



International Library Education

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The Information Science Programs of the School of Liberal Arts, Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University (STOU), Thailand

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This article presents the background of Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University, its history, and its major study areas. It goes into some detail about the School of Liberal Arts before concentrating on the Information Science Programs offered by that school. The objectives, qualifications of applicants, and the details of the different Information Science Programs are presented at length. The article then goes on to give a detailed outline of the distance-teaching system as used by STOU. It concludes with a statement as to the unique value of the Information Science Programs offered by STOU.

Background of STOU

Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University was officially established by royal charter on September 5, 1978, as the eleventh state university of Thailand, in order to provide the people of Thailand with increased educational opportunities at the university level. It was the first open university in Asia to use the distance-education system. Since its founding, STOU has attracted worldwide attention for its innovative multimedia approach to distance education. It has also been honored by UNESCO as a leading institution in distance education, acting as the center for the coordination of activities among open universities in Asia and the Pacific.

Sukhothai Thammathirat Open

University does not follow the traditional practice of organizing a university into faculties and departments. Rather, it consists of major study areas or schools, each having a Board of Studies of its own. As far as course provision is concerned, the university offers courses in such areas of knowledge as are considered related to or essential for national development.

The university organizes its courses into four levels: master's degree, bachelor's degree, certificate, and continuing education. All three levels are offered in each of its ten schools:

- Liberal Arts
- Educational Studies
- Management Science
- Law

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The School of Liberal Arts

The School of Liberal Arts was one of the first three schools that opened at STOU in 1980. Since then the School of Liberal Arts has had responsibility for offering foundation courses to the students of the various schools of the university, in order to ensure that upon graduation they possess the basic knowledge required to live a proper and suitable life in society.

The School of Liberal Arts also offers a four-year bachelor's degree program, a two-year bachelor's degree program, and a one-year certificate program. These three programs are as follows:

Four-year bachelor's degree program with one study area in information science with majors in general information science and office information science since 1993

Two-year bachelor's degree program with the following study areas:

- a. Thai studies (since 1989)
- b. Information science with majors in
 - General information science (since 1989)
 - Office information science (since 1991)
 - History (approved, but no date set)

One-year certificate program with the following study areas:

- a. English for a specific career with ten majors

- Teaching (since 1985)
- Law (since 1985)
- Business (since 1987)
- Hotel personnel (since 1992)
- Office work (since 1992)
- Tourism (since 1993)
- Computer users (since 1995)
- Health science (since 1995)
- Agriculture (planned for 1996)
- Technicians (planned for 1996)

- b. Thai cultural studies (since 1989)

- c. Thai studies (since 1990)

- d. Information work with majors in

- General information work (since 1990)

- Office information work (since 1992)

- e. History (approved, but no date set)

Additionally, the School of Liberal Arts is now involved in two special programs as follows: the Sukhothai project and continuing education in the field of science and technology.

The Sukhothai Project

The objective of this project is to study and do research in the fields of history, anthropology, the arts, and culture and related fields of the Sukhothai Period. Another aim is to disseminate the knowledge and information gained from this study to the general public. The dissemination of this knowledge, which is ongoing, is carried out through radio, television, printed materials, the

compilation of bibliographies, and publications documenting the research in this field.

Continuing Education in the Field of Science and Technology

This program is designed to provide knowledge of science and technology to interested people regardless of their previous training or qualifications. Three areas of study are offered:

- Electronic technology
- Computer technology
- Printing technology

During the years 1987 to 1990, the school had a joint-venture program, "Follow Me," with the University of Cambridge and the BBC Radio and Television Broadcasting Company. This one-year program was designed to help people gain the skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking in English and to help them make use of this knowledge in communication in society.

The Information Science Programs of the School of Liberal Arts

STOU, through its School of Liberal Arts, became the first institution in Thailand to establish B.A. and certificate programs in information science that employ the distance-education system.

The objectives of the programs are:

- To graduate individuals who are able to store, retrieve, and handle information efficiently
- To disseminate knowledge about information storage, retrieval, and handling to information specialists and other interested persons
- To promote studies, research, and experimentation in the field of information science

Qualifications of Applicants

Applicants for these information science degree programs must have an associate's degree or its equivalent from an institution recognized by STOU. Applicants for the four-year bachelor's degree program and the certificate programs must have a high school diploma or its equivalent as recognized by the Ministry of Education. Applicants for the certificate programs who do not have this diploma will be accepted for enrollment if they fulfill the following requirements:

- Completion of lower secondary school or its equivalent as recognized by the Ministry of Education
- Five years' work experience following completion of lower secondary school and a minimum age of twenty, or five years' work experience and a minimum age of twenty-five

Distance-Education System

Information science, like other subjects at STOU, is taught through the distance-education system, which enables students in diverse localities to undertake the course of study by themselves, matching their individual needs in terms of time, interest, and readiness. Instruction is given through media that consist of textbooks, workbooks, reading materials, cassette tapes, and radio and television programs. Self-study is supplemented by tutorials at local study centers.

