

# An eLearning Project for 100,000 Students per Year in Thailand

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## Abstract

*In the year 1994, the senior author presented a paper at the Internet Society annual meeting that Assumption University was setting up a project to increase the number of Internet users in Thailand from about 3,000 to 100,000. Many people thought it was too ambitious but the target was reached in 2 years and there are 6–7 million Internet users in Thailand in the year 2004. The number of students taking eLearning through Thai universities is very low but Assumption University again announced a project to offer eLearning to 100,000 students per year. This paper presents the background, purposes, establishment, and work plan of the project which is called the College of Internet Distance Education of Assumption University of Thailand.*

## INTRODUCTION

Many papers have been written about Information Technology and Internet in Thailand [1-32].

A citizen of Thailand got to use the Internet when it first started in the United States around 1969. At that time, the US Department of Defense (DOD) Advanced Research Project Agency (ARPA) established ARPANET as an experimental network to support research. From 1968 to 1973, Prof. Dr. Srisakdi Charmonman was Director of Graduate Studies in Computer Science at the University of Missouri, Columbia, Missouri, USA, and also director

of a few research projects supported by the US National Science Foundation. Therefore, he became the first Thai to use the Internet. Figure 1 shows a group of Computer Science Department chairmen from universities in the USA joining a teach-the-teacher conference organized by Dr. Srisakdi Charmonman in his capacity as the NSF-funded project director. All NSF-funded research project directors were encouraged to use the Internet which was also funded by NSF after its birth from DOD.



**Figure 1. US Computer Department Chairmen at NSF-Funded Conference Directed by Dr. Srisakdi.**

As shown in Table 1, the number of Internet users from Thailand started with only one in 1969, became about 3,000 in 1994, and 6-7 million in 2004.

**Table 1. Approximate Numbers of Internet Users from Thailand**

Year	#user	Year	#user
1996	1	1995	50,000*
...	...	1996	150,000
1987	100	1997	350,000
1988	200	1998	600,000
1989	300	1999	800,000
1990	400	2000	1,200,000
1991	500	2001	2,300,000
1992	1,000	2002	3,600,000
1993	1,500	2003	4-5 Million
1994	3,000	2004	6-7 Million

\*Notes: Assumption University got in with 25,000 users.



**Figure 2. Dr.Srisakdi as the President of AIT Alumni Association.**

In 1987, the Internet was brought to Thailand for the first time at Asian Institute of Technology (AIT) and Dr. Srisakdi was the president of AIT Alumni Association as shown in Figure 2, and so got to use the Internet when it started in Thailand. In 1987, Dr. Srisakdi was also a member of the Board of Trustees of Assumption University and Rev. Bro. Dr. Prathip Martin Komolmas, the President of Assumption University (AU), kindly allowed him to use AU budget to purchase a computer and a modem to connect to the Internet at AIT. In 1992, the international Internet Society was established in the United States and Assumption University became a founding member (the only one from South East Asia) with Dr. Srisakdi as a member of the Advisory

Council. In 1994, Bro. Martin appointed Dr. Srisakdi to be Chairman of Internet Knowledge Service Center (KSC). Then, Bro. Martin signed an agreement with Dr. Srisakdi who was the Board Chairman of Internet KSC Co., Ltd. for Assumption University to serve as the “Incubator” for KSC Group to offer commercial Internet.



**Figure 3. HRH Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Presided over the Opening of the First Private-Sector International Internet Gateway.**

As shown in Figure 3, on January 19, 1995, Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn graciously presided over the opening ceremony of the international Internet Gateway at Assumption University paid for by KSC, 64 Kbps linked to UUNET in Virginia, USA. This international Internet gateway may be considered the first private-sector international Internet gateway from Thailand. The two earlier gateways were in the government sector, Chula and NECTEC.

In June 1996, the Internet Society approved the establishment of Thailand Chapter of the Internet Society with Dr. Srisakdi Charmonman as the Founding President. In June 1999, Dr. Srisakdi became the first Thai to be elected one of the 15 members of the Board of Trustees of the international Internet Society.

