

## Chapter 2: South East Asia<sup>1</sup>

### Section 3: Thailand

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#### 1. The present situation of Thailand and its higher education system

Since *Asian Universities: Historical Perspectives and Contemporary Challenges* (Altbach, 2006), and materials published by UNESCO and the Thai government have explained the outline of the higher education system of Thailand in detail, this report will refer to only recent movements in Thai government policies.<sup>1</sup> Recently, one of the major changes in higher education in Thailand was the merger of the Ministry of University Affairs with the Ministry of Education in 2003. Because of this unification, the Commission of Higher Education (former Ministry of University Affairs) has come to exercise jurisdiction over not only research-centered universities with Bachelor's and more advanced degree programs, but also teacher training schools of the Rajabhat system, which offer diploma courses, and polytechnic institutions of the Rajamangala system, which offer advanced professional education in science and technology. As a result, it became necessary to set up Bachelor's degree programs in these institutions and prepare legislation for a higher education system that controls these institutions with other universities that offer Bachelor's and more advanced degree programs (Yamnoon, 2008). Moreover, American community college-type institutions, which are still directly controlled by the Ministry of Education, will be newly installed and affiliated with the Commission of Higher Education in the near future. Therefore, a more comprehensive higher education system that interacts with special training education will be necessary in the future as well.

In the background of such structural reform of higher education as a whole is the National Education Act, which was issued in 1999. It promoted the following reforms in many higher education institutions:

1. Higher education has been divided into two levels, i.e., lower than Bachelor, and Bachelor levels,
2. Higher education should aim at academic and advanced professional development and research undertaking for the purpose of advancing the body of knowledge and the betterment of society,
3. Public higher education institutions are allowed to adopt either the bureaucratic administration system or autonomous administration system according to their respective university acts,

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<sup>1</sup> This article is a part of Hotta, Taiji. *et al* (2010) 「ACTS と各国の単位互換に関する研究」 (Study on the ASEAN Credit Transfer System and Credit Transfer Systems in Asian Nations) [The Report of Mission Research by the Promotion Fund of Leading University Reform, The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology in Japan (MEXT), 2009], Hiroshima University, 403 pp.

4. Government agencies, local administrative bodies, and private organizations are allowed to establish specialized higher education institutions in response to their own needs, utilizing their own expertise,
5. The Ministry of University Affairs has been transformed into the Commission on Higher Education under the supervision of the Ministry of Education. All higher education institutions including those under the Ministry of Education's jurisdiction have been transferred to fall under jurisdiction of the Commission on Higher Education. (Yamnoon, 2008, p.2.)

As a result, 40 Rajabhat teacher training institutions and nine Rajamangala universities of technology have increased the number of their departments and advanced to become universities with Bachelor's and more advanced degree programs. Moreover, technical schools and nursing schools in provincial areas were integrated to establish two new local universities.

Thus, higher education institutions in 2008 were as below.

**Number of higher education institutions in Thailand in 2008**

Total number of public higher education institutions		78
	Autonomous universities	13
	Traditional universities (with a bureaucratic system)	15
	Rajabhat Universities (Teacher's colleges)	40
	Rajamangala Universities of Technology	9
	Pathumwan Institute of Technology	1
Total number of Private higher education institutions		68
	Universities	34
	Institutions	5
	Colleges	29

Source: Yamnoon, 2008, p.3.

In 2008, there were 165 higher education institutions. This is a significant growth compared with the 78 institutions (24 national and 54 private institutions) in 2002, when Rajabhat and Rajamangala institutions were not yet under the control of the Ministry of University Affairs. This shows how recent higher education in Thailand is aiming at the development of mass higher education.

Also in 2007, the Commission of Higher Education announced "The Second 15-year Development Plan" from 2008 to 2022, to show their position on coping with the following nine present situations and issues.

- (1) The articulation of university system with basic education and vocational education,
- (2) Reform of the existing university education system,

- (3) Good governance and management,
- (4) The role of universities in enhancing the country's competitiveness,
- (5) Higher education financing,
- (6) University staff development,
- (7) Networking of universities
- (8) Higher education plan for southern Thailand, and
- (9) Learning infrastructure for university education (Yamnoon, 2008, p.4.)

