# THE OPEN UNIVERSITY OF SRI LANKA

## *D.G. Jayasuriya*

## INSTITUTIONAL PROFILE

The Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL) was set up in 1978 and enrolled its first students in 1980.

### Objectives

The prescribed objectives of OUSL are:

- to make higher education available to everyone;
- to provide mid-career training;
- to provide an opportunity to study while remaining in employment;
- to make lifelong education possible;
- to provide education even to geographically isolated areas; and
- to promote social mobility and self employment.

The OUSL is essentially an autonomous university that offers its own programmes of study leading to certificates, diplomas, degrees, and postgraduate degrees and diplomas. It also offers associate student programmes and public education programmes that do not carry formal accreditation. The system of education is designed to make higher education available to everyone in compliance with the objectives of the OUSL. It adopts a multimedia approach, which is developed to suit local requirements.

The main purpose of the OUSL is to increase educational opportunities by opening doors to people seeking higher education. It is open to all who desire a university-level education, not only those who have passed the General Certificate of Education (Advanced Level). No formal educational qualifications are required to apply for enrolment at the open university, but applicants should be 18 years of age. The open university concept is clearly popular in Sri Lanka: Enrolment figures sharply increased from 3,990 students in 1990, to 14,942 in 1991.

### Programmes

The open university conducts programmes leading to the following certificates, diplomas, and postgraduate degrees and diplomas:

- Continuing Education Programmes and Awareness Programme;
- Certificate Programme;
- Diploma Programme;
- Bachelor Degree Programme;
- Postgraduate Diploma Programme;
- Masters Degree Programme; and
- Master of Philosophy Degree Programme.

## Student Characteristics

According to a recent survey conducted by the open university, 80% of open university students are employed; 74% of the total enrolment are 26 years of age or older. Of the 14,874 students enrolled in 1990–91, 38% were female.

## Organisational Structure

The administrative structure of the university is similar to that of traditional universities. The post of chancellor is considered honourary. The vice-chancellor is the chief executive and academic officer of the university. The registrar is responsible for maintaining the records and property of the university and for its general administration. The other officers are faculty deans, the director of regional educational services, director of educational technology, librarian, and bursar. The council is the executive and academic body and governing authority of the university. The senate consists of deans and the director of educational technology, all professors, heads of academic departments, librarians, and permanent teachers that each faculty elects to the council. In total, the open university has approximately 750 staff. They are allocated to three faculties, administrative and support services, and the regional centres. About 60% of staff are nonacademic.

Apart from the main library at the central campus in Colombo, mini-libraries or reading rooms are available at all regional and study centres. The main library at the central campus is open every day from 8:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m., including weekends. Because resources are limited, the libraries are for reference purposes only. Limited lending facilities are provided for undergraduate students at the main library on the central campus. In addition, 25 public libraries, situated in main towns, cooperate with the open university in providing library facilities for distance learners.

The open university has computerised the following areas of administration to provide an efficient service to students:

- registration and personal records;
- examination records, including results; and
- student fee collection records.

# STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICE

A network of four regional centres and thirteen study centres is located across Sri Lanka to provide counselling, registration, distribution of course materials, face-to-face contact sessions, examinations, and, finally, a place for students to meet. The major objectives of student support services are:

- to create an environment conducive to distance learning;
- to facilitate the distance learning method;
- to motivate students to continue their education;
- to encourage socialisation and to promote team work and team spirit; and
- to improve the educational standards of students.

The regional and study centres provide facilities for both academic and nonacademic activities. Laboratory and workshop facilities are available at selected study centres, where students taking courses in science and technology have the opportunity to observe

demonstrations and engage in practical work. The regional and study centres maintain reference collections of mixed media packages that the university sends to students for home study. These include printed texts and workbooks, audio and video cassettes, films, and other relevant audiovisual materials, including copies of a selected number of video and audio programmes that the open university broadcasts over the Sri Lanka Television Corporation and Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation.

Although the home study materials are designed to help students learn independently, personal tuition and counselling are available at the regional centres. The open university conducts day schools and discussion groups in order to facilitate distance learning. "Computer Knowledge" students have the option of enrolling in a continuing education computer science course in addition to their academic courses. Any study problems the students encounter during their home study can be discussed at contact sessions when academic staff are available to solve learning difficulties. University teachers are available at the central campus each week during working hours and students are able to meet the staff at the central campus when required. Academic staff and regional officers act as counsellors. These counselling services are available to assist any student with problems that may be interfering with his or her full development as a student or as a person.

Non-academic facilities at the regional and study centres include short-term hostel accommodation in Colombo and other regional centres for those students who come from a distance to attend activities. Sixty male and sixty female students can be accommodated at the central campus. They pay a nominal charge for accommodation. The regional centres also provide canteens. Finally, photocopying services are provided at a subsidised rate.

Other student support services include a monthly student information system newsletter printed and mailed to all registered students the first week of every month. The newsletter gives information about nonacademic and academic activities, including examination and day school timetables. An estimated 70% of students use this newsletter to get information about activities at the open university. It helps to eliminate the communication gap between students and the university.

