

The present condition and administrative issues of e-learning programs in Suratthani Rajabhat University

Fumiko Inoue¹ and Tokuji Hayashi²

¹ Faculty of Education, Suratthani Rajabhat University
272 M.9 Tambon Khunthalay Amphur Muang Suratthani 84100, Thailand
Tel: +66-7735-5645, Fax: +66-7735-5646

² Faculty of Education, Yamaguchi University
1677-1 Yoshida, Yamaguchi 753-8513, Japan
Tel: +81-83-933-5461, Fax: +81-83-933-5461
E-mail: ¹ purima@d9.dion.ne.jp, ² hayashi9@yamaguchi-u.ac.jp

Abstract: The e-learning programs at the Suratthani Rajabhat University were established three years ago. The various programs provide students to enhance their capabilities. About two thousand students and almost two hundred teachers are registered in this program so far.

In this article, we report the present condition and administrative issues of the e-learning programs.

1. Introduction

The e-learning programs at the Suratthani Rajabhat University in Thailand were established three years ago (2005) It provides various programs to aid students to grasp better understanding in the class and help them to improve their achievement. About two thousand students and one hundred thirty six teachers (Last updated May 15, 2008) are registered in this program so far. However some administrative challenges have occurred since then. Some examples are; system crashes, not sufficient computers for the students, low quality curriculum content and intrusion to the teacher's site by some students. In this article, we report the present condition and administrative issues of e-learning programs at the Suratthani Rajabhat University (SRU).

2. Background

From the '1999 National Education Act', the Thai government made a great effort to improve the educational system in Thailand. They believe that high quality education is essential to the development of human resources, especially in this epoch of globalization. In the 'Education in THAILAND 2005/2006' [1], the government insisted on the importance of higher education as follows;

'Higher education is essential to human resource development, especially in this era of globalization, where a country's international competitiveness depends a great deal on the capability of its citizens to thrive in a knowledge-based economy and society.' (p.71)

Table1. Student Enrolment in Higher Education Institutions

Levels of Education	Academic Years		
	2002	2003	2004
Diploma	439,363	400,071	397,127
Undergraduate	1,371,058	1,396,242	2,436,940
Certificate	2,138	4,139	8,353
Master Degree	108,774	120,116	142,845
Doctorate	5,120	8,040	8,234
Total	1,926,453	1,928,608	2,993,499

Source: OEC, Thailand Education Statistics Reports, 2002-2004

Therefore the Office of the Higher Education Commission proposed a roadmap to serve as guiding principle for promoting and developing the quality of Thai higher education. And one of the new projects to enhance Thailand's competitiveness is establish the 'Thailand Cyber University (TCU) [2]' (Figure1). Surprisingly the students' enrolment in higher education institutions in Thailand, including that of the Open Universities, rose continuously (Table1).

'Internationally, e-learning has become a widespread tool in both conventional and open teaching and learning, and the popularity of e-learning in Thailand is increasing recently...' ('Education in THAILAND 2005/2006', p.79).

In early 2005, the government approved a 5-year budget of Bht.600 million to encourage university participation in a pilot project 'The TCU Program' initiated by the Office of Higher Education Commission. They promote low-cost online learning in higher and lifelong education, and IT (Information Technology) literacy enhancement as well as generating a knowledge-based society. The Suratthani Rajabhat University was involvement at the on set of this project.

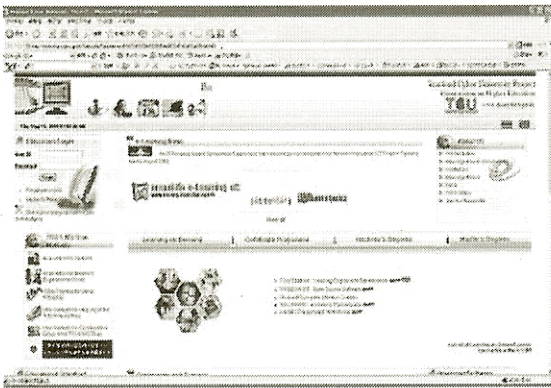


Figure1. Thailand Cyber University, Home page
 Source: <http://www.thaicyperu.go.th/>

3. Thailand Cyber University (TCU)

The Thailand Cyber University (TCU) currently offers Master's Degrees courses, Bachelor's Degrees courses, Certificate Program and Learning on Demand contents (Figure2). It involves 42,449 registered users (2,434 teachers and 40,015 students) so far (Table2) and they have also access to its e-learning components such as, the e-library, the e-classroom, the e-community and the e-learning professional development.

The objectives of TCU are;

- To assist all the Higher Education Institutes to deliver distance learning programs via the Internet.
- To ensure that all online courses are of a high quality and meet government standards.
- To promote the sharing of teaching resources and human resources.

