A Comparative Analysis of Academic Staff's Academic Performance between Autonomous and Public Universities in Thailand

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Abstract

This study examines the academic performance of the academic staff in autonomous and public universities in the areas of teaching and research activities. The study aims to prove that there are differences between the two types of universities. An independent-sample *t*-test approach was employed to measure those differences. The study revealed that there are statistically significant differences between the performance in the two types of universities in terms of the number of research projects, the monetary amount of research grants supported by both government and private sectors, the number of academic publications in international-level journals, the number of presentations at international-level conferences, and the number of academic books written. But with respect to the number of graduate students under academic supervision, the extent of teaching loads (quantified by credit units), the number of academic publications in national-level journals and the number of presentations at national-level conferences, and the employability of graduates, there are no significant differences.

1. Introduction

It is apparent that in recent years the issue of the 'efficiency' of higher education institutions (HEIs), particularly those are under a 'bureaucratic or government control system,' has been among the major concerns in the reform of higher education (HE) in many countries. The performance of government agencies who are under the bureaucratic system including public HEIs has been questioned. According to Handler (1996:4), public agencies, from the largest national bureaucracies to local school districts, are corrupt and inefficient. Van Vught (1994:323) believes that the predominance of the state control model in HE in developing countries is a major barrier for the further development of HE as regards increased efficiency and quality. The efficiency and quality of HE systems will increase if they become less regulated and controlled by governments. Government-controlled HEIs in Asian countries such as Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Thailand and Viet Nam have been transformed or are being transformed to government-supervised institutions, being made independent of bureaucratic systems. It is a general trend that

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reformed universities are granted greater institutional autonomy, but receive decreased financial support in return. Significantly, the mechanisms of budget allocation have changed from the itemized or earmarked approach to the block-grant or lump-sum basis. With more institutional autonomy as regards financial and personnel matters, these universities are expected to be more productive, efficient, effective and accountable. Autonomous institutions are more responsive to incentives for quality improvement and efficiency gains, and if universities are to achieve higher quality and greater efficiency, sweeping reforms in financing are needed (World Bank, 1994:10, 40, 63). Simultaneously, these institutions have to secure non-government funds to meet the funding shortfalls through many kinds of academic and commercial activities, or at least have to run institutions efficiently with limited money. In short, they have to do more (work) with less (money).

'Corporatization of public universities' has become one of the hottest issues in Thailand HE. Prompted by the Tom Yum Kung crisis in 1997, along with the strenuous loan conditionalities of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and Asian Development Bank (ADB), in March 1998 the government formulated the *Corporatization Policy* to make all public universities independent of the bureaucratic system in financial and administrative terms by 2002. But in practice it has been impossible to achieve that goal by schedule because of the universities' unreadiness, academic community's considerable resistance, and political issues involved. Currently, there are four corporatized or autonomous universities in Thailand, of which three are newly established autonomous institutions. These new types of HEIs have been expected to represent a possible solution to the problems of higher education quality, efficiency and accountability.

Although the government concluded that, sooner or later, all public universities would inevitably be corporatized, that matter is still being debated by both proponents and opponents of the policy. Efficiency has been among the major issues. The proponents believe that the new type of university will be more efficient, accountable and socially responsive. The former Ministry of University Affairs (MUA)[1] (1990:2, 1998:1-2) clearly stated that autonomous universities would bring efficiency, effectiveness, quality and responsiveness to society. Similarly, the former Prime Minister, Chuan Leekpai (1992-1995, and 1997-2001) held the view that a policy of autonomy would bring administrative efficiency and academic excellence to universities. Further, Dr. Krissanapong Kirtikara (2002:5), the current President of King Mongkut's University of Technology, the first-ever public university to be transformed into an autonomous university, revealed that, according to MUA research, public universities have low internal efficiency. More recently, Pongpol Adireksarn, the Minister of Education, stated that universities controlled by the government are inefficient, rigid and less autonomous, with the result that they cannot accomplish their missions. Despite the many claims about the inefficiency of the bureaucracy in general and public universities in particular, there has been little statistical evidence and research to back up those claims. The Council of the University Faculty Senate of Thailand (CUFST) which has publicly resisted the changes toward greater institutional autonomy has argued that HEIs can be efficient even if they are under the bureaucratic system and that autonomous universities do not necessarily ensure efficiency. The CUFST's research, entitled *Autonomous University in Thailand: Goals, Results and Problems*, concluded that there is no statistically significant difference between autonomous and public universities in terms of international recognition, academic works, academic leadership, the amount of international research grants, academic creativity, and teaching loads at the graduate level.