Especially since 2008, the Commission of Higher Education has held the policy of constructing a system that not only approves the establishment of educational institutions but also regularly accredits and evaluates the educational programs of all the education institutions. Thus, it can improve or abolish low-quality educational institutions, programs and curriculums, being conscious of improvements in educational quality assurance. The Commission is planning to classify higher education institutions into (1) community colleges, (2) liberal arts universities, (3) specialized and comprehensive universities, and (4) research- and graduate education-oriented universities, and to accredit and evaluate them according to the different evaluation standards for each category, as shown below.

#### Classification of four categories of higher education in Thailand

Group of higher education institution	Degree	Proportion of Ph. D. academic staff	Proportion of science/ social science students	Mission for country's development	Characteristics of graduates	Service area
Community college	Associate/ Advanced Associate	10%	20:80	Strengthen community and promote sustainable development	Manpower in local production sector	Province/ district
Liberal arts university	Bachelor/ Master	50%	40:60	Develop local administration organization and regional business	Manpower for driving local change	Province/ region
Specialized/ Comprehensive university	Bachelor/ Master/ Doctorate.	70%	60:40	Manufacturing sector	Knowledge/ high potential workers	Metropolitan/ big cities
Research/ Graduate university	Bachelor/ Master/ Doctorate/ Post doctorate	100%	90:10	Competitive industry	Global prime mover/ opinion leader	Metropolitan/ small cities

Source: Yamnoon, 2008, p.5.

## 2. Summary of regulations on credit system

The Thai government has regulated various standards to establish credit systems of higher education institutions. First of all, Article 5 of "Standard Criteria of

Undergraduate Program” (revised on February 21, 2005)<sup>2</sup> states that the minimum length of class time per term is 15 weeks for the semester system, 12 weeks for the trimester system, and 10 weeks for the quarter system. Also, Article 6 sets the accreditation standard for the number of hours for study per credit as below.

- 6.1 A theoretical course requiring at least 15 hours of lecturing or discussion sessions per regular semester in equivalent to 1 credit hour in the two-semester system
- 6.2 A practical course requiring at least 30 hours of practice or experimental sessions per regular semester is equivalent to 1 credit hour in the two-semester system,
- 6.3 A practicum or field work training requiring at least 45 hours of training sessions per regular semester in equivalent to 1 credit hour in the two-semester system,
- 6.4 A project or other assigned learning activities requiring at least 45 hours per regular semester is equivalent to 1 credit hour in the two-semester system. (p. 6)

As for the requirements to earn a Bachelor’s degree, Article 7 includes the following provisions on the number of credits to acquire.

- 7.1 For four-year undergraduate programs, the required total credit hours must not be less than 120 with study duration of not more than eight academic years for full time registration, and not more than 12 academic years for part-time registration,
- 7.2 For five-year undergraduate programs, the required total credit hours must not be less than 150 with study duration of not more than 10 academic years for full time registration, and not more than 15 academic years for part-time registration,
- 7.3 For Six-year minimum undergraduate programs, the required total credit hours must not be less than 180 with study duration of not more than 12 academic years for full time registration, and not more than 18 academic years for part-time registration,
- 7.4 For undergraduate programs (continuing), the required total credit hours must not be less than 72 with study duration of not more than four academic years for full time registration, and not more than six years for part-time registration.

Also, Article 8 clearly states regulations on the required number of credits to be earned for the three kinds of subjects in a Bachelor’s course. According to Article 8, educational programs for Bachelor’s courses are divided into three components: general education, specialized education, and electives. Students should earn at least 30 credits in general education. As for specialized education, students should earn (1) at least 84 credits in the 4-year program, (2) 114 credits in the 5-year program, (3) 144 credits in the 6-year program, or (4) 42 credits in undergraduate (continuing) program, which is for continuing students from diploma programs. Finally, students have to

earn at least 6 credits from electives.

There is also a regulation on the limit of credit acquisition per semester. Article 11 states that it is necessary to acquire at least 9 credits and at most 22 credits per semester, in order to be assured the position of a regular student. As for part-time students, 9 credits per semester is the upper limit of the number of credits that can be earned per semester.