Limited medical facilities are available to students through the services of a qualified medical practitioner who is available for two or three days per week at the main campus.

Further, financial services are provided. A limited number of bursaries are available to students in the Bachelor of Science, Bachelor of Laws, and Diploma in Technology programmes. Students are selected based on their performance and financial need. The value of the bursary awarded to any student is equivalent to 60% of the tuition fees for an academic year. The scholarship funds are received from interest income on bursary deposits. Also, 1% of the total income from student tuition fees is allocated to the bursary fund.

The university supports a student council. Its aims and functions are to advance the interests and welfare of students, to afford a recognised means of communication between students and the university administration, and to encourage and coordinate the activities of student clubs and societies. The student council consists of 39 members, representing three faculties.

Student unions in each faculty promote peer interaction. In addition, teacher-student relation committees have been formed.

## OUTLINE OF ISSUES

### Use of Student Support

The rate of student support service use is high because resources are limited and the demand from so many students is very high. Extending the available student support services in relation to the number of students would improve the present situation and, judging from student requests, improved facilities might have some bearing on the attrition rate. Specific requests include extending to regional and study centres the student services available at the Colombo centre. These include audiovisual aids and equipment, recreational facilities, and improved library access for students.

### Funding

Grants from the University Grants Commission (UGC) are the main source of income for the open university. Grants account for approximately 70% of total income. Student fees account for 19% of income and a further 5% comes from other income. The university obtains funds from the UGC according to the number of full-time equivalent enrolments. The UGC grant must be used mainly for capital projects and for university salaries and other essential services. No specific UGC provision is made for student support services. Consequently, the open university must generate funds for student support services, with inadequate funding the main issue in extending and improving student support services at the Open University of Sri Lanka. The cost of providing support services in the distance education appears to be higher than at traditional universities.

### Interaction

In some programmes such as the Bachelor of Laws programme students demand increased face-to-face teaching components or more day schools, because they are accustomed to that approach. But as a distance education institution, the open university prefers to provide them with more printed and audiovisual materials. Although the open university promotes various student socialisation programmes through student clubs and associations, participation in extracurricular activities appears to be low compared with traditional universities for two reasons. First, employed students, who comprise 70% of the student body, have little time for socialisation. Second, the distance from their residences to the main campus and to the regional and study centres is too great.

## A VIEW TO THE FUTURE

The Open University of Sri Lanka recognises the importance of extending student support services in order to improve the quality of distance education. Improving student support services relating to academic activities has been identified as a priority area. Development plans include a new library building with modern facilities. To provide more audiovisual facilities and aids to students in order to help their home study, a modern Centre for Education Technology is being constructed with the assistance of the Japanese government. With the completion of the project more television programmes and audiovisual aids will be available for distance education.

Some specific goals the student support services must pursue are:

- to provide experimental kits and other aids for science and technology students to carry out their practical work at home;

- to increase student participation in making decisions relating to student support services;

- to explore the possibilities of raising funds from outside agencies such as provincial councils and private organisations in order to improve the student support services available at the central campus and in the regional and study centres; and

- to increase awareness among students about the student support services available at the central campus as well as at the regional and study centres.

# BANGLADESH INSTITUTE OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

## *M.D. Shahajuddin*

## INSTITUTIONAL PROFILE

Bangladesh Institute of Distance Education (BIDE) enrolled students in an experimental Bachelor of Education programme beginning in 1985–86. The basic qualification for admission in the Bachelor of Education course was a degree in arts, science, or commerce. Since the course was designed for secondary school teachers, at least two years of teaching experience was a prerequisite. During the years 1985–87, 1986–88, and 1987–89, a large number of applicants applied but only about 20% were admitted. During these three sessions 10,281 applicants were enrolled. Most were secondary school teachers; some were administrators and primary school teachers.

The Bangladesh Institute of Distance Education planned, organised, and managed the course, which was of two years' duration over four semesters. The Institute conducted examinations, scored answers, and published results with the help of 21 officers, 11 office staff, and about 10 other general support staff. In addition to BIDE staff, members of teacher training colleges in Bangladesh and the National Academy for Educational Management (NAEM) helped the BIDE run the course.

The Bachelor of Education course offered through distance education consisted of the following compulsory subjects:

- Educational Psychology;
- Principles of Education;
- History of Education;
- Educational Measurement; and
- Education and National Development.

Elective courses included:

- Bangla;
- English;
- Mathematics;
- Science;
- Social Science; and
- Geography.

Seven hundred marks were allowed for theoretical subjects and three hundred marks for practice teaching.

Staff of the BIDE were qualified professionals in various subject areas who actively participated in order to make the programme a success. The BIDE used qualified academics who were drawn from the teacher training colleges, NAEM, and the faculty at Dhaka University.

The teacher training colleges and NAEM also allowed students in the Bachelor of Education programme to use their libraries. Their faculty tutored BIDE students and members of the BIDE staff served as counsellors.

