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QUALITY ASSURANCE OF INFORMATION SCIENCE PROGRAM: CHIANG MAI UNIVERSITY

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Abstract. Quality Assurance System has been implemented in Thai universities since 1997, initiated by the Ministry of University Affairs. According to the National Education Act 1999, the Office of Education Standards and Evaluation was set up to respond for external assessment while educational institutions do internal assessment. The Information Studies Programs, Chiang Mai University uses QA system and mechanisms as tools to improve quality. Two main elements need strongly support are faculty development and research.

Introduction

The Eight National Higher Education Development Plan (1997-2001) saw 'quality and excellence' as one of six main policies. The Ninth Plan (2002-2006) obviously stipulates quality as the main emphasis of the overall implementation. The Ministry of University Affairs, which was in charge of universities, announced its quality assurance policy and guiding directions on July 8, 1996. The policy has stipulated that all universities improve their academic quality. The MUA has assured the quality of higher education through quality control of the study programs with minimum requirements set for public and private higher education institutions. (Ministry of University Affairs, 2002a)

The National Education Act, promulgated on August 19, 1999 gives strong support to quality assurance, The law focus on unity in policies and diversity in implementation, quality and standards of education, access in education by all, professional standards of teaching personnel, decentralization of education administration, mobilization of resources, education technology, and integration of life-long learning in the Thai society. (Ministry of University Affairs, 2002b)

Since 1997 QA system and mechanism were developed, extensive campaigns to create QA awareness were made. From 1997 to 2005 QA system and mechanism were adapted in higher education institutions step by step as follows:

-1997 QA system and mechanism were developed and extensive campaigns to create QA awareness were made.

-1998 Staff development programs for higher education institutions began.

-1999 Training of external auditors was initiated while The National Education Act 1999 was promulgated, stipulating that there must be internal and external QA for all education levels, and that an office for education standards and education would be set up to take responsible for educational quality assurance.

-2000 The Office of Education Standards and Evaluation (OESE) was promulgated. The Ministry of University Affairs changed its role to seeing only internal QA while OESE responds for external assessment of universities.

-2002 Ministry of University Affairs was amalgamated with the Ministry of education. Universities are under the Office of National Education Commission (Ministry of University Affairs, 2002b)

- 2000-2005 OESE performed external assessment to all higher education institutions as planned.

The above mentioned development have enhanced growth of the university quality in teaching and learning activities, research, academic services as well as culture and environment conservation. The external assessment is done in the university level, which the internal assessment done in the faculty level. To provide for internal assessment each faculty sets quality assessment mechanism at the department level.

Standard Criteria of Thai Higher Education

The Ministry of Education passed the latest announcement of the Standard Criteria of Undergraduate Programs (Ministry of Education, 2005b) and Graduate Programs on Feb 21, 2005 (Ministry of Education, 2005a)

The undergraduate programs standard criteria cover:

- Philosophy and objectives of the programs
- Academic years
- Study credit equivalence
- Number of credits and study duration
- Structure of study programs
- Number and qualifications of faculty members
- Admission requirement
- Registration
- Assessment criteria and graduation
- Degree designation
- Quality assurance of the programs
- Curriculum development

The graduate programs standard criteria covers:

- Philosophy and objectives of the programs
- Academic years
- Study credit equivalence
- Structure of study programs
- Transfer of credits
- Number and qualifications of faculty members
- Workload of academic supervisors for dissertations and independent studies
- Admission requirement
- Registration and duration of study
- Graduation criteria
- Degree designation
- Quality assurance of the programs
- Curriculum development

Requirements of the Quality Assurance of both undergraduate and graduate programs stated that each program has to clearly determine a quality assurance system which covers at least four elements, i.e. 1) curriculum administration 2) resources for learning, teaching and research 3) students support and advice 4) need of job markets, social and/or graduate users satisfaction.

