

# Guidelines for Internet-Based Distance Education in Colleges and Universities in Thailand

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## **Abstract**

*In 2003, the Ministry of Education decided to appoint a Committee on Regulating the Guidelines for Internet-Based Distance Education Programs in Colleges and universities to formulate a set of criteria and guidelines for providing the e-learning-based distance education, especially via the Internet.*

*This committee, in 2004, proposed a set of guidelines to ensure the effective provision and expansion of higher education to wider target groups, i.e. students, working adults, and the general public allowing them to get university degrees and certificates via e-learning systems.*

*In this article, the author as the Chairman of the Committee presents the conceptual framework of the guidelines to control the provision of IDE concerning definitions of terms related to distance education and e-learning, philosophy and objective, e-educational system, establishing a center for distance education via the Internet, production of IDE courseware, ICT infrastructure, e-learning evaluation, credit transfers, and educational services and student affairs.*

## **1. Introduction**

In response to the need to make full use of the advancement of ICT for delivery systems in colleges and universities, it is necessary to issue an education code on the

guidelines of providing Internet-Based Distance Education (IDE) for programs of study offered by traditional, close-admission universities, the Ministry of Education, appointed a Committee on Regulating the Guidelines for Internet-Based Distance Education Programs in Colleges and universities in mid 2003 in compliance with Article 8 of the National Education Act of 1999. This Committee was requested to formulate a set of standard criteria to be used as the guideline for offering degree and certificates via the Internet to ensure the effective provision and expansion of higher education to wider target groups, i.e. students, working adults, and the general public to get university degrees and certificates by electronic means adhering to the philosophy of continuing, life-long and life-along or just-in-time education.

## **2. Definitions:**

In order to formulate the frame work, it is very important that the definitions of the following terms must be agreed upon:

“**Distance Education**” is an educational system where instructors and students are physically apart. Knowledge and experiences are planned, prepared, delivered via multi media packages comprising core media and supplementary media in the forms of print

media, broadcast media, and electronic media to help students learn effectively at their dwellings without attending regular classes or relying upon the instructor or other resources under reliable evaluation system. After completing all the requirements, they are awarded degrees or certificates of equal value to those from traditional, closed admission universities.

**“Internet-Based Distance Education or Internet Distance Education (IDE)”** is a distance education system where the planning, preparation, production, presentation, and evaluation of knowledge and experience are conducted using the Internet as the core media and augmented by supplementary media such as prints, audio tape or CD, video tape or CD, network-based seminars, and face-to-face interactions where necessary.

### **3. Scope of Enforcement**

This guideline must be enforced to all degree levels and all disciplines in both public and private colleges and universities wishing to offer via the IDE. They must be applicable both to new and existing on-going programs of study of colleges and universities under the jurisdictions of the Commission on Higher Education, Ministry of Education.

### **4. Philosophy and Objective**

**4.1 Philosophy:** The provision of IDE must comply with the philosophy of life-long and life-along education by opening and expanding the opportunities to students and the general public to pursue higher education according to their own pace, interests, and abilities without having to attend regular classes at the campus.

**4.2 Objective:** To control the provision of quality Internet-based higher education in accordance to the National Higher Education Development Plan, and in tune with

academic and professional standards to produce high quality graduates well versed in both theories and practices and capable of transferring the knowledge and experience in their professional services and equipped with sound judgment, systematic and critical thinking and morality.

## **5. Details of the Framework**

The framework covers 12 aspects:

### **5.1 Application Procedures**

Each college or university wishing to offer existing programs of study via the IDE must submit the plan to the higher institution council for approval according to the criteria and standard set forth in this education code before commencing the Internet-based program.

### **5.2 Establishment of the IDE Center**

The IDE provider must establish an internal unit called the Internet Distance Education Center (IDEC) or other similar name.

The IDEC must have adequate numbers of faculty members and personnel, regular and adjunct where necessary.