Moreover, in order to complete a Bachelor's course, at least 6 semesters of enrollment as a regular student is necessary, or at least 14 semesters of enrollment as a part-time student is necessary.

"Standard Criteria of Graduate Program" (revised on February 21, 2005)<sup>3</sup> states the regulation on standards of graduate schools, such as the period of classes per semester, study hours per credits, etc., but they are exactly the same as those for the Bachelor's course. However, the number of credits required for graduation is different from that for the Bachelor's course, set up in Article 7 as shown below:

- 7.1 For graduate diploma and higher graduate diploma programs, a total of no less than 24 credit hours is required for each program.
- 7.2 For Master's degree programs, a total of no less than 36 credit hours is required for each program. The study program can be organized under two plans:

Plan A is the plan that stresses research through thesis, which can be divided into two plans:

Type A1 is a thesis-only program which is equivalent to no less than 36 credit hours. Institutions may require additional course work or other academic activities without giving any credit hours but students have to attain the achievement at the levels determined by respective institutions,

Type A2 is a combined program of thesis, equivalent to no less than 12 credit hours, and at least 12 credit hours of course work.

Plan B is the plan that stresses course work without requiring a thesis, but there must be an independent study of no less than 3 and no more than 6 credit hours.

- 7.3 For Doctoral degree programs, the institution can be organized under two types of programs stressing research to develop high-level scholars and professionals:

Type 1 is the study plan that focuses on research through dissertations that lead to the creation of new knowledge. Higher education institutions may require additional courses or other academic activities without giving any credit hours but students must attain the achievement at the levels determined by respective institutions as follows;

Type 1.1: A Master's degree holder is required to write a dissertation equivalent to no less than 48 credit hours,

Type 1.2: A Bachelor's degree holder is required to write a dissertation equivalent to no less than 72 credit hours,

The dissertations required under Type 1.1 and Type 1.2 must be of the same quality and standard.

Type 2 is the study plan that focuses on high quality research that enhances academic and professional advancement, and requires additional course work as follows;

Type 2.1: A Master's degree holder is required to write a dissertation equivalent to no less than 36 credit hours, and take no less than 12 credit hours of course work,

Type 2.2: A Bachelor's degree holder is required to write a dissertation equivalent to no less than 48 credit hours, and take no less than 24 credit hours of course work

The dissertation required under Type 2.1 and Type 2.2 must be of the same quality and standard.

Also, as a condition for graduation, Article 12 states that the maximum number of credits to be earned per semester is 15 in a semester system. Additionally, the maximum length of enrollment for a graduate diploma course must be three semesters and five for a Master's course. For a Doctorate course, the longest enrollment period for students with a Bachelor's degree is eight semesters, and for students with a Master's degree it is six. This is the summary of the credit system in the education programs of Bachelor's, Master's and Doctorate courses.

### **3. Summary of regulations on grade assessment system**

Although there are no regulations on the notation of grades, a standard is set for the use of GPA in academic evaluation in universities, and Article 12 of "Standard Criteria of Undergraduate Program" states that all students should have at least a GPA of 2.0 out of 4 points to complete a Bachelor's course. Also, Article 13 of "Standard Criteria of Graduate Program" states that a student should have a GPA of at least a 3.0 to earn a degree in a quasi-Master's course. In a Master's degree program, a student should have a GPA of at least 3.0 and an excerpt of the student's Master's thesis should be published in an academic or professional journal. In a Doctorate course, a student should pass an exam on (at least) one foreign language designated by his/her major field of study, the final results of coursework should be a GPA of 3.0 or more, and at least one refereed paper related to the student's Doctoral dissertation should be published before graduation.

Such detailed regulation on the national level is an indication of efforts to promote the popularization of higher education all over Thailand through radical educational reform implemented in 1999 and to ensure its quality in some form.

Although there is no regulation on a legally unified grade transcript, UNESCO (2003) lists the following table as a common grade transcript.

