

LIBRARY SERVICES FOR DISTANCE STUDENTS AT SUKHOTHAI THAMMATHIRAT OPEN UNIVERSITY

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INTRODUCTION

Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University, or STOU was established in 1978, employs a distance learning system aimed at helping students study by themselves with utmost independence. Like other conventional public universities, STOU is under the control of the Ministry of University Affairs, and has the right to award its own degrees. To provide academic support for independent study, the University has established various types of academic services. One of such services is the provision of library and information services.

Library and information services are provided through the Office of Documentation and Information - ODI. As the central library of the University, ODI is responsible for developing library system and management including the acquisition of printed and non-printed materials, organizing the technical process and procedures such as classifying cataloguing and indexing the materials according to library science principles, creating tools and finding aids and providing a variety of library services to its users. ODI also takes responsibility for establishing the STOU library network system to provide library and information services to STOU undergraduate and graduate students and the general public throughout the country.

ODI has used computer systems for handling library activities and services. As a part of the STOU network system, the ODI automated library system can be linked with other various wider networks in Thailand and overseas. Therefore, ODI is able to provide library and information access to the national and international networks.

A MODEL OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SERVICES TO DISTANCE LEARNERS

ODI organised three levels of library and information services for STOU students, namely central, regional and provincial services. Each level of services has established with the following responsibilities.

1. Central Services

The Central services are provided through the Office of Documentation and Information in the Documentation Building and the Academic Building I at Nonthaburi. Its main purpose is to make resources available to STOU faculty staff members and course teams, STOU staff members, researchers and the general public who wish to use library materials and access to information. However, STOU students may access library and information services at ODI

while attending activities and seminars on the university campus. Graduate students may be approached for assistance in finding information and making photocopying of library materials with fee of charge through mail, fax and e-mail.

A variety of services available from the University's library. Some examples of basic library services are as follows:

1. *Reference and information service*
2. *Loan service*
3. *Inter-library loan service*
4. *Information access and retrieval*
5. *Photocopying Service*
6. *Orientation and library visits*

At the central services, computers and information technology have been used for a wide range of library functions. Currently, six modules of the VTLS library automation systems, namely acquisition, cataloguing, circulation, OPAC, serial control and journal indexing are in use. In addition, the library automation system of the ODI is able to link together the various STOU computer systems, and the national and international institutions of higher learning. This will enable ODI to expand its services and to provide more effective and efficient library services to the students through long-distance requests.

2. Regional Services

There are two types of library services at regional level. They are library services of the Academic and Development Services Centers and Graduate Educational Resource Centers.

Library Services of the Academic and Development Services Centers

According to the University's plan 10 Academic and Development Services Centers will be established throughout the different region - the northern, central, northeastern, eastern and southern. Currently, nine Centers are in operation. Each library of the Center serves as a repository and service center with up-to-date library materials. In the near future, each Center will install a computer network system. This computer system will facilitate communication links and the exchange of information, both within and outside the University. A sub-system of library automation system is also placed in a plan.

The following library services are the basic services provided for STOU students and the general public:

1. *Reference and information service*
2. *Loan service*
3. *Inter-library loan service*
4. *Information access and retrieval*
5. *Photocopying Service*

Graduate Educational Resource Centers

With the purpose to establish library services centers for graduate students of STOU, six Graduate Educational Resource Centers were set up with the cooperation of various government agencies in 1993.

In each Graduate Educational Resource Center, self-instructional materials, reference books and textbooks for graduate students are available. It is the responsible of the ODI to supply

such materials as well as to develop the library services system and producing finding aids and tools.

The following library services are provided to STOU graduate students:

1. *Reference and information service*
2. *Loan service*
3. *Photocopying service*

3. Provincial Services

Provincial Services are offered in the *STOU Corners* located in 75 provincial public libraries through the cooperation of the Department of Non-formal Education. The University has also received cooperation from the Bangkok Metropolitan in establishing *STOU Corners* in four public libraries in Bangkok, namely the Lumpini Park, the Soi Phra Nang, the Phasicharoen and the Bang Khen public libraries. In addition, Mahawachirawut School in Songkhla province has also given its cooperation by establishing a STOU Corner in Tinnasulanon Library. Similar services also provided in the Bang Khwang Central Prison, Nonthaburi.

Each STOU Corner acts as a repository and services center of different types of selected materials and media prepared by the ODI in order to provide a service which will be of benefits to the University undergraduate students and the general public in local area.

The following library services are provided:

1. *Reference and information service*
2. *Loan service*

The Use of Information Technology for Library and Information Services

The following are the examples of the electronic library services provided to the staff members at the central service.

1. On-line public Access Catalogue

Since 1991 the on-line public catalogue has been made for both Thai and English materials available at the ODI. The academic staff could access the catalogue on campus and through the ODI Web page (www.odi.stou.ac.th).

2. CD-ROM Databases

The ODI has subscribed to various databases of different areas in the form of CD-ROM. A CD-ROM network was set up in 1996. Currently the databases available to the staff and students include ERIC, ADO, SIC and Laser Quest.

3. Internet

Through the STOU computer system, the users are able to access information from the Internet at the ODI.

4. Specific Databases

The ODI has developed its own databases since 1988. At the beginning, Micro CDS/ISIS software for micro-computer was used for creating databases as a research project. As a result, three databases, namely Printing Technology, Telecommunication and Information Technology databases were developed. Later, more databases of different areas were created

by using BRS/Search software with the purpose to use as tools for information access. Currently, the ODI has databases in six areas, namely Printing Technology, Telecommunication, Information Technology, Science and Technology, Distance Education, and HM King Prajadhipok's databases.

Future Plan for Development of the Library

According to the university policy and plan, the library network will be linked with ten libraries of the Academic and Development Services Centers within a few years. Thus, STOU students and personnel at each Center will be able to search data and information through electronic databases of ODI via the terminal installed at each center. They will be also able to search information from other institutions of higher learning and other information centers worldwide.

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