Figure 1 outlines the distance-teaching system of the "STOU Plan."

As can be seen from the diagram, the first stage of the "STOU Plan" in the distance-teaching system involves *identifying the educational needs of the target groups* through preliminary surveys and research.

The second stage is *curriculum*

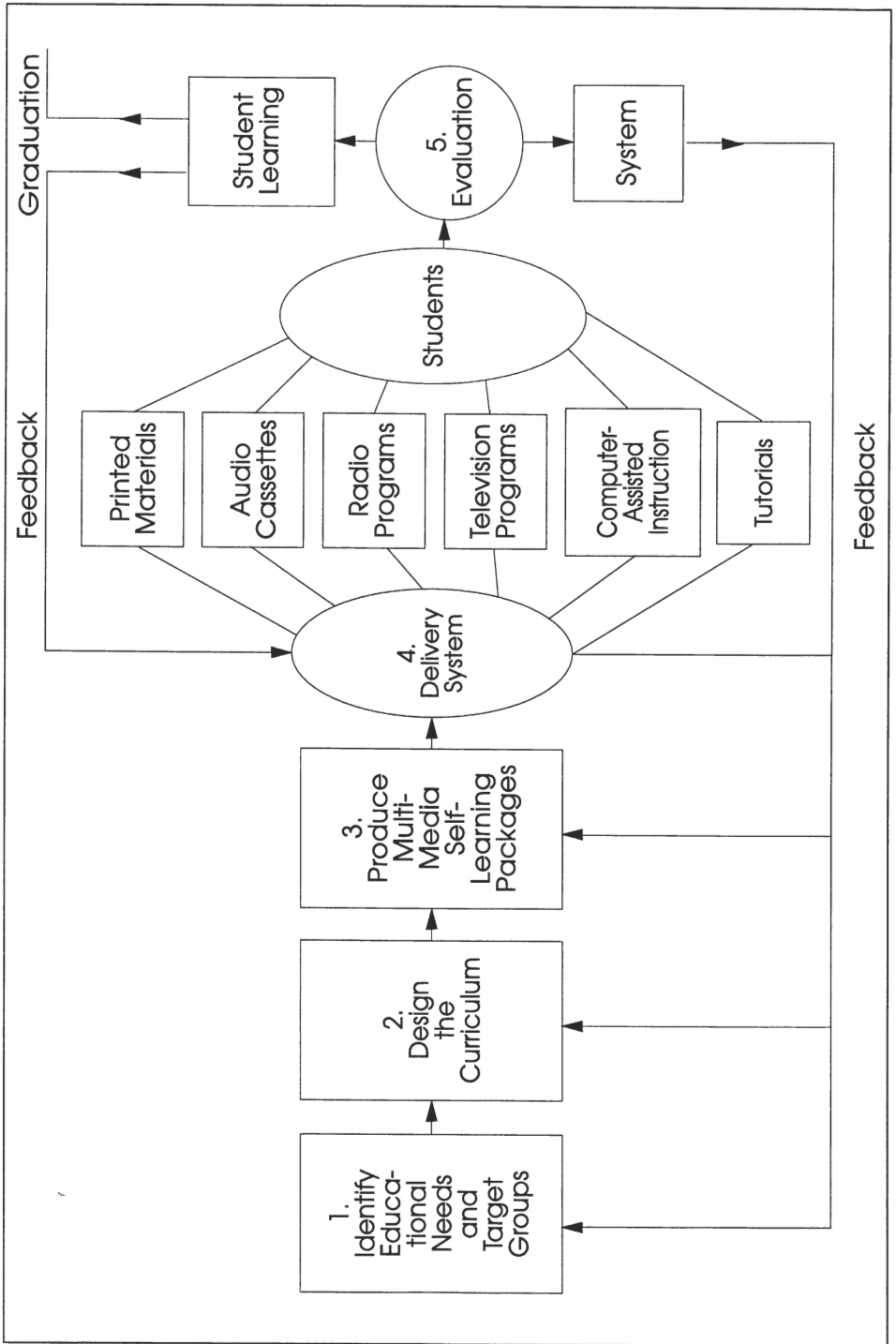


Figure 1. Distance-Education System of the "STOU Plan"

development. The structure of the curriculum must be set up in such a way as to facilitate the use of distance-teaching techniques. The academic structure in the "STOU Plan" is based on the principle of course integration. It is thus primarily of an interdisciplinary nature.