The BIDE had some limited technological resources with which to support the teaching programme. These included a studio for audio and video recording and editing as well as a mini-computer for developing print materials.

## STUDENT SERVICE PROFILE

The primary goal of the BIDE programme, to provide professional training to secondary school teachers, was furthered through the following facilities and services:

- BIDE prepared books on different subjects and supplied them to the students at a subsidised rate.

- BIDE prepared a limited number of audio and video cassettes for student use.

- BIDE provided guidance services by personal contact, and through telephone, radio, television, and newspaper media.

- Ten teacher training colleges and the NAEM provided tutorial services.

## ISSUES AND PROBLEMS

### Utilisation of Services

BIDE utilised the facilities and services of the teacher training colleges and NAEM. As these institutions provided full-time services to their regular programme students, the students of the distance education course could not derive full benefit from the teaching staff and other facilities.

### Attrition

Supervision of teaching practicals was not adequate and this contributed to attrition.

### Technology

Technological equipment and properly trained staff were lacking.

### Funding

The Bachelor of Education course was financed primarily from student tuition fees. Government provided a very limited amount of funding. However, income was not adequate to provide all possible facilities.

## A VIEW TO THE FUTURE

During the 1985–87, 1986–88, and 1987–89 sessions, BIDE enrolled 10,281 candidates, of whom 7,313 completed the Bachelor of Education course.  The results were published within a month of completing the examination and students received diplomas within six months of the publication of results.  These are noteworthy achievements in view of the usual sessional "log jam".

The success achieved by the BIDE has prompted interest among government decision makers.  Recently, the government of Bangladesh, with the financial assistance of the Asian Development Bank, established Bangladesh Open University near Dhaka city.  The government has decided to merge the Bangladesh Institute of Distance Education with Bangladesh Open University.  The vice-chancellor will work as project director to develop the infrastructure and academic departments.  Within five years the university will take complete shape.

# INDONESIAN OPEN LEARNING UNIVERSITY

## *M.G. Sembiring*

## INSTITUTIONAL PROFILE

The Indonesian Open Learning University (Universitas Terbuka) came into operation in 1984 with the following goals:

- to provide educational opportunities to students who cannot take advantage of traditional higher education programmes;

- to achieve equal access to higher education for a large segment of the population, including older, employed people who wish to upgrade their education, as well as those living in remote areas; and

- to be flexible in eligibility for enrolment, age of entry, choice of programme, method of study, conduct of examinations, and general programme operation.

The Universitas Terbuka is a state university based on a distance education design. The system relies mainly on a multimedia approach instead of face-to-face instruction as practised in the traditional universities. This multimedia approach consists of printed and recorded materials presented in modules, textbooks, audio cassettes, and videotapes, as well as tutorials. At the same time, the system provides flexibility to students in choosing and deciding when they wish to register, study, and undertake examinations.

The academic programmes the university offers consist of certificate, diploma, and sarjana programmes in three categories: non-educational, educational, and Akta programmes. The non-educational programme is carried out by three faculties: economics, social science and politics, and mathematics and natural science. The educational programme, offered by the Faculty of Education and Teacher Training, is devoted to skill upgrading for primary and secondary school teachers. The Akta programme provides professional development to teachers. The Faculty of Education and Teacher Training is responsible for carrying out the Akta programme.

These four faculties have full-time academic staff who are responsible for developing curriculum, reviewing course material, writing audio and video scripts, giving tutorials, and analysing examinations. In addition, the university's administrative staff are in charge of activities such as keeping student records, distributing study materials, and administering examinations.

Currently approximately 100,000 students are registered. The university is expecting about 400,000 more students within the next five years. The vast majority of students are working people. All students registered in the Faculty of Education and Teacher Training must be practising teachers, either in primary or secondary schools. The non-educational programme is available to anyone, provided they have a high school certificate.

The Universitas Terbuka functions from its main office in Jakarta, the capital city of the Republic of Indonesia. From there a network of 32 regional centres (also known as learning resource centres) spread throughout the country's 27 provinces. The regional

centres are located in provincial universities or teacher training institutions, and can therefore make use of existing facilities. Furthermore, the regional centres are the contact point between the university and its students.

## STUDENT SERVICE PROFILE

Broadly speaking, the regional centres provide academic, administrative, and counselling services. The centres are coordinated by a director, with the help of administrative and academic staff. These services are aimed at offering all possible assistance to students during their studies.

The organisational structure at the regional level can be divided into the following levels: the Director of Regional centre (level one), the Head of Academic Programmes (level two), the Head of General Administration (level three), and Academic and Administrative staff (level four). Most level one and level two personnel in the regional centres are part-time staff; all personnel at levels three and four are full-time staff. The level one and level two staff are normally hired from the local state university at the provincial level.

Educational facilities and library resources are limited. Regional centres do not provide the use of sophisticated equipment or technological applications such as computers or audiovisual equipment and mini-libraries to their students. Instead, the regional centres offer tutorials and advice, and they facilitate the formation of study groups. As well, they promote extracurricular activities for students.