The staff and personnel should consist of the following positions:

- 1) **Executive Officers** - Full time academic staff should be appointed from those holding doctorate degrees or equivalent or at least associate professorship.
- 2) **Administrators** - Full-time academic staff should be appointed from those holding a doctorate degree or equivalent or possessing an academic position of at least associate professorship to be appointed deans of schools of directors of study programs;
- 3) **Content specialists**- Full time academic staff should be appointed from those holding a doctorate degree

or equivalent or possessing an academic position of at least in the areas of needed specialization.

- 4) **Specialists in Educational and Communication Technologies or ECT specialists** – ECT specialists should be appointed as full time academic staff from those holding at least a master's degree in educational technology, instructional technology, audio-visual education to be in charge of systems instructional design, supervise and control media production, utilization, and evaluation;
- 5) **Specialists in Testing and Evaluation** – Test or evaluation specialists should be appointed as full time academic staff from those holding at least a master's degree in educational measurement and evaluation to be in charge of developing and analyzing on-line and off-line test instruments based on objectives and learning experiences;
- 6) **Faculty Members** - Full-time staff members who are instructors, tutors, and thesis advisors.

An instructor must hold at least a master's degree in the area of his/her specialization with university teaching experience or equivalent. The instructor may be responsible for unlimited numbers of students but he/she must have adequate number of tutors.

The instructor must supervise the tutor(s) in each Internet-based course.

A tutor, acting as an assistant instructor, must hold a degree higher than the assigned program or have at least three years of teaching experience. A tutor must be responsible for not more than 40 on-line students.

The tutor should be assigned to perform the following duties:

- (1) Acknowledge the receipt of email from the student within 24 hours;

- (2) Give responses to questions or consultation from the students within 72 hours;

- (3) Monitor student activities in the chat room and the collaborative group;

- (4) Check and review the student homework or assignment within seven days after the date of receipt;

- (5) Grade the examination and post the result on the web within seven days after the date of examination;

- (6) Submit weekly progress report of teaching to the instructor.

A thesis advisor may be appointed from the instructors and may supervise not exceeding 20 graduate students both Master's and Doctorate degree.

- 7) **Internet Personnel** - Full-time Internet personnel of the IDEC are needed to perform the tasks of controlling and overseeing the use of Internet-based learning.

The following members are needed to perform the tasks:

- (1) Director: The director should be appointed from those holding at least a Master's degree in the field of information technology or educational and communication technology;

- (2) Internet experts: The Internet experts should be appointed from those holding at least a Bachelor's degree in informational technology or educational and communication technology.

- (3) Internet specialists: Internet specialists are Comprising Systems operators, System administrator, Webmaster, Web developer, Help desk assistants, Engineers, and Technicians.

- (4) Supporting staff: The Institution may need to create other positions if necessary to support the provision of the IDE.

### 5.3 Internet-based Distance Learning System

The IDE provider must develop its own IDE system as its Academic Master Plan to ensure effective teaching and learning to be approved by the Council of the institution.

Also, the IDE provider must develop its own software for the production of the Internet courseware in compliance with the details specified in Item 5.2.9.

### 5.4 Semester Systems and Curricula

1) Semester System: The institution must specify the semester system (i.e. bi-semester, tri-semester, or quarter) with fixed dates of the beginning and the end of each semester, or the duration of the semester. The number of the semesters must not exceed four semesters per year. New student intake may be admitted every semester for the student's convenience.

2) Curriculum Structure must comprise programs of study and individual courses.

Each course must be of two-four (2-4) credits in the bi-semester system requiring the students to complete the course not sooner than two months.

In case, the set course design is applied, each set course must be of four-six (4-6) credits in the bi-semester system requiring the student to complete each set course not sooner than four months.

Each course must be produced in the form of Internet courseware comprising the following components: (1) knowledge and experiences, (2) activities or assignments, and (3) evaluation consisting of pretest, posttest, and final examinations.

3) The IDE provider must submit the Curriculum Administration Committee to supervise the overall implementation of the curriculum after it is approved by the Council.

### 5.5 Production of distance educational packages

1) The IDE provider must submit the

course production plan for each IDE program of studies.

