

**Thammasat University International Office:
Problems and Solutions**

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Introduction

Thammasat University is one of the oldest universities in Thailand, founded 72 years ago. It is also a comprehensive university consisting of 22 faculties covering various fields of study ranging from science and technology to social science and humanities. It has four campuses: two in Bangkok, the capital, one in the north and the other in the east coast. The number of students is 32,166 – 24,331 undergraduates and 7,835 at the graduate levels. The staff are 1,573 faculty members and 4,011 supporting staff.

The Division of Foreign/ International Affairs was established about 20 years ago and later in the year 2005 it was promoted to be a larger unit – the Office of International Affairs (OIA) owing to the present rector's policy to internationalize the education at Thammasat University. The main objective of the Office, therefore, is the Exchange Project, which includes the exchange of students, scholars, and staff. Actually the student exchange is particularly emphasized as it is stated in the university assessment as an index illustrating Thammasat University a world – class University. It is believed that if students from developed countries enroll in our courses and transfer the credits earned back to their home universities, then we are at the same level of world renowned institutions. To achieve the goal of successful student exchange project involves personnel in the International Office. Hence, the paper will discuss the problems arising in these two sections: Student Exchange Project and Personnel.

According to the Buddha's teaching, when there are sufferings in life we are taught to find the cause(s) of suffering and then the way(s) to eliminate them. This paper, therefore, presents not only the problems in the Thammasat International Office but also their solutions done in the last couple of years and in the future plan.

Student Exchange Project

Thammasat University has memorandum of understanding (MOU) with 192 universities and institutes around the world. Among these, 41 are student exchange agreements where the partner universities agree to have a reciprocal exchange of students during a duration of 3-5 years. To implement the agreements, the OIA is in charge of the exchange students which are categorized into incoming and outgoing students. Table 1 illustrates the number of MOUs, incoming students, and outgoing students in the academic year 2006 (June 2005 – May 2006, August 2005 – July 2006)

Table 1: Numbers of MOUs, Incoming and Outgoing Students in 2006

Continent	MOU	Incoming	Outgoing
Asia	74	21	21
N. America	51	73	21
Europe	47	9	4
Oceania	16	1	1
Africa	2	0	0
S. America	2	1	0
Total	192	105	47

The problems arise in the Student Exchange Projects are as follows:

1. Balance of Exchange

It is no doubt that students in developing countries like Thailand dream of studying abroad in countries like the USA and Japan while the MOU states the one-to-one exchange. As a result, the number of our students over balances our partner universities. While some (very few) are kind enough to accept our students, most ask us to stop sending our students until the unbalance is cleared.

To solve this problem, we did two things

- (1) Tailored Courses: We offer a program or courses specially designed for a group of students from our partners. For example, we offered Thai language courses for the Australian National University students. Another example was a Thai Studies Program taught in Japanese for students from Meiji Gakuin University.

(2) Thai Studies Program: At Thammasat University there are 49 programs taught in English – so called International programs at both undergraduate and graduate levels. All are degree programs except the Thai Studies Program, which consists of several courses concerning Thai language and culture. The program is quite popular among the incoming or international students who want to know more about the Thai ways of living. Table 2 shows the number of incoming students who enrolled in Thai Studies Program in the year 2006 and the countries they come from.

Table 2: Number of Incoming students in Thai Studies and their countries in the year 2006.

Countries	Number of Students
Australia	1
Denmark	1
Finland	1
France	5
Japan	9
Korea	1
Norway	1
Sweden	1
U.S.A.	72
Total	92

2. Financial Support

Studying abroad is costly. The students are to pay for their airfare, accommodation and living expenses although the tuition fee is waived. Particularly, the Thai students have to pay much more than what they actually pay at home due to the higher cost of living. To be an exchange student for a semester or a year means they must have extra money for this.

To assist the exchange students who have financial problem, Thammasat University grants 6 scholarships, Baht 30,000 or US \$ 857 each and more are expected from the alumni association. Moreover, the OIA proposes the government scholarships from the host universities like the Japanese and Australian governments.

3. Language Barrier

It is required that the exchange students know the language of the host universities. This is a crucial problem for Asian students who want to study in any English - speaking countries or even the English - taught courses in Asian countries. There are required to have the TOEFL scores at least 550 for the paper-based or 213 for the computer-based in order to illustrate that their English language proficiency is good enough to study in a university. The English language requirement screens out students with poor English. Moreover, the students who want to study in countries like France, Germany, China and Japan need to know the native language even though they will take courses in international programs because to be able to use the everyday language can make their stay pleasant and comfortable.

To lessen the problem of language barrier, the OIA holds an orientation twice a year to inform the students to prepare themselves in advance, particularly in language requirements like taking the language class and test. In the future, the OIA plans to offer foreign language courses for our outgoing exchange students. For the incoming students, we try to overcome the language barrier by offering courses taught in the native language of the students such as Japanese and Chinese. But the number of the students must be big enough to offer a course.