Despite the university's multimedia approach to instruction, modular printed material is the predominant medium of instruction. The modules, in a self-instructional format, are produced by the university and provided to students. The university also uses the national television network (TVRI) and the national radio station (RRI) to deliver instruction, although to a limited extent.

Two tutorial models are employed at the Universitas Terbuka: face-to-face and written tutorials. Face-to-face tutorials are usually conducted at the regional centres by tutors hired from local state universities, using local facilities as venues for class tutorials. Previously, the regional centres provided two free tutorials every semester. However the number of tutorials given, both face-to-face and written, is very limited. In some regions, the university provides written tutorials via local newspapers. This service seems to be most effective and efficient. Academic staff from the main office and regional centres publish articles related to the courses, as well as administrative and counselling services (written tutorials are also offered through the main office). The academic staff are responsible for answering academic enquiries from the students.

Apart from the two tutorial services, the university also asks the regional centres to facilitate study groups and extracurricular student activities. Although these activities do not directly contribute to student performance, they are seen as one way to avoid a feeling of isolation among students.

# ISSUES, PROBLEMS, AND PROPOSALS

In a distance education system, learning must occur despite constraints. Learning, moreover, is primarily in the hands of the student rather than the shared responsibility of both teacher and student (Moore 1983). Therefore the student must make every effort to learn. In Indonesia, distance education students are mostly adult learners; and they turn to distance education as a second opportunity to return to school after being away for some time. Adult learners in distance education are usually highly motivated and see themselves as independent (Robinson 1981). In most cases, adults believe they are capable of self-direction. In general, they are willing to be self directed in their learning. Furthermore, they usually have a very clear objective. They learn, therefore, in a manner and at a pace that suits them, since they control their own learning situation and aspirations. This high level of enthusiasm must be maintained by the distance education institution by providing appropriate support mechanisms.

The Universitas Terbuka, as a distance education institution, actually established its systems in order to encourage students to be active, self-directed, and independent. From the beginning, the university has given students the freedom to study on their own and has held them responsible for their own learning; that is, students are responsible for building their skills and knowledge, and for converting the information acquired into something meaningful. The university has played the role of a support agency which provides services, facilities, information, and mechanisms that support the learning process (Pannen 1991).

The premises of Moore and Robinson, however, are not always fully applicable, especially in Indonesia. Most Indonesians do not have the tradition of individual and independent learning. They are used to rote learning and to the face-to-face classroom method. They depend highly on the teacher as the sole reliable source of knowledge and information. Pannen (1991), moreover, recognises that those who have such habits are less likely to have the skills they need to study alone and independently. They need a great deal of help. Sewart (1981) points out that distance education institutions usually rely on attractive printed self-study materials, often supplemented with audiovisual materials. This implies that less consideration is given to individual needs through such packages and institutions. In fact, well-designed self-study materials cannot provide individualised learning. Having considered all of this, it is clear that services the university offers through its regional centres are very limited. Although in theory the university should offer and provide academic, administrative, and counselling services simultaneously, it is recognised that only administrative services are relatively well-organised throughout its operations.

In terms of academic and counselling services, several things need to be addressed. There are no standard tutorials (face-to-face and written) given to the students on a nationally organised basis. Hence, one observes certain trends taking place in Indonesia such as the establishment of Universitas Terbuka Student study centres (PSM) and Student Study Groups (KBM). Basically, they are regular lectures provided by a private institution to the students for a fee. This kind of service has benefited university students who have the money to pay for the service, as well as students who come directly from high school, who are usually very dependent and used to rote learning. Still some students are left behind because of their socioeconomic situation, or because of distance and technological constraints. But the university cannot afford to provide instructional media such as audiovisual sets and library resources at every regional centre. Nor can it offer tutorials using sophisticated telecommunication equipment.

These constraints are due to economic reasons and the lack of technological support from other institutions. Consequently, in its future development, the university will focus on involving other resources available at the regional level. These include improved partnerships with local governments and other private institutions in order to provide better services to students. At the same time, the university is looking at providing services that do not rely heavily on the use of sophisticated technology. In other words, the university is developing tools for linking students and the university through the postal service and with more face-to-face interaction. At first glance, this development seems to be less effective in terms of time as well as contradictory to the concept of distance education.

The university, with the help of funding and technical assistance from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA Canada), is currently implementing a pilot project in six sites which seeks to establish a model for regional centres and their services. The mission statement for regional centres will be:

> To provide standardised academic and other support to students through a decentralised network of full-service Learning Resource Centres and Learning Resource Posts, in cooperation with partner institutions where possible and appropriate. The Learning Resource Centre network will also serve to provide visibility for the University at the regional level throughout Indonesia.

The aim of the pilot project is also "to improve academic and non-academic student support services delivered regionally and to standardise these services throughout the Learning Resource Centre network". The full-service learning resource centres will administer all academic and other student support activities throughout their respective regions and will also provide services offered through the learning resource posts in each region. The learning resource posts will be implementing learning resource functions in the satellite areas. The first priority will be to standardise tutorials and to acquire improved facilities at the regional level. This will be the major responsibility of each learning resource centre director. The next priority is to increase the quality of services for registration and examinations.

