activities

- *Student clubs.* To supplement its curricular activities, STOU promotes and endorses student clubs. These provide opportunities for students to meet each other, share views and experiences, and participate in University activities including academic, sports and camping. The clubs, formed by the students themselves, are in all provinces throughout the country.
- *Practical Experience Programmes.* Before graduating, students are required to participate in pre-graduation programmes organised by STOU.
- *Professional Experience Activities.* These are practical activities arranged by each school with the following objectives: to
 - a) enable students to realise the importance of their professions;
 - b) enable student to apply the principles and theories acquired in their studies to actual practice;
 - c) provide students with experiences they cannot effectively receive through the DE system;
 - d) promote the qualities essential to a successful career; and
 - e) provide opportunities for students to exchange professional experiences.
- *Graduate Enrichment Programmes.* Students are required to undergo intensive training in this programme if they do not participate in professional experience activities: to
 - a) promote experience in the areas of morality and professional ethics;
 - b) establish good relationships with the University, academic staff, and each other; and
 - c) enable students to appreciate the importance of teamwork and sacrifice for the benefit of others.
- *Practice or Training.* Some course blocks are designed so that the student can undergo obligatory practical training or observe work procedures in academic, professional and vocational institutions.

7. Examinations and Evaluation of Studies

- *Examination Centres.* For the student's economy and convenience, STOU has at least one examination centres in all provinces. These are usually at the regional universities and provincial schools which serve as STOU local study centres. Provincial students can take examinations in the provinces where they live or are residing temporarily. Inmates of corrective institutions, who by virtue of their good behaviour have been granted permission by the Corrections Department to register as students, may take their examinations in their institutions. The University also provides STOU students residing abroad with the opportunity to sit examinations at their local Royal Thai Embassy or Consulate.

- *Examination Schedule.* The University does not wish to see students give up their work or leaving their official duties to take examinations; so these are held at weekends and organised so that they can be completed in two days.
- *Examination Supervisors.* In organising examinations supervision, STOU makes maximum use of existing community resources. Local study centre personnel who are not STOU students act as supervisors at examination centres, in addition to University officials and academic staff.
- *Examination System.* The University organises its teaching under a two-semester system. Examinations are held twice each semester - the final exam and a make-up exam for students who failed or missed the final exam. STOU also organises a special semester in which students have the option to register for one course.
- *Notification of Examination Results.* Within 30-45 days of each examination, the Office of Registration, Records & Evaluation mails students their examination results.

Conclusion

Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University has a great diversity of students in terms of age, gender, occupation and place of residence, in keeping with the University's objective of expanding educational opportunity, irrespective of background or personal circumstances. Most students fall in the 21-25 year age range, reflecting the University's success in providing opportunity to those already in the workforce. In the past 28 years, STOU has produced a total of 368,077 graduates. In response to the nation's social needs, STOU plans to offer more science and technology study programmes, particularly in fields of ICT and Thai Studies. STOU is committed to continue enhancing its DE system in order to maintain high-quality services to Thai society.