

### *Educational Model*

The traditional college operates on a scholarly discipline model where the disciplines are the context for conveying the cultural heritage, for posing the questions that have perplexed humankind over the ages, for engendering new questions, and for teaching the methods of disciplinary inquiry. Students interact with the best ideas and minds, both historical and contemporary. The Phoenix model, on the other hand, has a more behaviorist starting point focusing on the competencies that the student needs and the most efficient and effective ways to develop these outcomes in the student. These different starting points, perhaps more than any of the other differences noted above, illustrate the contrast between the goals of the University of Phoenix and a traditional institution.

### *Conclusion*

I proposed that by comparing the University of Phoenix to a traditional college, we could learn something about both. The sharp focus and efficient organization of the Phoenix plan are impressive. The intent is not to displace traditional colleges but to target its systems-oriented, highly efficient approach to a narrowly defined segment of the population that it regards as underserved. By providing good service in its just-in-time mode, it helps its consumers in their careers and simultaneously makes a profit.

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This narrow, pragmatic focus is in sharp contrast to the world of traditional higher education with its lofty and expansive mission statements, its complex sense of obligation and service to society, and its commitment, albeit often vague, to a liberally educated populace. As the analysis above suggests, the for-profit approach is a very different model, not only in its exclusive focus on career-oriented students, but also in its instructional design, in its unbundling of the traditional faculty role, in its education industry orientation, in its emphasis on students as consumers, and in its corporate rather than academic organizational structure. For-profits do not want to emulate traditional colleges and, except for some institutions with profit-making adult career education as part of their portfolios, likely pose little threat. But by implementing a model that proposes to be higher education while at the same time leaving out most of the assumptions and goals that traditional higher education holds dear, they challenge traditional colleges and universities to reexamine how committed and effective they are in maintaining those assumptions and achieving those goals. ■

## Quality Assurance Initiatives in Thailand

### **Grant Harman**

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Major efforts are currently under way to implement a new quality assurance system in Thailand for both public and private sectors of higher education. These efforts have followed passage of the 1999 National Education Act, which required the establishment of a new formal educational standards and quality assurance system for the whole education sector.

These efforts in Thailand parallel similar developments in a number of other countries throughout the Asia Pacific region. Within the region, governments are increasingly recognizing the importance of the standards of academic and professional qualifications in the new era of globalization and increased international competitiveness. They also see the need for new efforts to ensure that courses meet both employer and student needs, as well as securing wider international recognition.

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Thailand has a large and comprehensive higher education system, comprising both public and private sectors and both degree-granting and subdegree institutions. At present, higher education is under the control or supervision of 10 different ministries. Currently, there are some 645 institutions, not counting branch campuses. A total of 74 institutions are under the Ministry of University Affairs (MUA), 489 under the Ministry of Education (MOE), and 82 specialized institutions under other ministries. Under the control and supervision of the MUA are 20 regular public universities, 4 autonomous public universities, and 50 private universities. Institutions under the MOE include 36 *rajabhats*.

In 2000, the higher education system had a total of 1,639,149 students studying in institutions classified as degree-level institutions, of whom 29 percent were studying at degree level. Nearly one-quarter of the higher

education age group is enrolled in higher education institutions excluding open universities. However, following the change in economic conditions since 1997, there has been some reduction in both the total number of secondary school and higher education enrollments.

Thailand began a process of reform of higher education in the late 1980s when the MUA prepared the first 15-year Higher Education Plan covering the period 1990 to 2004. The 8th National Higher Education Plan for the period 1997 to 2001 indicated that one of the six main policy directions would relate to quality and excellence. New quality assurance policies and guiding directions were announced in July 1996, and these stipulated that all universities improve and enhance their efforts for achieving quality of instruction and an appropriate academic learning environment. One of the main principles articulated was that all higher education institutions will establish quality management systems and work consistently to improve their performance. Subsequent important steps included establishing procedures for internal and external quality assurance, developing manuals, running some pilot audits, and establishing performance indicators.

These efforts were followed by the 1999 National Education Act, which legislated for extensive and comprehensive educational reforms affecting both public and private education sectors. The MOE, the MUA, and the Office of the National Education Commission are to be merged into a new Ministry of Education, Culture and Religion. The public sector role in higher education is to be changed from being regulatory to supervisory, while the mission of higher education is being redirected more toward societal participation, student-centered learning, and life-long learning. In 2002, all public universities will gain increased autonomy.

With regard to quality assurance, the 1999 National Education Act required establishment of a new system of quality assurance and assessment for higher education, which includes both internal and external reviews. The recently established Office of Education Standards and Evaluation (OESE) is responsible for development of criteria and methods of external evaluation and for managing the program of external evaluations. All educational institutions are required to receive an external quality evaluation at least once every five years, and the results are to be submitted to the relevant agencies and made available to the public. Educational institutions are required to prepare appropriate documentation and evidence and arrange for their personnel, governing bodies, parents, and others to provide additional information at the request of the OESE and external agencies certified by the OESE for conducting external evaluations.

In cases where an external evaluation shows that an educational institution has not reached the standard required, the OESE must submit a report to the parent organization recommending corrective action to improve performance. In cases where corrective measures are not implemented, the OESE is required to report details to government agencies. "Parent organizations" with jurisdiction over higher educational institutions (ministries in the case of public institutions and owners in the case of private institutions) and the institutions themselves are responsible for establishing quality assurance systems and undertaking internal reviews.

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While private higher education institutions will continue to enjoy independence, they will follow the same rules for assessment of educational quality and standards as those for state educational institutions.

Considerable progress has been made with implementation. The OESE was established by a royal decree of October 2000, and senior staff have taken up their appointments including the director, Dr Somwung Pitikyanuwat, who has strong background in education evaluation. The OESE is required to perform a wide range of functions regarding development of the external evaluation system, including establishing criteria for external evaluation; training and certification of external evaluators; development of training materials; and submission annual reports to the Council of Ministers, the Minister of Education, Religion and Culture, and the Budget Bureau. While the importance of institutional autonomy and diversity of institutions is recognized, all institutions will be required to reach acceptable international standards.

Thailand has thus embarked on a most ambitious and comprehensive program of quality assurance and evaluation. In doing so, it seeks to draw on best practice internationally. At the same time, it is clearly recognized that the system being developed must meet the particular needs of the Thai education system and Thai society. The OESE in particular faces major challenges in the coming months in developing detailed policies and procedures and getting the system fully operational. External reviews will commence in mid-2002, and the OESE is required to complete reviews of all 645 higher education institutions within a surprisingly tight timeframe. ■