2. Framework and purposes of study

Because public institutions are under the bureaucratic system in the same way other government agencies are, all government-owned universities have been performing under the same regulations and rules. University staff are government servants retained on the basis of lifelong employment. Since their working conditions are the same, their work performance is supposed to be the same as well. But when public universities were transformed into autonomous institutions, expectations regarding their performance were higher than those of the public institutions mentioned above. It is generally believed that independence in the administration and management of autonomous universities will result in greater productivity, efficiency, accountability, and so forth. **Figure 1** below explains that ethos.

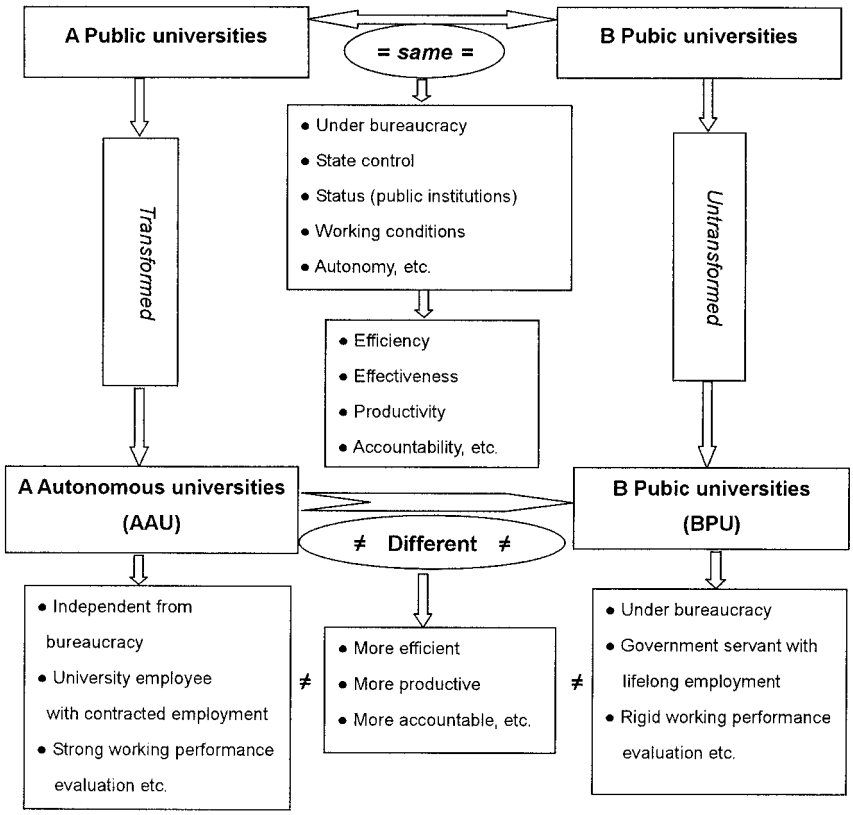


Figure 1. The Ethos of Autonomous and Public Universities

This study is intended to compare two different types of government-owned HEIs, namely, 'autonomous' and 'public' universities, with the assumption that the difference in status makes them different in performance, or, in other words, that the status of universities affects their performance. Although all government-owned and -financed HEIs in Thailand have served the nation in four aspects, namely; teaching, research, social-academic service and cultural enhancement, the first two activities (teaching and research) have been regarded as their original and predominant functions. Therefore, this

study aims to determine and evaluate in concrete ways the academic performance of the academic staff in the two types of universities in their major tasks, teaching and research. As stated earlier, although Thailand currently has four autonomous universities, there is only one autonomous university, A Autonomous University (AAU), which has been transformed from a public university. The rest are newly established autonomous institutions. Thus, the experience and practices of AAU could be studied as their prototype and the understandings obtained applied to other public universities that are preparing for autonomous status. Accordingly, this study takes AAU as an exemplar of autonomous universities, whereas B Public University (BPU) represents other public universities**.**

3. Thailand's higher education and the autonomous university

All Thai public universities are owned and largely funded by the government. Their origins and the history of HE in Thailand date back to the establishment of the country's first medical school in 1889. This was followed by the foundation of the Law School in the Ministry of Justice in 1897, the Royal Pages School (later known as the Civil Service College) in 1902 and the Engineering School in 1913. Later on, these schools were upgraded and granted university status. Their aims were to train and educate skillful manpower to provide a newly expanded civil service for the government. In addition, three specialized universities were established to provide training for competent personnel for government service in medicine (Mahidol University), agriculture and forestry (Kasetsart University) and fine arts (Silpakorn University).