Each course must have its own IDE package comprising the four basic components:

(1) Content presentation using multi-media consisting of text, still images, moving images, and sound imparted on-line via the Internet or off-line via CD, DVD, CAI, E-books, and linkages to internal and external sources of information.

(2) Assignments, learning activities or practical work in the forms of reports, projects, case studies, or any other types of assignment, self-pretest and self-posttest to be performed by the students and submit to the instructor or the tutor via the Internet.

(3) Learning management System (LMS) to ensure interactive two-way communications between students and the instructors, and students to students via the Internet to enable dialog, discussion, asking and answering questions, and advising on assignments.

(4) Personal profiles needed for checking, monitoring, and evaluation of learning progress by the instructor or the information of students, except the grade reports, to be checked, modified, and updated by the students themselves.

2) The IDE provider must appoint the course team for each course. The course team must comprise 3-5 content specialists (to be appointed as the Chair, the editor, and content providers), one (1) educational technologist, one (1) test specialist, and one (1) manager.

For each course, the IDE provider must appoint a full time member of the course team to be the Chair of the course team.

3) The course team is responsible for planning, preparation and production of the ODE courseware at least one semester before

the launching date.

### **5.6 Evaluation of IDE learning achievement**

The IDE provider must develop its own IDE evaluation system covering the evaluation of process and the evaluation of product:

1) The evaluation of process must cover the evaluation of the pretest, activities, assignments and practical work performed during the course. The assignments and practical may be marked and the scores may be used as parts of the final evaluation.

The proportion between score earned from the final examinations and from the activities or assignments may vary according to the two (2) levels of courses:

(1) Level One: Theory courses aiming at providing background knowledge emphasizing principles and theories may use the score from the final examinations not less than 70 per cent;

(2) Level Two: Practical courses aiming at providing both principles and theories and skills from direct and indirect practical experiences such as from real situations, simulated laboratories or virtual laboratories may use the final examination scores not less than 40 per cent.

2) The evaluation of product must comprise the final examinations and final projects. The IDE provider must develop the guideline or the operation plan for both the mid-term and final examinations to be administered in an examination center where the inspection of student identification is possible.

On-line, home-based final and mid-term examinations are not permitted. Examinations must be center-based. The identification of students taking examinations must be checked .

For the Bachelor's degree programs, an External Examiner Committee need to be

established to oversee the overall assessment or each course's evaluation.

### **5.7 Network and ICT Infrastructure**

The IDE provider must have adequate Internet infrastructure to ensure smooth and uninterrupted provision of IDE to its students comprising:

1) *Server* - Two sets of servers are needed; one for the main server and another for back up in order to provide 24 hour uninterrupted services linking to the international servers on the speed not lower than two MgB per 10,000 students. The down period of the Internet servers may not exceed six hours.

2) *Examination Facilities*:-At the headquarters, at least 20 computer terminals are needed to provide full security for on-line examinations at the center.

In the regions, written agreements are needed between the IDE provider and local institutions or organizations agreeing to provide sufficient computer services to indicate the readiness to facilitate the terminals and proctors during the examination sessions.

3) *Local Area Network, Telephone Lines and Modems*-At least 100 computer terminals are required for continuous and adequate provision of the Internet services at the starting point. Then, every time the number of students is increased by 20, one terminal must be added.

### **5.8 Availability of E-learning Programs or Software**

The IDE provider must submit the information on the following supporting computer programs or software needed IDE management:

1) *Learning Management System*- To accommodate effective and simultaneous login for 100 students, the software must consist of at least 12 parts: (1) Homepage with navigation menu, (2) Learning centers (3) Self Access Learning Resource (4)

External resource centers, (5) Laboratories, (6) AV Media Center, (7) Assessment Center, (8) Web board, (9) Chat room (10) E-mail, (11) Frequently Asked Questions-FAQ, and (12) Personal Information/Profiles.