The third stage involves selecting and producing the *teaching media* approach, based on the following five criteria: availability, accessibility, acceptability, validity, and economy. Printed materials are the main or core medium. Audio cassette tapes and videotapes, radio and television programs, and special tutorial sessions are the supplementary media.

It should be noted that STOU printed course materials are produced not by single academics but by course teams, each of which comprises some seven outstanding content specialists, one educational technologist, and one evaluation specialist. Apart from these content specialists who also serve as course writers, there are also a varying number of course writers who are not course team members. Some course teams and writers are full-time staff of the relevant schools; others are experts drawn from various universities and agencies, including some from the private sector. In the case of producing information science texts, for example, experts in information science and related fields were called upon to produce course materials for just the two-year bachelor's degree program in general information science alone.

In producing teaching media packages according to the "STOU Plan," the first step is the production of the printed texts and workbooks. After that, selected portions of the texts are used as the basis for tapes, radio and TV programs, and tutorial session workbooks. These latter media are considered as supplements to the printed materials, the core medium. The completed teach-

ing package is thus in the form of a multimedia self-learning package.

The fourth stage involves establishing *delivery systems* in order to communicate knowledge to the students. The printed materials are sent by mail to the student's home, and radio and TV programs are aired at the same time throughout the country. The tutorial sessions are held on weekends at the local study centers located in each province. The distance-education system established according to the "STOU Plan" is thus in the nature of home-based education.

The fifth stage consists of *evaluation and follow-up*, which are of two types. The first is evaluation of student learning through final examinations held each semester at the local study center to which the students have been assigned, and the examinations are held at the same time throughout the country. The second type of evaluation is system evaluation, which is conducted in order to obtain feedback that can be used to improve the effectiveness of the curriculum and teaching/learning process.

Practical Experience Programs

Prior to graduation, students in the Information Science Program participate in the following pregraduation programs as organized by the university. The objectives are to:

- a. Enable students to realize the importance of their professions,
- b. Enable students to apply the principles and theories acquired through their studies to actual practice,
- c. Provide students with additional experiences they are otherwise unable to receive effectively through the media employed in the distance-education system,

- d. Promote various characteristics essential to the efficient establishment of a career,
- e. Provide students with the opportunity to exchange professional experiences.

The professional experience programs are practical activities that the School of Liberal Arts arranges. Students take up residence at the university for four nights and five days to participate in activities that include the following:

1. *Professional Seminar.* Resource persons in the field are invited to give speeches, answer questions, and discuss the latest developments in the information science field.
2. *Small-Group Activities.* Small-group activities, held in conjunction with students in practical experience programs at other schools, are arranged for the purpose of teaching problem solving and speech communication skills. Ethical and moral problems are discussed in the groups, which also have the purpose of promoting leadership potential and which give students practical experience in group dynamics.
3. *Practice.* Since most of the students in the Information Science Programs work in fields that are relevant to the course they are studying (e.g., libraries, information centers, and information units), it has not been found necessary for the university to formally require students to undergo practical training in the various offices dealing with information work. Consequently, most of the time established for the practical-experience program is devoted to activities that disseminate information about information analysis, information services, reference sources, and information

technologies. Besides being encouraged to discuss these topics and the systems that are relevant to their work, the students also have the chance to see videotapes that show new technologies and advances in their profession. They undergo some practical training and observe work procedures in the Office of Documentation Services and in the Office of Computer Services at STOU. The professional experience program is very important to all information science students. It is the only time when all the students have a chance to get together and build a feeling of group camaraderie. It is also a time and a chance for them to meet their teachers and to make new friends. The experiences they share in working, studying, and living together during this week leave them with the unforgettable impression of STOU's being *their* university when they return to their homes and to their work.

Conclusion

The Information Science Programs of the School of Liberal Arts of STOU are an important step forward in the education of librarians and information specialists throughout Thailand. They are unique programs because they are the first in the country and in the region to use the distance-education system. It is further hoped that they will make a major contribution to the field of information science education, not only in Thailand and Southeast Asia, but in the rest of the world as well.