A common grade transcript in Thailand

Evaluation		GPA
A	Excellent	4.00
B <sup>+</sup>	Very Good	3.50
B	Good	3.00
C <sup>+</sup>	Fairly Good	2.50
C	Fair	2.00
D <sup>+</sup>	Poor	1.50
D	Very Poor	1.00
F	Failure	-
I	Incomplete	-
W	Withdrawn	-
WF	Withdrawn due to Failure	-
AU	Audit	-

Source: Bovornsiri, 2003, p. 280.

These are the legal regulations on grades and a common example of grade calculation reflecting GPA. There were no explicit statements about relative or absolute evaluation for grades in the government regulations. In our field interview at universities, many were using absolute evaluation. However, some universities have an environment where grades given by instructors can be automatically displayed as a distribution chart on-line, so that the grades can be decided based on the data of relative evaluation. As for the grade calculation methods, in many universities, there seems to be a system where the Dean or a program leader compares the exams and achievements of students in their department or program with the grades given by instructors, and can discuss the grade with the instructor, if necessary.

#### **4. Summary of regulations on credit transfer for student exchanges**

In Thailand, there are clear regulations on credit exchange, in order to ensure the mobility of students in the country, where various types of higher education institutions exist. The recently revised “Criteria for Transfer of Study Credits at the Degree Level into the Formal Education System” (published on September 29, 2003) has set up the following regulations:

**Article 2 Higher education institutions must undertake the equating of knowledge and transfer of study credits under the following criteria:**

2.1 The criteria for the equating of courses and transfer of study credits within the formal education system.

[Bachelor's Degree Level]

- (1) (Omission)
- (2) They must be individual courses or groups of courses with contents covering no less than three fourths of the individual courses or groups of courses to be equated with,
- (3) They must be individual courses or groups of courses that the learner gets the grade of not lower than C or 2.00 score level or equivalent,
- (4) A student can equate the courses and transfer the study credits for not more than three fourths of the total credits of the study program into which to transfer,
- (5) Individual courses or groups of courses transferred from other higher education institutions will not be included in the calculation for the cumulative grade point average,
- (6) The student must study in the higher education institution into which his/her study credits are transferred for at least one academic year.

As for the credit transfer at the level of graduate schools, the regulations are basically the same as above. However, (3) academic evaluation of the subject for credit transfer must be "B" or a GPA of 3.0 or above (2.0 for a Bachelor's course), and (4) the number of credits for transfer must be one third (three quarters for a Bachelor's course) or less of the number of credits required for graduation. This clause also includes regulations on credit transfer from non-formal or informal education institutions, but they are omitted here.

Similar conditions are also listed in "Suggestions Concerning Good Practice Guidelines for Transfer of Study Credits at the Degree Level" (published on September 29, 2003), along with another regulation added in regards to graduate-level credit transfer, that is, Article 2, Clause 2.3, Section A (7), entitled, "Graduate study level", which states that the student must study in the higher education institution into which his study credits are transferred for at least one academic year and enroll for courses or thesis in the study program for not less than 12 credits.

**5. Summary of accreditation system to ensure the quality of higher education programs in Thailand**

Higher education in Thailand has sometimes been criticized for not answering the needs of society and for failing to make efforts to develop (Altbach, 2008). In



responding to such criticism, the Office for National Education Standards and Quality Assessment (ONESQA) was established in 1999 by the State Education Law, in order to accredit and evaluate the level of education and assurance of quality. Many laws on evaluation standards were amended between 2000 and 2006, and the “Private Higher Education Institution Act” was published in 2003, in order to standardize the quality of private universities. Accordingly, all the private universities came to be obliged to participate in the equivalent accreditation/evaluation system, and in addition to the audit at the time of establishment, they became subject to audit every five years on the contents of the education they regularly provide (Yamnoon, 2008). In 2006, the “National Qualification Framework for Higher Education in Thailand” was published and certain standards were set up for higher education in Thailand in general.

