

the students who come to the university have a clear need of remediation. Outside of Phnom Penh and other major urban areas few schools have libraries, much less laboratories. In addition, most students from the countryside have had little exposure to foreign languages. Thus, as the university moves toward a credit unit system, it is likely that somewhere near 155 credit units will be required for graduation rather than on average 120 units required in the United States.

Within the context of sharply constrained national resources and the lack of large donors, the resource issues have been persistent. To help solve them, government has recently granted the university permission to charge tuition. It is hoped these funds will be used to enhance academic quality through the rationalization and upgrading

of staff and further program development.

In a country where up to 90 percent of the educated population were killed, we have a long way to go to produce graduates with the dedication and skills needed to guide Cambodia into a secure future. But we have also come a long way. The university has been reestablished. Improvements, even if small incrementally, have a large cumulative effect. Growth has been constant: enrollments and program offerings have increased, library and laboratories reopened, faculty and staff given short-term training, and a few sent for higher academic degrees. This progress is in large measure owing to the efforts of the university's Cambodian staff, who despite difficult conditions and low pay have given willing hands and hearts to the work of building the future. ■

Two Years after the "Thaitanic"

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After Thailand floated the baht on July 2, 1997, the basically bankrupt country had to request a \$16.7 billion loan from the International Monetary Fund. With negative growth of -9.4 percent in 1998, the economy is now expected to grow 3 to 4 percent in 1999. This past September, the government did not have to take the final installment of its IMF loan. Policy makers express guarded optimism that the economy is on the way to recovery, spurred on by a stable macroeconomic environment, improved investor sentiment, and successful implementation of key legal reforms. Even so, the recovery is slower than many had hoped. Huge non-performing loans currently stand at 45 percent of total lending for the entire financial system. While re-capitalization and massive debt restructuring continue, Thailand's real per capita GDP is not expected to return to the 1996 pre-crisis level of 70,000 baht until the year 2005.

Budget Cuts

Within this context, higher education in Thailand has had to face its own challenges. Early attempts to institute budget cuts have continued with belt-tightening policies on the use of office supplies and utilities, organizing or attending conferences, and opening new courses. In some individual units of public universities, extra revenues from community service projects help to purchase badly needed equipment or offset the lack of central funds in other ways. However, only larger, more popular departments have such resources with which to support themselves.

According to Brother Simeon Anupatt P. Yuttachai, Vice-President for Financial Affairs at Assumption University, the crisis has demanded new projections of monthly cash flow in order to assure completion of its new campus, now in construction for over five years. Nothing has been scrapped in the original plans, but construction has slowed down to match possible monthly payments. The campus is still scheduled for a soft opening in June 2000, with fewer buildings completed. At other universities, like state-owned Srinakharinwirot, buildings under construction are being completed, but new construction that has already gained approval has been put on hold.

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Hiring Freezes

Like most other universities, Assumption University declared a freeze on hiring last year. However, this policy is implemented with great flexibility so that departments under expansion may still hire additional full-time staff. State universities have a more rigid policy. Only 20 percent of the positions made available by retirement may be replaced, and the hiring freeze will stand until a new salary range for non-civil servants is set. Many have taken government incentives for early retirement in units like Ramkhamhaeng's Faculties of Law and Political Science, but the 20 percent replacement rate applies to the entire university rather than to individual units. As a result, the situation may become more labor-intensive for remaining lecturers because class sizes necessarily become larger. In departments that were overstaffed, however, the hiring freeze will not have so nega-

tive an impact upon instruction. Moreover, restructuring to eliminate duplication of services helps to pool resources and to equalize workloads from department to department.

Shifts in Student Enrollment

While Thailand's forty private institutions of higher learning have all experienced expansion in their life-span of the past 36 years, they have had to face a reduction in student enrollments since the inception of the crisis. These students are gravitating to the state-run Rajaphat Institutes, universities upgraded from former teachers' colleges like Srinakharinwirot, and the open university Ramkhamhaeng, where enrollment increased some 20 percent in the past year, for a total now approaching 100,000 students. Even a prestigious private university like Assumption, which has not experienced significant decreases in the past two years, has had a smaller number of students applying for the second semester intake than a year ago. Of course, student enrollments affect a university's cash flow. With its mass numbers of students, Ramkhamhaeng is likely to have enough funds to meet its obligations even after autonomy from government control. Conversely, a decrease in student numbers can lead to losses of income that may affect development or force some private universities to curtail existing programs.

Prognosis for the Future

Given the state of flux in which Thai society finds itself at the moment, it is hard to predict the future for Thai higher education. Many are convinced that the present government is strongly committed to quality education on all levels, despite recent criticisms of the way it is handling privatization. However, elections are slated for next year, and what the next government will do for education remains a key question. Historically, there has often been a lack of continuity in policy from government to government, with a temptation for vested interests to return to square one with each new government.

Thai universities can expect to cope with more stress, more staff pressures, and larger classes in the years to come. In a context of strong competition for qualified staff, less established universities will need stronger human resource development and better professional training of existing staff. Overstaffed Faculties will have to become leaner and meaner. For things to turn out well, universities will need a system of greater accountability and greater rewards, especially higher, equitable salaries and a good working atmosphere to maintain morale.

As Ministry control is lessened or eliminated by the year 2002, some nation-wide unit for evaluation like the National Education Commission will probably take on the role of accrediting agency. As the universities gain more independence from Ministry control, each will need to strengthen quality assurance through internal audits. At

present, external examining committees are only in place for the private universities. In the future, instructors in the public universities can expect a similar system together with performance evaluations by students like those already used in some graduate schools.

According to Brother Bancha Saenghiran, Vice-President for Academic Affairs at Assumption, private universities need to proceed with caution. They must find ways to cope with major changes outside their control. Investment must go on, crisis or not, and they must uncover new sources of funding for continued development. In order to survive, not to mention compete, they must above all raise existing programs to national and international standards.

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One positive impact of the economic crisis that Brother Bancha has observed is a wiser set of attitudes towards spending and consumerism in the general public. Students and their parents increasingly demand a stronger correlation between cost, course, and outcome. They also recognize the need for better structuring of operations across the board. They are becoming greater stakeholders in the educational enterprise than in the past. On the national level, a greater stress upon quality assurance and good governance comes not only from reflection on failed practices, but also from the new national constitution in effect since 1997. Its stress upon the timely values of transparency, accountability, and participation is leading to a shift in models in society that will also affect every aspect of education.

In *Higher Education in the 21st Century: Global Challenge and National Response*, Philip G. Altbach and Todd M. Davis have identified ten "issue clusters" as "central to current developments in higher education worldwide." The economic crisis has intensified Thai responses to some of these. With their need to find alternative funds, universities are opening more certificate programs, short-term courses, company training programs, and graduate courses. Coincidentally, these programs help meet the increasing "demand for education throughout the life cycle" so that "those in the workforce" can cope with the evolving nature of work. Likewise, the many students returning to the country as a result of the crisis may assist in finding ways "by which talent can flourish in the soils that originally nurtured it" and thus reduce brain drain. As with every crisis, opportunities lie hidden in its folds. ■