The pilot project will focus at this stage only on non-traditional students. Eventually, the model will be applied to all students. The tutorials that are currently being offered in the regions are based on partnerships with private sector organisations and local governments, using the tutorial staff and facilities of those institutions. The learning resource centres (that is, the regional centres) will organise the tutorials at those institutions and students will pay for each tutorial they attend. In addition to this development, the university will also provide students with a student handbook and study skills handbook. Tutors will also be given a tutor orientation guide.

In terms of providing academic student support services, the learning resource centres will be responsible for:

- providing face-to-face tutorials;
- developing agreements with local newspapers to publish written tutorials and student administrative information;
- identifying and recommending potential partnerships with other institutions to provide tutorials and referring these to the rector;
- providing appropriate instructional media for student use;

- encouraging and facilitating the organisation of study groups; and
- evaluating academic support activities.

As for non-academic support, the learning resource centres will provide group information and orientation sessions to prospective students and visitors. Academic advising services are also offered at this level. The administrative functions of the learning resource centres include processing registrations and student records, storing and distributing learning materials, coordinating, marking, and administering examinations, and posting and distributing final examination grades. In addition to the development of partnerships, promotion, and communication, the learning resource centre directors are expected to take new initiatives and report them to the main office, via the rector.

Delivery of services in the learning resource posts will consist of:

- monitoring the number and quality of tutorials;
- appointing tutors for the learning resource posts on advice from the learning resource centres staff;
- directing examination coordination and take-home exams at the post level; and
- supervising staff in the posts.

In terms of personnel, it is realised that staff at levels one and two are less available because they are mostly part-time staff. Local state universities act as the parent universities, so someone at a senior level must be employed full time. Therefore, it is suggested that every regional centre have an academic advisor, acting as a generalist at the regional level. This would be a full-time academic or administrative staff person in the regional centres at level four, giving continuity of service to students. The academic background of the academic advisor would be at a level sufficient to respond to academic enquiries from students.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

It is obvious that within the next two years significant changes will take place in student support services at the Indonesian Open Learning University. It is expected that these changes will improve the entire operation of the university and students will be served better than before. Furthermore, it is expected that students will increase not only in number but also in quality. Specifically, it is hoped the quality of students learning via distance education will be the same as those attending conventional universities. At the same time, however, some of the new developments planned for the university seem to contradict the principles underlying pure distance education systems. For example, students will have to pay more than a tuition fee; that is, they will have to pay tutorial fees. As a result, we appear headed towards more of a classroom instruction system, but perhaps only as transition to a truly independent open learning system.

# SUKHOTHAI THAMMATHIRAT OPEN UNIVERSITY (THAILAND)

*Natee Khlibtong*

## INSTITUTIONAL PROFILE

Sukhothai Thammathirat Open university (STOU) is structured along lines similar to the United Kingdom Open University. Curriculum development especially reflects a number of the Open University's operating principles and practices. The curriculum content is arranged into self-study packages that integrate related material and activities into sets known as "course blocks". A course block is worth at least six university credits and is divided into fifteen units, each of which requires approximately twelve hours of study per week. The university offers three programmes:

- four-year bachelor's degree programme;
- two- and three-year bachelor's degree programmes; and
- one- and two-year certificate of achievement programmes.

STOU courses are developed by course teams of three to five subject specialists. A team comprises a chairperson, an editor, an educational technologist, and an evaluation specialist. The instructional staff is modest in relation to the 180,000 students currently enrolled with the university. In 1990 there were only 1,099 officials, including 377 support staff. Additionally, approximately 3,000 part-time staff serve as course team members, authors, tutors, and examiners.

In order to fully discharge its responsibilities, the office of educational services is divided into sections, each with its own function. These include: the Centre for Correspondence Studies with the primary responsibility of course materials development and delivery; and the Regional Affairs and Counselling sections, both responsible for general student support services.

The rapid dissemination of educational media — textbooks and workbooks, audio tapes, and other supplementary materials — is necessary in order for the STOU distance education system to operate efficiently. The Centre for Correspondence Studies is responsible for the efficient mailing of these materials to students and those involved in university projects. As well, they provide other postal services, including mailing government documents to various agencies concerned with the university.

### Self-Study Material

Self-study material used at STOU includes textbooks, workbooks, and audio tapes. Course textbooks provide the basis for learning. Study methods and teaching plans for the different units are provided. Supplementary textbook material is arranged in programmed lessons so that students must study every unit of the textbook in detail as well as complete the exercises laid down in each unit. Workbooks contain instructions on how they are to be used, details of the teaching units, and self-evaluation before and

after studying, as well as space for notes and for doing exercises and reports. The workbooks also include forms of tests for each unit. In addition the university produces audio tapes for some courses in the form of lectures and discussions, as well as in other formats. These tapes do not duplicate radio programmes produced for the same courses. Details of these cassette tapes, which students can purchase, are published in the university's newsletter, *STOU News*. In addition, the university arranges for books and supplementary reading materials to be placed in study centres in various provinces, called "STOU Corners".