On July 13, 1998, the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB) announced in the Mass Communication and Information Technology Development Plan for Human Resource and Social Development (1999-2008) in

Paragraph 2.2 (5), Chapter 4, Visions, Objectives, and Goal:

*“To facilitate computer communication in all tambon, and Internet usage by 20 percent of the whole population”*

The first known policy on computers for education in Thailand was started around 1960 when Asian Institute of Technology, which was affiliated with Chulalongkorn University at that time, proposed that a computer be installed in Thailand for the first time. The purpose was, of course, for education. The first of the first graduating class of AIT got a scholarship to study for Ph.D. in the US. That student was Dr. Srisakdi and he became the first Thai to earn a Ph.D. in the computer area.

By 1976, the Ministry of University Affairs established the Subcommittee to Coordinate Computing Activities responsible for computing activities of all government universities, all private colleges and all departments in the Ministry. Dr. Srisakdi Charmonman was named the head of the Working Group and later the Chairman of the Subcommittee.

In March 1984, the Council of Ministers of the Royal Thai Government approved the resolution for the Ministry of Science, Technology and Energy to promote computer software industry. A national-level Committee to Promote Software Industry was later established with Dr. Srisakdi Charmonman as the Chairman and the other 18 members were from government agencies, universities, and computer companies. Also in 1984, the Ministry of Education approved a plan to introduce computer major in junior colleges. A committee was earlier established in 1982 to prepare textbooks for the major and Dr. Srisakdi Charmonman was named the Chairman of the Committee.

After several years of usage of Internet in Thailand through AIT and Chulalongkorn University, Dr. Srisakdi was convinced that

the system should be made available to the whole of Assumption University (AU). Therefore, in August 1993, he proposed to the AU Board of Trustees and got approval to implement the Internet project by setting up an Internet network called AuNet. The purposes of AuNet include the followings.

- (1) To educate the students, faculty and staff members on the concepts of local and international networking.
- (2) To prepare the students to enter into information society where networking will be the norm rather than the exception.
- (3) To provide full Internet access to all students, faculty and staff members for their personal and educational usage.

On the financial side, the Board of Trustees of Assumption University approved the proposal to let the students pay for the project. The Board decreed that Internet knowledge and experience become a requirement for graduation in any and all educational programs at AU. All the income, about 1 million US dollars per year is earmarked for the development and maintenance of the project.

In June 1994, Dr. Srisakdi presented a paper entitled “An Internet Project for 100,000 Users in Thailand” at the Internet Society Annual Meeting in Prague, the Czech Republic. Some of the audience did not even know Thailand. Some other questioned how to increase the number from about 3,000 to 100,000 or how soon. It turned out that AU jumped in with 25,000 users and then all other universities joined in. The number of users then increased to 150,000 in 1995 and eventually to 6-7 million in 2004.

## **BACKGROUND**

Universities all over the world are offering eLearning so that students can study any subject from anywhere and at anytime. In the year 2002 when the eLearning project at Assumption University was proposed, there

were 10-20 million students studying for their new degrees through eLearning. The number of students interested in and entering into eLearning are increasing rapidly. Therefore, Assumption University should establish the project to offer eLearning. There are many universities in the world offering Internet Distance Education. Some are accredited and some are not. Sample of accredited universities are University of Phoenix in the US with over 100,00 students; Jones International University established in 1993 as the first online and accredited university in the US; Cappella University in US offering 400 subjects, Canadian Virtual University offering 175 programs with over 2,000 courses, UKeU (United Kingdom e-University) with UK government funding of 62 millions pounds to set up the company to offer e-Learning for all UK universities, Charles Sturt University in Australia in with 300 Internet-based courses for 23,000 students, and UNITAR in Malaysia offering 15 degree programs at the Bachelor's, Master's and Ph.D. levels. The benefits of eLearning are:

- 1) The online degree will be equivalent to the degree awarded to students on-campus of the university offering the degree.
- 2) Student can earn the degree of his choice from fully accredited universities.
- 3) Student can study from any place and at any time through a combination of online media, including e-mail, Internet conferencing, and all facilities of the Internet.
- 4) Student can save money without having to travel to the classrooms.
- 5) Student can study and continue working full-time.
- 6) Student can earn his degree from universities abroad while staying with his family in Thailand.

#### PURPOSES

The purposes of the eLearning project at Assumption University are:

- 1) To serve the country by allowing those interested in education the opportunity to continue their studies conveniently, no matter from where or when.
- 2) To promote Life-Long Learning by using the Internet.
- 3) To expand Assumption University from traditional classroom-based education to Internet-based distance education.
- 4) To increase the number of students at Assumption University from about 18,000 persons in 2002 to 100,000 persons later.