**Activities of self-inspection and self-evaluation:** There are some legal regulations to ensure the quality of higher education in Thailand. Article 14 of “Standard Criteria of Undergraduate Program” states that each higher education institution is obliged to construct a system to ensure the quality of each education program. It also urges higher education institutions to evaluate at least their own (1) program management, (2) instructional resources, (3) student supports and guidance and (4) social and labor market needs and/or satisfaction of graduate’s employment. Moreover, Article 15 makes it mandatory for all the educational programs to conduct self-inspection and self-evaluation every 5 years. Article 15 of “Standard Criteria of Graduate Programs” sets a similar regulation, but section (2) states that education and research resources (equipment, facilities, instructors’ research abilities, etc.), rather than the quality of instructors, should be evaluated and that the information should be disclosed.

**Management of instructor’s qualification:** Also, in order to ensure the quality of instructors, Article 9 of “Standard Criteria of Undergraduate Program” sets a regulation on the quorum and qualification of instructors for each educational program. Each program has to employ at least five full-time instructors, and two of the five must have a Master’s or higher-level degree. Article 9 of “Standard Criteria of Graduate Program” states that each program of a Master’s course has to employ at least three full-time instructors, and all of them must have a Ph. D. or an equivalent qualification, and that their job title at the institution has to be associate professor or above. As for a Doctorate course, at least three instructors of professor-level with a Ph. D. or an equivalent qualification have to be assigned for each program as full-time instructors. In addition, “Guidelines for Standard Criteria Management of Higher Education Programs” (published on May 20, 2005) sets detailed regulations on the recruitment of instructors and qualifications for their various duties, but the sections are skipped here since they are too detailed for this report.

**Qualification Framework for Educational Programs:** In November 2006, the “National Qualifications Framework” was released to construct a system to manage the quality of education for the higher education system in Thailand as a whole. This qualification framework sets up six “levels” for each degree of higher education.

Level 1: Advanced Diploma

Level 2: Bachelor

Level 3: Graduate Diploma

Level 4: Master

Level 5: Higher Graduate Diploma

Level 6: Doctorate

However, a student who completes one level cannot automatically advance to the next level. Whether a student can advance or not depends on the student’s grades and other qualifications. The National Qualification Framework sets up standard values for each level from various viewpoints. First of all, standards of credits and learning outcomes are shown in the table below. The numbers of credits in the table required the degree of the respective level. As for learning outcomes, their goals and objectives are based on five indexes. The five indexes are (1) ethical and moral development, (2) knowledge, (3) cognitive skills, (4) interpersonal skills and responsibility, and (5) analytical and communication skills. These learning outcomes should be measured in all the fields.

The table below shows the required number of credits and the level of achievement in five learning outcomes for each level.

**Credits and fields of learning outcomes for each level in the qualification framework**

Levels	Minimum Credits	Domains of Learning Outcomes				
		Ethical and Moral Development	Knowledge	Cognitive Skills	Interpersonal Skills and Responsibility	Analytical and Communication Skills
1. Advanced Diploma	90	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX
2. Bachelor	120 150 180	XXX	XXX	XXX	XXX	XXX
3. Graduate Diploma	Bachelor’s degree + 24		XXXX	XXXX	XXXX	XXXX
4. Master	Bachelor’s degree + 36	XXXXXX	XXXXXX	XXXXXX	XXXXXX	XXXXXX
5. Higher Graduate Diploma	Master’s degree + 24		XXXXXX	XXXXXX	XXXXXX	XXXXXX
6. Doctor	Master’s degree + 48 or Bachelor’s degree + 72		XXXXXXX	XXXXXXX	XXXXXXX	XXXXXXX

Source: “National Qualification Framework for Higher Education in Thailand,” p. 6.

Next, as for the degrees given at the completion of the curriculum at each level, standards are set up from two viewpoints. One is for the academic type of degrees, and the other is for degrees with specific specialization, which can be used as criteria for employers in hiring graduates.