### Educational Radio and Television Programmes

STOU provides educational services in the distance teaching system through the use of correspondence media and radio television broadcasts. Each semester, STOU produces fifteen to seventeen 20-minute radio programmes in a variety of formats such as interviews, documentaries, drama, and docudrama. The content of each programme is designed to enrich course blocks. STOU radio programmes are broadcast daily through the public relations department's radio network. STOU uses television to supplement its academic courses. For each academic course three 30-minute educational television programmes are produced in various presentation formats. STOU sends tapes of the programmes to local stations all over the country for broadcast. To disseminate knowledge and to provide academic services to the general public, STOU has developed the radio and television programmes "Academic Programme" and "Academic Service". These use a documentary style and STOU benefits from these programmes.

### Library and Educational Media Services

The university is well aware of the importance of library and educational media services to support independent study by students as well as to provide resource materials to faculty members, course design teams, tutors, other university personnel, and the general public who seek lifelong education. Accordingly, a library system has been established to take the direct responsibility for providing basic library services as well as educational media services. Library and educational media services provided by the office of documentation and information for the benefit of STOU's target group are comprised of central services, provincial services, and regional services. Central services and library and educational media services are provided for full-time academic staff. A special building at the university houses the central library and has the responsibility to acquire books and educational materials according to the needs of the university.

## STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

The university's Centre for Regional Affairs assists students who have problems understanding the course material and helps increase their knowledge and understanding. This student support service consists of tutorials, student activities, academic guidance, and media services such as videotapes as a substitute for tutorials, professional and practical training programmes, and field and laboratory work. All these activities are conducted at the study centres located in the provinces with the cooperation of various educational institutions and agencies. There are three types of study centre: study centres; provincial or local study centres; and special purpose centres. The latter include the STOU Corners that are located in libraries and other specialised and practical study centres. These organisational structures and their twin functions of counselling and tutoring are outlined below.

## Counselling

The counselling section of the Office of Educational Services serves a very important role in helping students to quickly grasp the system of education that the university uses. The counselling section also gives advice on the selection of study areas, studying the different courses, vocational guidance, and personal problems. In addition, the counselling section provides orientation to newly enrolled students through various media such as radio and television broadcasts, the *STOU News* newsletter, and orientation pamphlets. It also provides telephone and mail guidance services, is responsible for the supervision of STOU student clubs throughout the country, and conducts territorial defence courses for STOU students.

## Tutoring

Tutorials constitute one of the academic services that the university arranges to benefit students. Through tutorials, academic staff provide knowledge enrichment, a wider and deeper understanding of the content of course blocks which students study on their own. Tutorials also help clarify problems students may have with the teaching materials they are studying. The objectives of the tutorial function are:

- to serve as an academic liaison between students and the university;
- to create a link between tutorials and other teaching materials;
- to assist students in increasing their knowledge and understanding of the academic content of the courses they are studying;
- to understand the problems students experience while studying by themselves so that approaches and methods of solving them in the future problems can be worked out; and
- to provide students with an opportunity to receive academic guidance and counselling from university personnel.

The university arranges tutorials to ensure that they are of the greatest benefit to students. Tutorials are conducted on weekends in local study centres throughout the country, and they are generally given twice. Where it is considered necessary, three meetings are arranged, each lasting three hours. Academic staff from the university are sent, on a rotation basis, to all study centres. There they give counselling and guidance to students for 15 to 60 minutes before tutorials begin.

## STUDY CENTRES

To provide students in every region of the country with education services, the university has, with the cooperation of local institutions and other government agencies, set up study centres. Study centres are of three types, each with its own responsibilities: regional centres, local study centres, and special study centres.

The responsibilities of the regional centres include:

- arranging tutorials and assist in selecting tutors from that region;
- arranging examination facilities;

- providing students with guidance and counselling services; and

- providing public relations and news services for the university.

The responsibilities of the local study centres include:

- arranging venues that the university can use for specific activities such as student orientation, tutorials, examinations, counselling, and other supplementary learning activities that the university considers appropriate and beneficial to students; and

- providing public relations and university news at a local level as well as acting as a centre of liaison between students and the university in cases where students are unable to contact the university directly.

The responsibilities of the special study centres include:

- providing students of a particular school of study with academic counselling and guidance, laboratory training, and field work in specific areas; and

- identifying experts in specific subjects and proposing them to the university as potential tutors.

The university requests the cooperation of government departments that administer the area the schools of study are teaching. For example, the School of Agricultural Extension and Cooperatives has established a study centre at regional agricultural stations and the School of Health Science has established study centres in hospitals.