List of self-pack learning courses			
No.	Course ID	Course Name	University
Subject: Humanities, Religion and Theology			
Sub-subject: Linguistics			
1	2543006	French I	Group of Universities supported by CHE
2	2546001	French for Tourism	Group of Universities supported by CHE
3	CU-5503204-1	English for Academic Purpose I	Chulalongkorn University
4	CU-5503281-1	Technical English	Chulalongkorn University
5	TCU-2549052	e-Learning Thai Language	Chang Mai University

Figure2. Thailand Cyber University, Page for the list of self-pack learning courses
 Source: *rptCourseList_SelfPackLearning_Office_NotThai.pdf*

Participating universities receive free courseware as well as a copy of the Learning Management System developed by Chulalongkorn University to assist partner universities in managing student time, attendance, courseware guideline, meetings and examinations.

Students for courseware development, hardware requirement, and measurement of study credits in each curriculum are formulated by the *Office of the Higher Education Commission* to ensure the quality of online education. The government expects that the project will help increase educational access to those people wishing to pursue higher education who are unable to attend classes. In the *'Education in THAILAND 2005/2006'*, the Thai government mentioned that the anticipation to this project as follows;

'The system and continual improvement of higher education is essential to enable institutions to produce graduates of high caliber in accordance with the requirements of the country's social and innovation, research and development needed for the transformation into a knowledge-based economy and society.' (p.80)

Table2. Thailand Cyber University; since opening on Jan.12th 2005

	Contents	Number
1	Number of registered users	42,449
	- Students	40,015
	- Teachers	2,434
2	Number of courses	428
3	Number of study programs	16
4	Number of course registrations	63,780
5	Number. of times students have studied courses	890,759
6	Universities in Consortium	27

Source: TCU Homepage, Last updated: May 1, 2008

4. Present condition of e-learning in Suratthani Rajabhat University

The Suratthani Rajabhat University which was renewed from the Suratthani Rajabhat Institute in 1995 has nearly six thousand students and five hundred teachers now. It is organized in four Faculties (Education, Science and Technology, Management Science and Humanities and Social Science), International School of Tourism and Graduate School.

The Suratthani Rajabhat University participated to TCU in 2005, and the e-learning system is administrated by a Computer Center where an operator is coordinating

the e-learning programs (Figure3-5).

The e-learning system in the Suratthani Rajabhat University utilizes 'Windows 2003' Operating System, 'Microsoft SQL 2005' as the database, and The Web Application is provided by TCU.

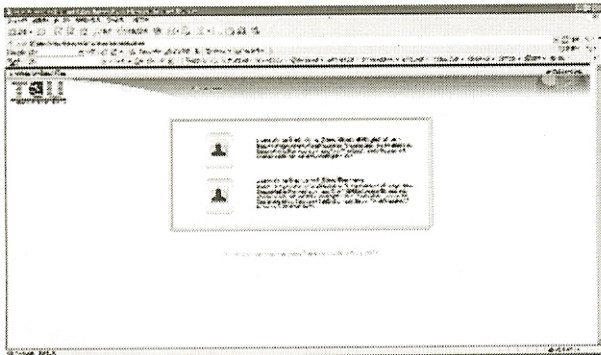


Figure3. Suratthani Rajabhat University, Registration page for the student and teacher. [3]

Source: <http://e-learning.sru.ac.th/tcu/main/masterdefault.asp>

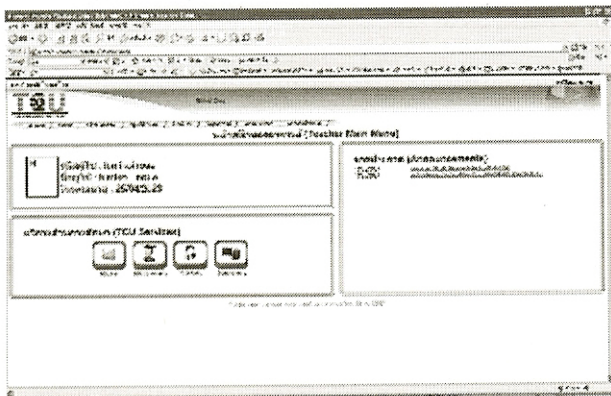


Figure4. Suratthani Rajabhat University, Menu page for teachers.

Source: <http://e-learning.sru.ac.th/tcu/main/menu.asp>

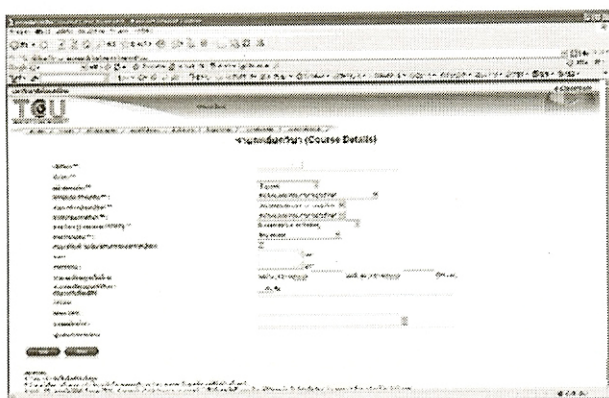


Figure5. Suratthani Rajabhat University, Page for editing the course for teachers.