Personnel of International Office

1. Skills of International Affairs

English nowadays is regarded as an international language; therefore, it is a must for anyone who works in the OIA. However, out of 12 personnel of the OIA, only 8 can communicate efficiently in English.

To improve their English, we have them attend the English classes offered in the university and we propose the administration to waive their tuition fee. Moreover, we award our staff who can obtain satisfactory scores from an English standardized test with extra monthly allowance. With this approach, they have an incentive to improve their English. Moreover, we are sending one of our staff for the training at the international office of Macquarie University in Sydney. This is a way to better the skills of international affairs of our staff. We plan to send them for both the in-the-country and abroad training.

2. Payment

It is required that and OIA personnel have high English proficiency. However, the salary is not appropriate due to the bureaucratic system since the university is still government – sponsored. As a result, very few people with good command of English apply for the position. Worse than that the staff resignation is frequent (7 persons within 2 years) as they have new jobs offering higher payment.

At present we are in the process of proposing the university to grant extra-payment for our staff due to their special qualification required. And in the future when our university is autonomous, we can set up the new scheme of payment for the OIA staff, hoping to attract qualified staff and keep them in our office.

Thammasat University International Office



Problems and Solutions in International Exchanges

Dr. Pongthep Vorakitpokatthorn *Director, Office of International Affairs*

Thammasat University

- Established in 1934
- 22 Faculties/Institutes
- Academic Programs
 - Undergraduate 110
 - Graduate 93
 - Thai vs International Thai 154
 - International 49

4 Campus

Main Venue for 13th Asian Games and coming Summer Universiade 2007

Student Enrollment

Undergraduate	24,331
Graduate	7,835
Thais	27,319
International	4,847
Foreign St.	379

OIA: To Promote and Support Internationalization to the University

- International Exchange Project
 - Student**
 - Faculty/Staff
 - Student Activities
 - HCAP
 - UC (Berkeley)
 - Research collaboration
 - Liaison/Visiting
 - Other academic cooperation

Student Exchange Project

- Incoming

Outgoing

Number of MOUs, Incoming and Outgoing students in 2006

MOU	Incoming	Outgoing	REGION
74	21	21	Asia
51	73	21	N. America
47	9	4	Europe
16	1	1	Oceania
2	0	0	Africa
2	1	0	S. America
192	105	47	TOTAL

Country

- Australia 1
- Denmark 1
- Finland 1
- France 5
- Japan 9
- Korea 1
- Norway 1
- Sweden 1
- U.S.A. 72

Problem Causes: Incoming

- Language
- Class offer/limit
- Timing
- Reputation

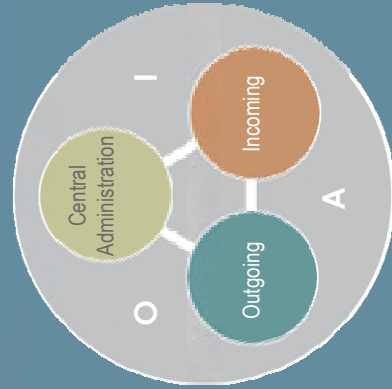
Problem Causes: Outgoing

- Language
- Financial Support
- Credit Transfer
- High Requirement (English Pro.)

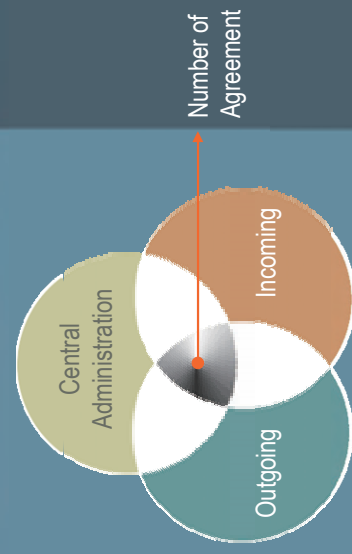
Student Exchange Project

Problems	Solution
Balance of Exchange	Tailored courses Thai Studies program
Financial Support	6 scholarships THB 30,000 each (857 USD) Source: TU, Host University, Other sources
Language Barrier	Orientation (2/year)

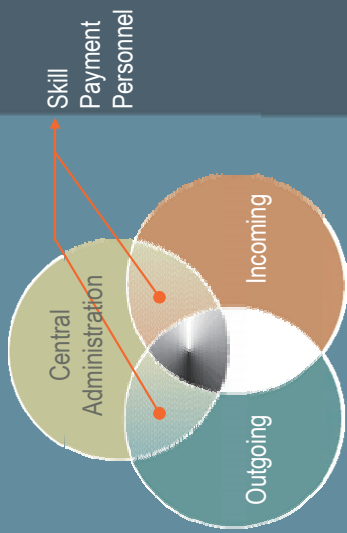
International Affairs



International Affairs



International Affairs



Solutions for Personnel

- Top up payment
- Language Study (Tuition waiver)
- In-service Training Abroad
- To be as Coordinator