## Regional Services

Student support services are also offered through STOU Corners, which are located in 72 provincial public libraries through the cooperation of the Department of Non-formal Education, Ministry of Education. Two other STOU Corners have been established in city libraries — the Lumbini Park Public Library and the Soi Phra Nang Public Library — through the cooperation of the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration. Similar services are provided in Bang Khwang Central Prison at Nonthaburi. STOU Corners act as a repository and service centre for different types of educational media as a service to students and the general public in local areas. Educational media include teaching and exercise materials prepared by the university for use with different subjects, as well as textbooks, reference books, and books on specific subjects that are of interest to the people who live in that area. As well, audio cassettes of course material, radio programmes, tutorials, and educational counselling are offered.

Other regional services will be provided at the ten area resource centres the university plans to establish throughout the country in accordance with the objectives of the Sixth National Economic and Social Development Plan. Each resource centre will aim to be a storehouse of various up-to-date educational media. Of particular interest are audio-visual materials and computer-assisted instruction. The resource centres will also provide public relations information and news about the university, and educational and vocational counselling services. Other duties will include coordinating educational services, as well as organising mobile educational media services to remote areas. Students and interested members of the public will be able to use these services for independent study.

### Public Relations News Service

STOU develops positive public relations through a monthly newsletter, as well as radio and television programmes. The newsletter, *STOU News*, provides general university news and more specific information about work activities that students should know.

The radio and television programmes include "STOU Time", which gives students and the general public throughout the country news of developments taking place in the university. "Meet the President" is a radio programme of information and news on STOU and open universities in general. The "STOU News Spot" is a television news spot broadcast daily to give students and the general public news of the university's activities.

The university also publishes a booklet, *Educational Television Programmes*, which gives the broadcast times of STOU's educational programmes. It is distributed to students all over the country.

## PROBLEMS AND ISSUES IN STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

Problems and possible solutions were identified from an analysis of documents and a survey of students at STOU. The results of the study indicate three main problems:

- tutoring problems;
- mailing problems; and
- student socialisation problems.

### Tutoring Problems

The main problem with the tutoring service is that two-thirds of students did not attend the tutorial sessions. Most of those not attending live in small communities and face difficulty travelling. However, others found the subject matter easy enough to understand, without the help of a tutorial.

The students who did attend the tutorial sessions complained that the tutoring programme was difficult to understand because of the very short time given each subject.

In order to make the tutorial sessions more meaningful for students, the university should deposit videotape recordings of the tutorials at both the regional centres and STOU Corners. Students who are unable to attend the tutorial sessions can view the videotapes at their convenience. But the videotapes must be of the best quality. Another way to improve attendance at tutorial sessions is to discuss the content of each tutorial session in the university newsletter, because it is the most effective means of conveying information to students about tutoring.

### Mailing Problems

Students should receive printed study materials at least 15 days before the beginning of each semester. However, numerous obstacles exist. Each mail truck line has a limited capacity, with only 23 mail truck lines in all of Thailand. Because the post office has a limited number of trucks to carry the mail, the university is limited in the amount of mail it can send each day. Then, in some areas, the number of students enrolled is low, while

in others, students are numerous. This leads to some mail trucks loading too much mail, while others run nearly empty. In addition to the mail truck problem students register at different times so it is difficult to manage a delivery plan. Finally, some students change addresses, which complicates the problem of delivering their mail.

One possible solution to these difficulties with the mail is to deposit printed study materials at specified bookstores around the country, where students can claim them at their convenience after registration.

## Student Socialisation

STOU students have organised student clubs to help each other academically and socially and to promote public relations. The clubs establish good relations between STOU and its students, as well as good relations among students. They also build the university's academic status and general reputation.

The counselling section is responsible for the activities of about 73 student clubs throughout the country, involving about 150,000 students. Unfortunately, the club head office has only 11 counsellors. That number is insufficient to deal with the problem of a lack of cohesion within the student clubs. It stems, in part, from the fact that club committee members have little time and funding to fulfil their obligations to members. In fact, some of the student clubs no longer function.

To improve opportunities for students to socialise, the university should promote more face-to-face contact among students by supporting student club activities.

# SUMMARY OF SYMPOSIUM
# ANALYSES OF CASE STUDIES

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## *R. Sweet*

The concerns expressed at the Delhi Symposium are summarised below in the form of problem statements. These issues and the suggested means of addressing them combine the views of all participants towards the task of developing more responsive student support systems. In their focus on the change that is taking place in the kinds of instruction needed and its implications for the organisation and operation of student support services, the participants' analyses reflected the assumption that movement towards more responsive support systems begins with an understanding of student characteristics and their learning needs. Nevertheless, problems reported at the Delhi Symposium were not limited to the areas of instruction and counselling. A range of administrative restrictions and the often constraining influence of institutional and government policies were raised in discussion. Many of these concerns were unique to a particular institution and reflected local conditions, customs, and practices. Other reported problems reflected variation in the stages of programme development with rather significant differences existing among institutions and between countries. However, some issues emerged as common themes in most if not all reports. These included the difficulty in identifying indicators of the effectiveness of a programme using proximate and outcome indicators such as the poor use of services and high levels of student attrition. Other matters of concern were the current level of staff development, with deficits seen in both instruction and management. Both deficits were linked to attrition rates and problems with the programmes themselves. Finally, the difficulty of projecting the "distance education concept" to the general public and to educators from more traditional institutions was raised as a problem. These concerns, along with others arising from the participants' analyses, are addressed in the following four questions, which outline the major policy issues and options considered at the Delhi Symposium.