Source: <http://e-learning.sru.ac.th/tcu/courses/courseedit.asp>

One hundred thirty six teachers in our university are registered to the e-learning programs so far (Last updated: May 15, 2008)

And nearly two thousand students are registered to the e-learning program. The students usually use this program in the Computer Center, the Library and their homes.

Figure6 is the flow of e-learning process in the Suratthani Rajabhat University.

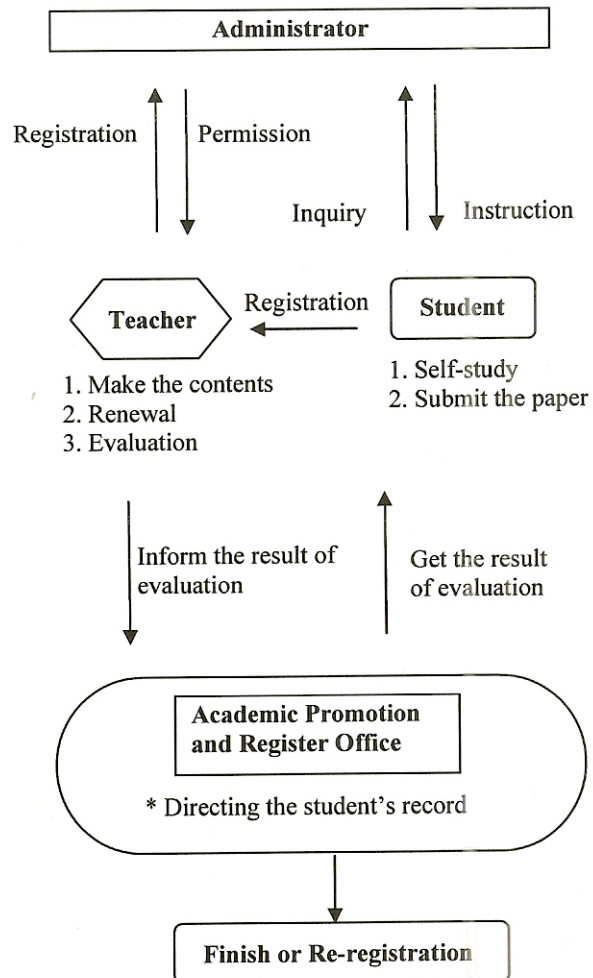


Figure6. The flow of e-learning process in the Suratthani Rajabhat University

According to the administrator's comment, the students usually prefer e-learning, because they can study wherever and whenever they please.

However he also mentions that organizational and administrative hurdles need to be overcome to ensure smooth running of the e-learning program. Some of the weightier issues to be resolved are;

1. The number of computers in SRU is not sufficient for students; the number of students is about thirty

thousand, but only one thousand computers are available at this present time.

2. There is only one person as the administrator for the e-learning system. As he is not a specialized system employee, he is not always capable to correspond quickly when problems arise on the system.
3. Occasionally some teachers upload large size documents or visual contents and the students encounter problems downloading.
4. Most of the teachers don't know how to produce multimedia contents, so most of the learning contents consist only of text, with the consequence that the students become board at times.
5. The teachers don't have sufficient time when they intent to produce audio/video contents. Moreover another challenge is the absence of expert personnel to assist the teachers in their multimedia creations.
6. The absence of an E-learning Curriculum Overseer to check or scrutinize the e-learning contents. Due to this the contents of each subject are barely updated much less improved.
7. Unfortunately some students impersonating teachers hack into the teachers' sites and attempt to obtain data.

5. Conclusion

The objective of this article is to introduce the Thailand Cyber University (TCU) and to review the present administrative and organizational challenges of the e-learning programs at the Suratthani Rajabhat University.

Owing to the increasing number of people's ambition to pursue higher education through e-learning system such as the TCU we are morally obliged to outline our findings regarding the administrative and organizational issues on the e-learning programs at the Suratthani Rajabhat University.

The main issues summed up are;

1. A matter of study facilities, such as the lack of sufficient computers.
2. A matter of personnel, e.g. there is only one person to function as system administrator.
3. A matter of insufficient capacity of the Network.
4. A matter of the teachers' incompetence to create computer based programs or other contemporary media technology.
5. A matter of immoral conduct by some students impersonating teachers and hacking into the teachers' sites.

There is no doubt that e-learning offers more various and easier opportunities. It also functions as one of the most useful tools for education, and it might become one of the main means to follow a course of study in the near future.

Therefore it is of utmost importance to strive to find solutions to the aforementioned issues in this report in order to improve the study circumstances for the students.

However we must keep in mind that a human being still has need of a personal face to face communication in spite of the rapid development of education through the use of the impersonal Information Technology.

Lastly, I would like to thank of Mr. Parinya Noidonprai, administrator of e-learning program in the Suratthani Rajabhat University for his cooperation to this article.

References

- [1] Office of the Education Council, Ministry of Education, Kingdom of Thailand, '*Education in THAILAND 2005/2006*'
- [2] Thailand Cyber University, available at <http://www.thaicyperu.go.th/>
- [3] Suratthani Rajabhat University, available at <http://www.sru.ac.th>