**Names of degrees for each level in qualification framework**

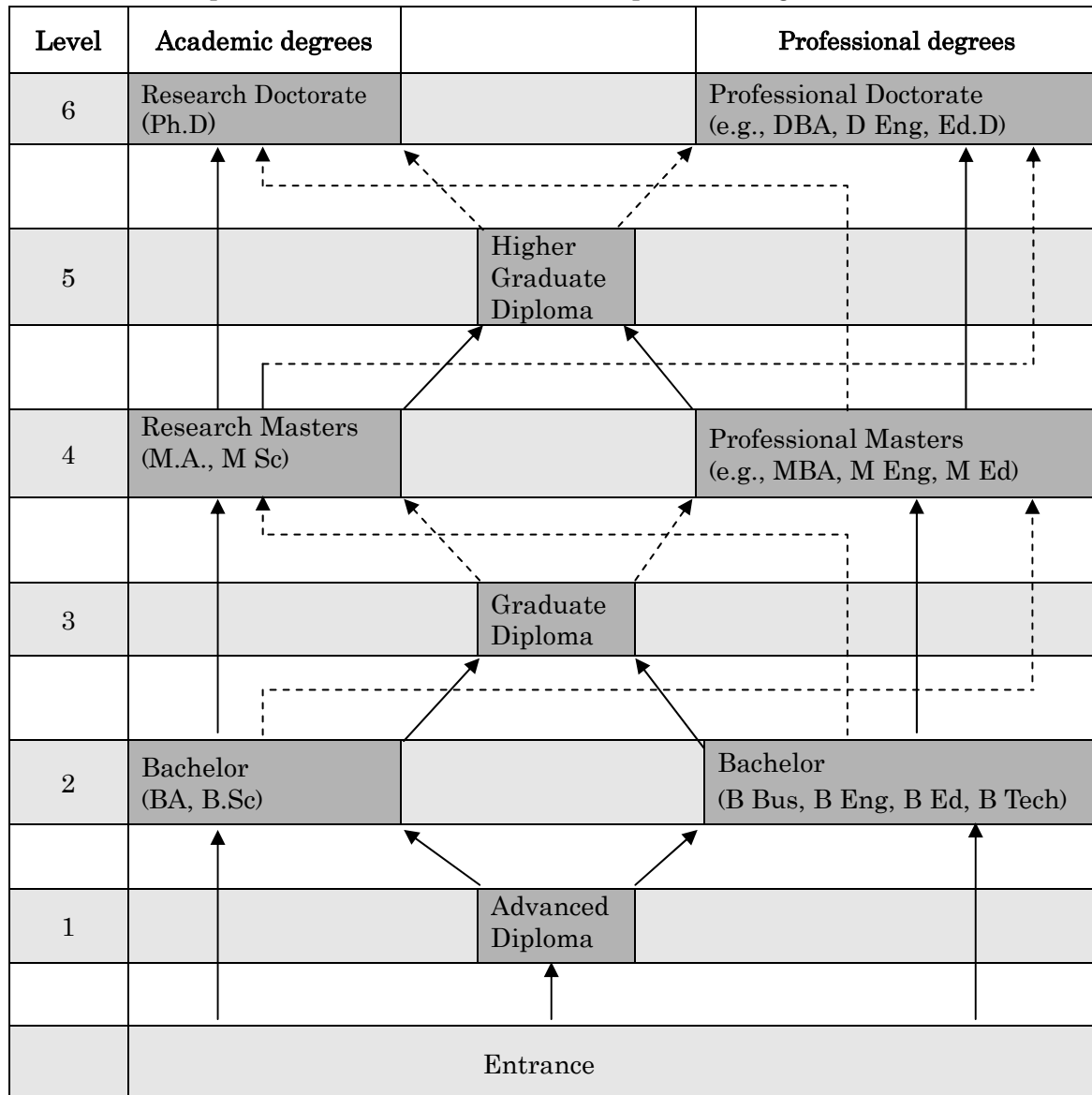
Level	Academic Strand	Professional Strand
Entry Level / Completion of Basic Education	No higher education title	No higher education title
1. Advanced Diploma	Graduate Diploma in Arts, or Science, or (if evenly divided) of higher Education	Advanced Diploma in.. (area of specialization)
2. Bachelor's Degree	Bachelor of Arts, or of Science	Bachelor of ... (name of professional field-e.g., Business, Education, Engineering)
3. Graduate Diploma	Graduate Diploma in Arts, or Science	Graduate Diploma of ... (name of professional field-e.g., Business, Education, Engineering)
4. Master's Degree	Master's Degree of Science, or of Arts	Master of ... (name of professional field-e.g., Business, Education, Engineering)
5. Higher Graduate Diploma		Higher Graduate Diploma in ... (name of professional field)
6. Doctorate	Doctor of Philosophy	Doctor of ... (name of professional field-e.g., Business, Education, Engineering).

