

**Distance Education in Library and
Information Science in Thailand**

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Abstract

This paper presents distance education in library and information science at two open universities in Thailand, namely Ramkhamhaeng University (RU) and Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University (STOU). The teaching system, degree offered and degree requirements of each university are described in detail.

Introduction

Human development is the main objective of national development. Education serves as a means to achieve the objective and to create a learning society. Education in Thailand has been challenged by rapid changes in science and technology. Recent developments in information and communication technology offer immense opportunities to all societies and individuals for an alternative, universal and economical way of accessing and disseminating education – distance education.

Distance education, firmly established in many countries, has been an accepted modality for providing lifelong education and independent and interactive educational access at all levels. It extends the reach of the classroom to a wider audience by using a wide range of technologies to deliver educational services and courses to off-campus sites, workplace, homes and remote villages. Learners can view diverse educational programs in the comfort of their offices and homes as well as across geographical barriers. Thus, distance education is recognized throughout the world as a viable alternative to campus-based education. For developing countries, such as Thailand, distance education, with possibilities of outreach and economics of scale, appears to be a promising approach in minimizing educational inequality.

In Thailand, library and information science has also been offered through distance education by two open universities namely Ramkhamhaeng University (RU) and Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University (STOU).

Distance education in library and information science at Ramkhamhaeng University

Ramkhamhaeng University is a public university established in Thailand in 1971. The University makes higher education available to students who, for either financial, geographic, or academic reasons, have no access to the country's selective-admission universities. As an "academic marketplace," Ramkhamhaeng University adopts an open admission approach to classroom activities where attendance is optional (Wichit Srisa-an 1983 : 87).

Teaching system

The teaching system used is a combination of on-campus instruction and distance learning through mail, radio, television, and other modern facilities. Students may choose either or both modes of instruction to fit their learning needs. Textbooks, learning materials, recorded audio and video lessons are available to students to study at home. For those fully engaged in their professions or other necessities, they are only required to come in for the final examinations (Ramkhamhaeng University 1998: 11).

Degree offered

Ramkhamhaeng University offers both bachelor's degree programs and master's degree programs in Library and Information Science, in the Department of Library Science, Faculty of Humanities and in the Graduate School respectively, as follows:

- (1) Bachelor of Arts, majoring or minoring in Library Science, initiated in 1974 and
- (2) Master of Arts, majoring in Library and Information Science, initiated in 1992. This study program has been delivered through conventional classrooms.

D e g r e e r e q u i r e m e n t s

U n d e r g r a d u a t e d e g r e e r e q u i r e m e n t s

To receive a bachelor's degree majoring in Library Science, a student must complete 144 credits: 45 credits of general education, 57-60 credits of major requirements, 30 credits of minor requirement and 9 – 12 credits of free electives.

G r a d u a t e d e g r e e r e q u i r e m e n t s

A Master of Arts in Library and Information Science requires 48 credits: 18 credits of core requirements, 18 credits of major requirements, 6 credits of guided electives and 12 credits of master's thesis.

Distance education in Information Science at Sukhothai Thammathirat

O p e n U n i v e r s i t y

Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University is the eleventh public university established in 1978. It is the first true distance teaching university in Thailand and in Southeast Asia. It provides both degree and non-degree programs to meet the demands of individuals and agencies for personal and professional development. To upgrade professional qualifications of the working people and to provide increased educational opportunities for secondary school graduates, Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University under eleven schools, offers three levels of degree programs: masters, bachelor, and certificate.

Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University plays a leading role in the development of distance education and regards its operations as highly successful both in Thailand and abroad. In 1983, STOU was designated by UNESCO as the Lead Institution in the Consortium on Innovations in Distance Education for Asia and the Pacific. It was granted the 1992 Asian Management Award in Development Management from the Asian Institute of Management, and the 1995 Institution Award of Excellence from the Commonwealth of Learning and the International Council for Distance Education.