2) *E-Learning Activities*:- operation plan is needed to ensure the student participation and get involved in the following activities: (1) Orientation for each course; (2) Studying from the IDE packages or courseware; (3) Studying supplementary packages in prints, AV media and external sources via Internet links; (4) perform the assignment, activities and projects and submit them via the Internet for tutor-marking; (5) Sit in the examinations at the designated examination centers; (6) Get access to the knowledge bases(KB) or knowledge centers (KC), students and instructors profile centers, and databases; and (7) Seek advice or consultation via the Internet with advisors, instructors, and tutors.

To ensure the minimum required participation or attendance to the above-mentioned activities, the IDE software must keep records of the log-in records of day, time and time-intervals for each student's participation during each learning sessions. This information should have sufficient details and made available to the advisor, course instructor and course tutor. This will help determine the student's learning progress, learning styles, and commitment to his/her study.

### **5.9 Libraries for IDE**

The IDE provider must have a present and future development plan on the arrangement of libraries for IDE students, both conventional and e-libraries.

Existing libraries may be utilized but they should be converted to e-libraries. In case, its own library is not available, the IDE must have a definite plan to make use of existing libraries of other colleges or universities. In this case, a written permission of each provider is required.

Each library must make available at least five types of documentation and information: (1) e-books/texts; (2) e-journals, (3) databases, (4) abstracts on-line, and (5) knowledge-base/databases.

In addition, the IDE provider must show an evidence of its membership to e-libraries, both domestic and international, to ensure the continuous access by students.

### **5.10 E-Bookstores for IDE**

The IDE provider must submit the current information and the plan to set up its own e-bookstore to enable students and faculty members to subscribe, order and purchase books, texts, and other AV materials on line.

The IDE provider may enter an agreement in writing with local bookstore or book centers to provide e-bookstore services.

### **5.11 Transfer of Credits**

The IDE provider must define the criteria or guidelines for the transfer of credits from bachelor's degree programs, graduate diploma, higher graduate diplomas, graduate degree programs and other programs of study both domestic and international to the Council for approval in compliance with the Commission of Higher Education's Regulations on Criteria for Credit Transfer to Degree Programs B.E. 2545 (2002AD).

### **5.12 Qualifications, Registration, and length of programs**

Qualification of faculty members, qualifications of students, registration, and the length of programs must comply with the criteria standards of each curriculum or program of studies issued by the Commission of Higher Education, Ministry of Education, as must be specified in details by each IDE provider.

### **5.13 Quality Assurance System**

The IDE provider must specify the

guideline for development of the quality assurance system in the IDE program(s) of studies and submit to the Council for approval.

#### **6. Educational services and student affairs**

An Educational Services Center must be established to provide educational services and manage the overall student affairs.

The Educational Services and Student Affairs Committee must be appointed to lay down policies and oversee the Internet distance education services to best serve the needs of the Internet-based students both in Thailand and other countries.

Each IDE provider must also establish a Regional Internet Distance Education Center (RIDEC) to provide on-demand educational services on the application, registration, information and knowledge access, tutorial sessions, seminars and conferences, distance learning media services, libraries, book stores, closely supervised on-line examinations, guidance and counseling, and intensive professional experiences.

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Education is divided into four levels in Thailand. Pre-school education is for kids under age 6. Primary education starts when the kids are 6. Primary education is called Prathom in Thai, and it usually lasts for six years. After Prathom 6, the students will receive Secondary Education. The admission of higher education sector after Matthayom is largely based on the High School Entrance Exam taken at the end of Matthayom 6. Universities and colleges are the main institutions that provide higher education in Thailand. Thai universities and colleges offer excellent programs in studies of art, medicine, humanities, and information technology. However, many young Thai citizens still prefer studying subjects such as law and business abroad (MOE, 2008, p.4). Distance learning, also called distance education, e-learning, and online learning, form of education in which the main elements include physical separation of teachers and students during instruction and the use of various technologies to facilitate student-teacher and student-student communication. Distance learning traditionally has focused on nontraditional students, such as full-time workers, military personnel, and nonresidents or individuals in remote regions who are unable to attend classroom lectures. However, distance learning has become an established part of the educational world, ... An increasing number of universities provide distance learning opportunities.