Source: CHE (2006) "National Qualification Framework for Higher Education in Thailand," p. 7.

Academic degrees are awarded to the students who want to become researchers and advance to graduate schools by writing academic papers, and professional degrees are awarded to the students who want to be employed through their expertise after graduation. As for academic degrees, it is important for educational institutions to guide their students more rigorously in writing theses, because the quality of educational institution is measured by the quality of the theses written by students who were awarded degrees by the institution. As for professional degrees, because institutions are evaluated by employers based on the actual achievements of their graduates, it is important for the educational institutions to continuously develop a curriculum that fits the needs of society. However, the most significant role of this qualification framework is that it has systematized such academic or professional education with a doctor's course at the top, and has clearly explained to the society concretely how much students can do with each level of degree and how far their expertise will be developed if they advance to the next level.

Finally, the following chart shows the names of degrees for each level and the flow of advancement in education.

**Structure of qualification framework and developmental stages of each level**



Source: CHE (2006), "National Qualification Framework for Higher Education in Thailand," p. 8.

As is shown in the chart above, one of the characteristics of the higher education system in Thailand is to make the progress of education as diversified as possible so that students can always advance to various types of educational courses based on their needs and talents. Although this report has not touched on it, the system actually provides students the opportunity to advance to higher education even from informal or non-formal education. In this sense, it can be said that the higher education system in Thailand is constructed with lifelong education in mind. As various types of education programs are integrated into one qualification framework, each education

program comes to be clarified as a part of the systematic educational system, and what students can study at each level and what they will be able to do after each level becomes explicit for both educational institutions and society. For these reasons, this qualification framework is worthy of introduction.

This is the summary of the qualification framework of higher education announced by the Thai government in 2006. The materials on the qualification framework include more detailed explanations about the qualifications of each level, the content of education, the learning outcomes expected after graduation in six fields, etc., but they are not included in this report due to space limitations.

### **Summary**

This report explained the specific legal regulations and guidelines on the credit system, grade calculation system, credit exchange system, and quality assurance of the higher education system in Thailand, which were established by the recent higher education reform implemented by the Thai government. It is apparent that recently, the Thai government has made efforts in aggressively enhancing the standards for the establishment of higher education institutions, especially clarifying the content and quality of education programs and concrete curriculum, and improving the reliability of the system as a whole. Also, the government has installed an office for accreditation and evaluation in the Commission of Higher Education, has implemented activities of external accreditation and evaluation every five years, and is trying to maintain and control such a qualification framework. Their endeavor will be a model for other countries in Asia in the future, when they construct a cooperative system of higher education among developing Asian countries as a whole.

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<sup>1</sup> Altbach, P. G. Umakoshi, Toru (ed.), Kitamura, Yuto (translation supervisor) (2006), Ajia no koto kyouiku kaikaku (Tokyo: Tamagawa UP), has already explained the summary in detail. Also, in English, the following texts explain the summary: The Office of the Education Council, the Ministry of Education (2006), Education in Thailand: 2005–2006 (Bangkok: The Office of the Education Council), p. 188; Bobornsiri, V. (2006), “Thailand,” pp. 187–218 in UNESCO (2006), Higher Education in South-East Asia, (Bangkok; UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education); Bobornsiri, V. (2003), “Thailand,” pp. 271–285, in UNESCO (2003), Handbook on Diplomas, Degrees and Other Certificates in Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific (2<sup>nd</sup> edition) (Bangkok; UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education), p. 360

<sup>2</sup> This establishment standard concerning Bachelor’s courses is a revision of the standard published on June 7, 1999. Also, this standard was a unified revision of not only the establishment standard for Bachelor’s courses but also for three educational courses in nursing science.

<sup>3</sup> This establishment standard concerning graduate education is a revision of the standard published on June 7, 1999. Also, this standard was revised and unified with the establishment standard for Associate’s courses (published on June 1, 1990).