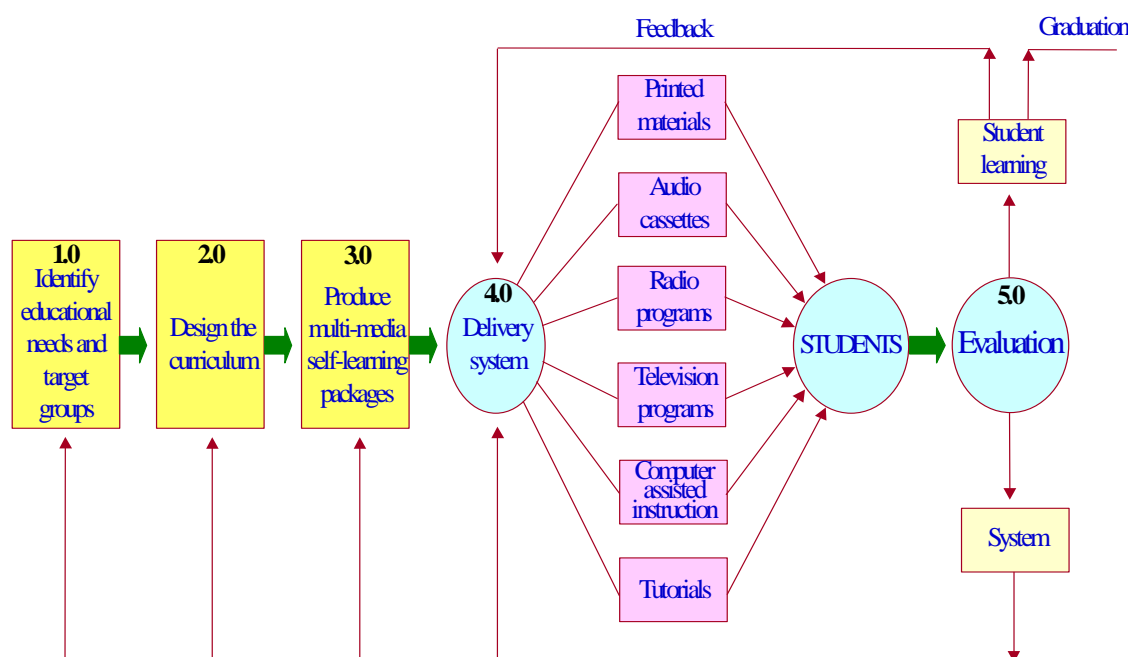
Distance teaching system

The distance teaching system enables students in diverse localities to undertake the course of study of themselves. Instruction is given through instructional media which are mainly printed, that is programmed textbooks and workbooks. Other support media include educational radio and television programs, cassette tapes, video tapes, computer-assisted instruction (CAI), and face-to-face tutoring.

The printed materials are sent to students by mail. Radio and television programs are aired throughout the country. Tutorial sessions are held on weekends at local study centers accommodated by secondary schools in each province. The evaluation of students' performance is final examinations held in each semester at local study centers at the same time throughout the country.

“STOU Plan” for the distance-teaching system is composed of five stages shown the below :

“STOU Plan” for the distance-teaching system



(Wichit Srisa-an 1986: 96)

In providing information science courses, Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University invites librarians, professors, academic staff and experts from various library schools and other related fields, in both government and private sectors, to join in all stages, especially in the production of instructional media. A more efficient and more economical educational program could be made possible through such cooperative efforts.

D e g r e e e s o f f e r e d

The School of Liberal Arts, Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University has offered the following information science programs :

(1) *Bachelor of Arts in Information Science with two majors*; General Information Science: A two-year program and a four year program initiated in 1989 and 1993 respectively. Office Information Science: A two-year program and a four year program initiated in 1991 and 1993 respectively.

(2) *Certificate in Information Work (a one-year program) with two specializations*; namely, General Information Work initiated in 1991 and Office Information Work initiated in 1991 and 1992 respectively.

Continuing education is also provided through various short courses and training programs in Information Science leading to “certificate of achievement” or “certificate.” During the period 1995-1997, the Information Science curriculum was revised and expanded to include master’s degree level. The revised bachelor’s certificate and the new master’s curricula were approved by the University Council in 1998. The master’s degree program in Information Science, majoring in Information Management will be introduced in 2001. Meanwhile, teaching materials will be designed and produced.

D e g r e e r e q u i r e m e n t s

U n d e r g r a d u a t e d e g r e e r e q u i r e m e n t

To receive a bachelor’s degree majoring in Information Science and a certificate in Information Work, students must complete credits of each program as follows:

Degree Level	Total	General education courses	Core courses	Area specific courses	Open elective courses
Four-year bachelor's degree program General Information Science	132	30	24	66	12
Office Information Science	132	30	24	66	12
Two-Year bachelor's degree program General Information Science	72-84	6-18	6	54	6
Office Information Science	72-84	6-18	12	48	6
Certificate program General Information Work	30	12	12	6	-
Office Information Work	30	12	12	6	-

G r a d u a t e d e g r e e r e q u i r e m e n t

There are two plans for the master's degree program:

Plan A (with thesis) requires 40 credits: 25 credits of area-specific courses (15 credits of required courses and 10 credits of elective courses) and 15 credits of master's thesis.

Plan B (without thesis) requires 40 credits: 30 credits of area-specific courses (15 credits of elective courses), 5 credits of open elective courses and 5 credits of independent study.

P r o s p e c t s a n d t r e n d s

Distance education in library and information science has made a major contribution to Thai librarianship and library and information science education in Thailand and in the Asia-Pacific region. During the Consultative Meeting and Workshop "Planning Human Resource Development for Information Societies" (3-7 March 1997) jointly organized by

Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University and UNESCO, Bangkok, Thailand, distance education was brought to the attention of the group and was discussed with enthusiasm. It was agreed that distance learning could be an attractive approach to continuing education for information professionals and workers. Suggestions include:

(1) To expand scope of the survey of distance education programs in library and information science delivered in the Asia and Pacific region conducted by STOU;

(2) To identify specific topics for short - term training programs which can be provided through the distance education mode, and

(3) To conduct courses on the planning, preparation and administration of training modules through distance education. The Meeting appealed to STOU to develop such courses (STOU and UNESCO 1997: 14).

Based on the concept and the principle of lifelong education, distance education increasingly plays important roles in expanding educational opportunities by providing the “second-chance” education and a continuing education for library and information personnel. Distance education in library and information science is no more a new phenomena in Thailand.

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