Information Studies Program, Library Science Department, Chiang Mai University

Background

The Library Science Department was found in 1968 in the Faculty of Humanities, offered an undergraduate program in Library Science and a course on Introduction to Library Science to students from other fields, Graduate program on Library and Information Science opened in 1996 and paused in 1999 to revise the curriculum and offered again in 2005.

Programs of study

Master of Information Science offers a two year program for candidates who already hold a Bachelor's Degree in any field.

Bachelor of Information Science offers a four year program to students who have completed 12 years of schooling.

According to the Standard Criteria, curriculum has to be developed at least once in every five years. Employers are to be in the curriculum development committee to give comment and suggestion.

Students

30 undergraduates each academic year, total 120.

23 graduates (one academic year of 2005).

Faculty staff

	Academic title	Degree held		
		MLS / MIS	MSc.Comp	MSc IT
Associate Prof.	3	3	-	-
Assistant Prof.	4	3	-	1
Lecturers	2	1	1*	-
	9	7	1	1

*PhD candidate

Research

Financial support is from Faculty of Humanities, Chiang Mai University and Research Council of Thailand. Number of research in the last five years is 12. Some of them are published in the journals and conference proceedings.

Resources for Learning, Teaching and Research

classroom	2
computer lab	2
server NT	2
computer pc	40
laser printer	3
ink jet printer	2
bar code reader	1
video projector	2
visualizer	1
library	Students and faculties can use the university central library , faculty libraries and department library which provide books, journals, CD-ROM, e-book, on-line database and e-thesis.

Student support and advice

Advisor: student	
General advisor	
Graduate program	1:5
Undergraduate program	1:15
Thesis advisor*	1:5
Independent study advisor*	1:15
Student activities advisor	1
*qualification and number are consistent with the criteria of Ministry of Education	

Satisfaction of the employers

Knowledge and skills on library and information Centers, IT, information resource, services are rated 4 from 1-5 seals. Other qualifications, i.e. an ability to learn; knowledge application in jobs; continuous self-development, communication skill, language skill, creative thinking, flexibility, commitment, ethics, etc. were rated 4.14 from 1-4 scales. Suggestions from the users of the graduates are to acquire more knowledge/skills on strategic planning, foreign language, seminar/conference monitoring, public relation, management and contribution.

Community Services

Radio program and on-line articles contributed by faculties of Library Science Department.
 Software program for cataloging and indexing developed by faculties distributed to school libraries free of charge.
 Book course service to disadvantage people providing books to homeless people in an urban area.
 Gift of books to rural schools responsible by undergraduate students.

Remarks

Although QA system has been implemented for nearby ten years there still are a lot to do. Two main elements are:

- *Faculty development* The Faculty Administration should set strategic plan to develop faculty staff. Assessment should be used as a tool to consider which areas are needed. Financial support for those activities should be prepared accordingly.
- *Research strengthening*. Financial support for research activities come from the university and lately the faculty.

Faculty members are required to do research, especially ones who get the associate professor or professor titles must have their publications in the international peer review journals or conference proceedings at least 2 articles per person each year. Though every faculty member has done research, few of them are published in the international journals or proceedings. Things need to be done, as Professor Shih Choon Fong (2000) suggested, are: 1) Establishing an International Academic Advisory Panels to review research output and advise on directions of the research. 2) Evaluation of the research project. 3) Assessment of research publications. Another reason for not writing to the international journal might be the English language limitation. This can be overcome by providing language correction in the faculty level.

Benchmarking is one of the good mechanisms to improve quality.

Lately the Commission on Higher Education held a QA Roadmap Brainstorm to set up the Quality Development and Standard for Thai Higher Education Plan for the next 5-15 years (Commission for Higher Education, 2005)

Conclusion

QA system has been implemented in the high education for nine years to enhance growth of university quality in teaching and learning, research academic, community service and culture and environment conservation. Information Studies Programs, Chiang Mai University through QA system and mechanism have developed their quality accordingly. Two main elements to take action seriously are the faculty development and research strengthening. The administrative at the university and faculty level should provide support.

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