## How to increase funding?

One of the difficulties faced by government-funded institutions are state policies of fiscal restraint. Such policies seem to be general and their effects pervasive. Institutions typically attempt to cut back on their costs in every way possible. Unfortunately, student support services often are the first to feel the institution's response to a shortage of funding. Retrenchment is not, however, the only response. The example of the Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University in Thailand is instructive. Thai government funding is minimal and the institution's operating costs are met through entrepreneurial activities such as contracting to publish advertising material for businesses. Another example is provided by Universitas Terbuka in Indonesia, which has opted for a measure of privatisation in its support service operations. Whether viewed as institutional innovation or privatisation, the range of response among universities clearly must be broadened in an economic climate of restraint that appears to be a permanent feature of future relations between governments and postsecondary institutions.

## How to target training?

Two areas in need of professional development programming are instructional inter-actions at the study centres and the general management of materials development and delivery. Professional development for faculty needs to be directed towards instructional techniques that encourage students to participate and engage in an intellectual exchange with the instructor, their peers and, of course, the material under study. Many such strategies are possible but they require a shift in the instructor's perception of his or her role in facilitating student learning. Educating faculty thus requires a programme that reshapes their underlying conceptions of useful instructional models in addition to adding techniques to their teaching repertoire. For support service staff, two areas appear to need improvement. The first is essentially attitudinal and relates to the understanding staff have of the differences between the traditional schooling they experienced and the open and distance education they attempt to provide. Where the mandate of the institution is improved accessibility, "non-traditional" students — typically mature individuals with work and family commitments — comprise a signifi-cant proportion of enrolments. As part-time students, they are the primary consumers of the institution's products and services. The relations between students and the staff who directly interact with them through registration, course delivery, evaluation, and the like must necessarily be cordial and encouraging for the system to work effectively. The notion of the student as consumer rather than recipient of the institution's service may be a useful perspective in improving the institutional face presented to prospective students. Second, the logistical problems of course delivery, marking, and feedback would likely be improved with training in a more innovative means of distribution. Even training within accepted and traditional forms of management would enhance efficiency and productivity. An important dimension of this problem involves the introduction of technology. While not widely discussed in the case studies, technology is identified as a particularly important area of instructional and administrative development in the research recommendations of symposium participants.

## How to further institutional collaboration?

Collaboration is important at two levels: among distance education universities them-selves, and between distance education universities and the other institutions within a country's postsecondary system. Since they share much the same mandate and many common management practices, distance education universities can benefit from the exchange of resources. There exist a number of examples of course material exchanges, transfer of expertise, and a rationalisation of services among institutions. Collaboration can occur to good effect at the country and (South Asian) regional levels. However, regional collaboration would require a degree of experimentation and development. Underlying such a collaborative effort is the need to make known the mandate of the open learning institution and to promote better understanding of the complementary relationship that exists between traditional and distance teaching universities — within each country and within the region.

## How to maintain and expand direct student support services?

Much of the discussion surrounding the case studies considered increased involvement of support service personnel in the instructional process. At the same time, it was recognised that the established student support mandate could not be neglected and in some cases needed expansion. The range of services required is well known and includes improved mechanisms for student loans, increased opportunity for socialisation

among students, and advocacy for the disadvantaged. Socialisation leads to the very necessary informal learning acquired through communication with one's peers. As well, it leads to institutional commitment, which has been linked to greater course and programme persistence.

Targeting resources for aiding disadvantaged groups is difficult. However, strategies need to be developed that will have the greatest impact on general attitudes and behaviour. It is quite possible that promoting the voice of one disadvantaged group can further improve the lot of another; at least, it improves to the extent that the target group is inclined to be inclusive in its pursuit of equity. If nothing else, the gains of one disadvantaged group sensitises the public and the educational bureaucracy to broader issues of access and equity. But there exists a continuing need to develop general policies and action plans in the area of direct student support and advocacy.

## Recommended Research Directions

A number of research priorities were identified by participants at the Delhi Symposium. These are listed below. Each emphasises the regional context and does not pursue findings that can be highly generalised. At this point, they are initial statements of research that need further development. They do, however, reflect the combined concerns of the participants and suggest some specific direction for future research and development.

- Explore the feasibility of engaging in various entrepreneurial activities.
- Assess the potential for introducing computer networking among universities within countries across the region. Computer networks would allow international links to be established through, for example, the Internet system.
- Develop models of institutional collaboration.
- Improve instructional materials, especially in the packaging and delivery of such items as home science kits and mobile instructional resource units.
- Analyse policies that affect equity groups.
- Analyse governance structures suitable to distance education institutions (as an alternative to traditional structures currently "imposed" on most distance education universities).

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