

**Enhancing Multi-Cultural Awareness through Extra and  
Co-Curricular Activities:  
The Case of Bangkok University**

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## **Abstract**

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by

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The increasing academic value of studying abroad has encouraged significant increasing number of students participating in various kinds of student mobility programs. Since 1975, the number of mobile students has grown globally by almost 350%. (Chien, 2010) During July 2008 – July 2009, Thailand admitted over 19,052 students from 124 countries. (Commission of Higher Education, 2009) In fact, over 1500 American students participating in study abroad programs hosted by Thai universities. (IIE, 2010) International students have contributed to the richness of multi-cultural environment on campus. This paper will share some best practices of enhancing multi-cultural awareness on campus through the extra and co-curricular activities; namely, communal development program, service learning program, cultural heritage field trip and Thai drama group.

Key words: multi-cultural awareness, extra-curricular activities, co-curricular activities

# **Enhancing Multi-Cultural Awareness through Extra and Co-Curricular Activities: The Case of Bangkok University**

## **Educating Global Citizens**

Over the past decade, there has been drastic increase in the number of students participating in the various kinds of student mobility programs. According to the UNESCO, the number of mobile students has grown by almost 350% (Chien, 2010) This means that every 2 out of 100 tertiary students will study abroad. Students decide to study abroad for many reasons. Some want to learn more about others' languages and cultures. Some might have no choice, but to go abroad to study in a particular field. Internationalizing the educational programs has been the priority of nearly every university worldwide. The top 6 countries, including USA, UK, France, Australia, Germany and Japan hosted around 62% of the world's mobile students. (UNESCO 2009) In addition, the top five fields of education in which mobile students enrolled are Business Administration, Science, Engineering, Humanities and Arts, Social Sciences and Law. The top 15 countries that sent out 44% of mobile students in 2007 were China (15%), India (5%), Republic of Korea (4%), Germany (3%), Japan (2%), France (2%), USA (2%) Malaysia (2%), Canada (2%), Russia (2%), Morocco (1%), Turkey (1%), Italy (1%), Poland (1%) and Hong Kong SAR of China (1%) (UNESCO, 2009)

Though Thailand was not among the top destination for international students, during July 2008 – July 2009, Thailand had admitted over 19,052 students from 124 countries. (Bureau of International Cooperation Strategy, Commission of Higher Education, 2009 ) Among these 2,815 (14.77%) came under the terms of agreement between their home universities and host universities in Thailand. The large group came from China (8.07%), USA (2 %), Japan (0.78%), Vietnam (0.46%) and Germany (0.45%). The majority of international students (13,428) in Thailand is self funding. They came from China (47.20%), Laos (6.58%), Myanmar (6.32%), Vietnam (5.99%), USA (4.29%), Korea (2.12%), Japan (2.11%), Bangladesh (2.07%) and India (1.87%). These international students enrolled in the programs in Thai language and Culture, Business Administration, International Business, English Language and Marketing. The Institute of International Studies had reported that there were over 1,500 students from the US participating in various study abroad programs hosted by Thai universities in 2010. (IIE 2010)

## **Multi-Cultural Campus**

International students have contributed to the richness of multi-cultural environment on campus. Both co- and extra-curricular activities will help foster an appreciation of multiple perspectives and awareness of the cultural diversity. (Chernotsky and Hobbs, 2005) These activities will enhance the students' global competencies. Some global competency skills that students should developed (Willard, 2006) are:

- Excellent intercultural communication skills

- Effective and knowledgeable in working in cross-cultural settings
- Understanding cultural differences and similarities
- Learn quickly
- Capacity to adapt and be flexible in new and challenging environments

### **Some Best Practices in Enhancing Multi-Cultural Awareness and Global Competencies**

The following are some co- and extra-curricular activities that have been successfully conducting to help promoting multi-cultural awareness and global competencies among undergraduate students at Bangkok University.

#### **Workshops, Study Visits, Special Lectures and Student Forum**

Bangkok University has regularly hosted workshops and study visits for partner universities. Various themes were set to suit the students' interest; for example, how to do business in Asia, digital media production, Thai culinary arts, Thai hospitality industry, and more. Student forums and joint seminars/projects were conducted together with some partner universities; namely, Ohio University, University of Nebraska—Lincoln, Gustavus Adolphus University in the US, National University of Singapore and many more.

#### **Communal Development Camp**

Despite low English proficiency, Japanese students from 3 partner universities in Osaka and Kyoto tremendously learned about cultural diversity through their participation in the communal development camp. The project was first initiated in 2001 with Osaka International University. Since then, it has been continuously conducted and another two Japanese universities, Haboromo University o International Studies and Osaka Gakuin University had joined the project. Each summer, the camp participants will assist Thai villagers building nursery, school playground, and promote good hygiene. The campsite will be different each year depending on the villagers' urgent needs.

#### **Service Learning—One Province One University Project**

The One Province One University Project was initiated by the Government on December 2010 to get universities more engaged in country development and social services. Since Bangkok University Rangsit Campus was located in Pathumthani Province, Bangkok University decided to mainly initiate and take active part in projects with villagers in this province. Some of these projects were:

- Teaching English in the local schools
- Assisting villagers on exporting and marketing their local products as well as on package design
- Conducting campaigns to promote ethics among school students
- Conducting workshops on tax, computer literacy, accounting and law

Faculty and students, including international students, were involved in these service learning. They found that they gained knowledge on Thai ways and flexibility through taking part in these projects.

### **Cultural Heritage Field Trip**

Cultural heritage field trips were conducted as co-curricular activities of classes, such as, ILB 331 Thai Studies, ITH 101 Thai Language for foreigners 1 and ITH 102 Thai Language for Foreigners 2. Students learnt more about Thai folk beliefs, culture and history by participating in these trips.

### **Ligae Inter (or Thai Drama Group)**

Ligae or Thai Musical is a project first initiated by a student. Her proposal to set up the Ligae Company won her a scholarship in 2008. Since then, many international students were recruited to join the group. Their appearances in many activities helped promoting multi-culture awareness on campus.

### **Thai Dance Workshop**

In addition to the class, IPE 112 Thai Classical Dance, the Thai Dance Workshop was occasionally conducted for groups of visiting and exchange students. Through participating in this Thai Dance Workshop, students will learn about similarities and differences between their and Thai cultures.

### **Conclusion**

By introducing students to other cultures, they will be more opened and flexible. Students will start to investigate the world and learn to respect the others' ideas and perspectives. Further data collecting will be needed to support the positive effect of these activities on enhancing multi-cultural awareness and global competencies.

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