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Appendix

Requirements for Bachelor's Degree and Certificate in Information Work

Bachelor's Degree in Information Science

The four-year and two-year bachelor's degree programs in information science consist of two majors, namely, (1) general information science and (2) office information science. The structure and details of the programs are as follows:

Four-year Bachelor's Degree Programs

Major in General Information Science. The total program is at least 22 courses or 132 credits comprising the following:

General foundation courses: 5 courses (30 credits)

- 10121 Man and Civilization
- 10131 Man and Society
- 10141 Science and Society
- 10151 Thai Studies

And one course selected from the following:

- 10111 Foundation English
- 10161 Effective Communication in Thai
- 10171 Interaction: Effective Communication in English

Core courses: 4 courses (24 credits)

- 10201 Thai History
- 10202 Thai Reading
- 10203 Human Behavior

Area-specific courses: 11 courses (66 credits)

- 13201 Introduction to Information Science
- 13202 Communication
- 13203 Introduction to Statistics and Research in Information Science
- 13311 Information Resources Development
- 13312 Information Analysis
- 13313 Information Services and Dissemination
- 13314 Information System Planning and Management
- 13401 Professional Experience in Information Science

And one course selected from the following:

- 13405 Management Information System
- 13413 Introduction to Information Technology

Free elective courses: 2 courses (12 credits) from any of the designated courses offered at STOU

Major in Office Information Science. The total program is at least 22 courses or 132 credits comprising the following:

General foundation courses: 5 courses (30 credits)

- 10121 Man and Civilization
- 10131 Man and Society
- 10141 Science and Society
- 10151 Thai Studies

And one course selected from the following:

- 10111 Foundation English
- 10161 Effective Communication in Thai
- 10171 Interaction: Effective Communication in English

Core courses: 4 courses (24 credits)

- 10201 Thai History
- 10202 Thai Reading
- 10203 Human Behavior
- 22222 English Reading

Area-specific courses: 11 courses (66 credits)

- 13201 Introduction to Information Science

13202 Communication

- 13203 Introduction to Statistics and Research in Information Science

- 13321 Writing for Business Communication

- 13322 Accounting and Business Law

- 13323 Financial and Operation Management

- 13401 Professional Experience in Information Science

- 13421 Office Work and Public Relations

- 13422 Organization Behavior and Marketing

- 60120 Principles of Economics

- 80204 Thai Political Economy

Free elective courses: 2 courses (12 credits) from any of the designated undergraduate courses offered at STOU.

Two-year Bachelor's Degree Programs

Major in General Information Science. The total program is at least 12 courses or 72 credits comprising the following:

General foundation course: 1 course (6 credits)

- 10151 Thai Studies

Core course: 1 course (6 credits)

- 22222 English Reading

Area-specific courses: 9 courses (54 credits)

- 13201 Introduction to Information Science

- 13202 Communication

- 13311 Information Resources Development

- 13312 Information Analysis

- 13313 Information Services and Dissemination

- 13314 Information System Planning and Management

- 13401 Professional Experience in Information Science

- 13411 Special Information

- 13412 Information Sources in Social Science, Humanities and Science

Free elective course: 1 course (6 credits) from any of the designated courses offered at STOU.

Major in Office Information Science.

The total program is at least 12 courses or 72 credits comprising the following:

General foundation course: 1 course (6 credits)

- 10151 Thai Studies

Core courses: 2 courses (12 credits)

- 10202 Thai Reading

- 22222 English Reading

Area-specific courses: 8 courses—6 required courses (36 credits) and 2 elective courses (12 credits), for a total of 48 credits

Required courses.

- 13201 Introduction to Information Science

- 13321 Writing for Business Communication

- 13323 Financial and Operation Management

- 13401 Professional Experience in Information Science (Note: Students must register for this course in the final semester.)

13421 Office Operations and Public Relations

80204 Thai Political Economy

Elective courses. One course to be selected from the following:

10203 Human Behavior

13202 Communication

13422 Organization Behavior and Marketing

And one course selected from the following:

13322 Accounting and Business Law

60120 Principles of Economics
Free elective course: 1 course (6 credits) from any of the designated undergraduate courses offered by STOU.

Certificate in Information Work

The one-year certificate program in information work consists of two areas of study, namely, (1) general information work and (2) office information work. The total program is at least 5 courses or 30 credits comprising the following:

General Information Work.

Required courses: 3 courses (18 credits)

13201 Introduction to Information Science

13312 Information Analysis

13313 Information Services and Dissemination

Elective courses: 2 courses (12 credits)

One course to be selected from the following:

13411 Special Information

13412 Information Sources in Social Sciences, Humanities and Science

And one course selected from the following:

13202 Communication

13311 Information Resources Development

13314 Information System Planning and Management

Office Information Work.

Required courses: 3 courses (18 credits)

13201 Introduction to Information Science

13321 Writing for Business Communication

13421 Office Operations and Public Relations

Elective courses: 2 courses (12 credits)

One course to be selected from the following:

13322 Accounting and Business Law

13323 Financial and Operation Management

60120 Principles of Economics

And one course selected from the following:

10203 Human Behavior

13202 Communication

13422 Organization Behavior and Marketing