#### ESTABLISHMENT

The Board of Trustees of Assumption University has approved the establishment of the College of Internet Distance Education on April 25, 2002. With the support of Rev. Bro. Dr. Prathip Martin Komolmas and Rev. Bro. Dr. Bancha Saenghiran, Prof. Dr. Srisakdi Charmonman and his team will offer eLearning to 100,000 students per year and make the College:

*"One-Stop Services for Worldwide E-Education for Anyone, from Anywhere, and at Anytime".*

The College is located at Srisakdi Charmonman IT Building (Figure 4.) with over 2,000 Internet terminals available in the building and all kinds of facilities to support eLearning, such as over 1,000 telephone lines to dial in, and mirror sites for degree programs from other countries.



**Figure 4. Srisakdi Charmonman IT Building.**

Srisakdi Charmonman IT Building at Assumption University has 10,000 square meters,

- Floor 1. Internet VDO Conference room, 140-seats mini theater, and Dr. Srisakdi's Office.
- Floor 2. Internet room with 408 computers.
- Floor 3. Internet service and computer center.
- Floor 4. Internet rooms for the blind, the deaf, the kids and the senior citizen.
- Floor 5. Internet rooms.
- Floor 6. Internet-related Learned Societies.
- Floor 7. Cybercafe in Thai and Roman styles.
- Floor 8. Digital library, conference rooms, and office of eLearning staff.
- Floor 9. Office of the executives of the College.
- Floor 10. Four TV and one radio studios.
- Floor 11. TV and Radio staff.

## WORK PLAN

The College of Internet Distance Education of Assumption University has announced a work plan which must be updated from time to time.

### *PHASE I. 2002-2004*

- Construction of Srisakdi Charmonman IT Building to house the College.
- Negotiation with accredited degree programs from abroad.
- Preparation and submission of Internet Distance Education programs from Assumption University to the Ministry of University Affairs.
- Speeding up of human resource development for Internet Distance Education.

### *PHASE II. 2004-2005*

- Opening of Srisakdi Charmonman IT Building in August 2004.
- Starting to offer MS (Management) as a classroom-based program to be switched

to eLearning as soon as the Thai government allows degree-level eLearning in Thailand.

- Continuing to develop human resources.
- Starting to offer short courses.
- Starting to offer accredited degree programs from abroad.

### *PHASE III. 2006-On*

To offer e-Learning to 100,000 students per year, probably:

- 20,000 students with Assumption University programs.
- 20,000 students with Asian programs.
- 20,000 students with North American programs.
- 20,000 students with European programs.
- 20,000 students with Australian & New Zealand programs.

The College of Internet Distance Education of Assumption University has entered into cooperation with many universities such as UKeU, Middlesex and UNITAR with the following sample accredited degree programs:

#### *UKeU*

- BA Enterprise
- BSc Business Information Systems
- MA Public Policy and Management
- MSc Bioinformatics
- MSc Biomedical Science
- MSc Coastal Zone Management
- MSc Computer Science
- MSc Energy Management
- MSc Environmental Toxicology and Pollution Monitoring
- MSc Geographical Information Systems
- MSc Information Technology and Management
- MSc Renewable Energy
- MSc Tourism and Travel Management
- LLME Environmental Law

#### *Middlesex University*

- BSc Business Information Technology
- MSc Business Information Technology
- MSc Electronic Commerce

#### *UNITAR*

- Bachelor of Business Administration

- Bachelor of Information Technology
- Bachelor of Information Systems
- Bachelor of Management
- Master of Business Administration
- Master of Information and Multimedia Technology
- Master of Information Technology Management
- Ph.D.

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

In the year 1994, Assumption University of Thailand announced a project to increase the number of Internet users in Thailand from 3,000 to 100,000. Many were skeptical but the target was achieved. In the year 2002, Assumption University of Thailand announced a project to offer eLearning to eventually 100,000 students per year. Again, some are skeptical but Assumption University goes ahead wholeheartedly by constructing Srisakdi Charmonman IT Building to house the College of Internet Distance Education to do the job. The main problem is that the government of Thailand has not established any law to allow universities to offer eLearning degree programs. So, the College has to start with classroom-based programs to be converted to eLearning later, as well as preparing to offer all kinds of short courses. It is hoped that by the year 2010 or before that, the target of 100,000 students, if not more, will be reached.

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