From the 1960s to the1980s, Thailand accelerated the diffusion of HEIs to meet societal demands for national development. By 1964 there were nine public universities, and all of them were located in Bangkok. The creation of three more new regional universities, Chiang Mai in the North, Khon Kaen in the North East, and Prince Songkla in the South, was an important step in national tertiary education development. However, due to the increasing social demands for HE, which could not be fulfilled by existing public institutions, two Open Universities, Ramkhamhaeng University and Sukhothai Thammathirat University, were established in the latter half of the 1970s. They have been playing a significant role in providing HE to the public. Furthermore, the private sector was encouraged to play a greater role in providing post-secondary education because the government alone could not cope with the public's increasing demands for HE. The existing private colleges were also granted university status under the 1979 Private Higher Education Act. In the 1990s, seven regional public universities were established. Interestingly, three of them were so-called 'autonomous or state-supervising universities', as opposed to 'state-controlled' ones.

Autonomous universities differ from other conventional public universities in many aspects. They are independent of the bureaucratic system but still financed by the government. Further explanation will be made in the next section. Currently, Thailand has three types of HE providers: public, autonomous and private institutions, as shown in **Table 1**. Despite the fact that autonomous universities are still recognized as "public institutions", in this paper they are classified as one of the university types, since they differ from other conventional public universities.

Table 1. Number of HE institutions and total enrollment, 2001*

Type of institutions	Number	Enrollment
1. Public universities	20 (27%)	937,340 (79%)
- *limited-admission*	*18*	*292,951*
- *open-admission*	*2*	*644,389*
2. Autonomous univ.	4 (5%)	18,419 (2%)
3. Private institutions	51 (68%)**	223,810 (19%)
Total	75 (100%)	1,179,569 (100%)

* The number covers HEIs under the jurisdiction of the MUA only.

** Two of them have not admitted students yet.

Source: The MUA 2002.

The concept of an autonomous university is not new to Thai HE. It was first introduced in 1928 by Prince Songklanakarintara. Later, a similar idea was proposed by Preedee Panomyong and Puey Ungphakorn, two former Rectors of Thammasart University. But for some unknown reasons, it was not carried through in those days (Nitungkorn, 2001:474). However, actual movement toward the autonomous university was begun between 1964 and 1970 by a group of university leaders and scholars. But, it was not implemented because it was rejected by the then-dictator-military government and opposed by university people themselves.

Even though the idea and proposal of the autonomous university could not be put into practice in those early days, they have since existed and been embedded in the Thai HE. Twenty years later, that idea became policy and was implemented by the former MUA in 1990s. In accordance with the Sixth, Seventh, Eight and Ninth National Economic and Social Development Plans (1987-1991, 1992-1996, 1997-2001 and 2002-2006) to downsize, decentralize, and streamline the bureaucracy for the improvement of the efficiency and effectiveness of the public sector, the MUA launched the Higher Education Long Range Plan (1990-2004), prescribing the corporatization of public universities by taking them out of the bureaucracy. Based on this Plan, Suranaree University of Technology and Walailak University, the two newly-established autonomous universities, were created in 1990 and 1992, respectively. Furthermore, the movement has continued to move forward since that time. In 1992, 16 public universities drafted their acts for autonomy. The acts were approved by the Cabinet but failed to pass the National Legislative Body. The latter half of 1990s witnessed progress in the movement.

Affected by the economic crisis, the government formulated a policy in March 1998 to make all of the public universities autonomous by 2002. This conforms to one of the conditionalities of the Social Sector Program Loan of the Asian Development Bank (ADB), which prescribes the corporatization of public universities. The National Committee on Autonomous Universities, presided over by the then-Deputy Prime Minister, was formed to oversee the autonomy policy. In September of the same year, the former MUA, the organization responsible for public universities, issued a White Paper entitled, *The Principles and Guidelines of Autonomous Universities.* This document explained the principles of autonomous universities and provided frameworks for public universities to draft their acts. The White Paper also outlined the fundamental issues underlying the administration, financing and monitoring of autonomous universities. Some key points are the following (Brimble, 1999:23):

- *An autonomous university means that the university is still a government unit but will have its*

own administration and management. The goal for being autonomous is for the university to be more efficient, independent, flexible, and fast in order to respond to academic change.

- The government will oversee autonomous universities only on issues related to policy, budget allocations, and quality, but it will emphasize monitoring and evaluation so that universities' operations are transparent.

- An autonomous university is a juristic entity under the supervision of the government through the MUA. It is not a part of the bureaucracy or a state enterprise.

- Administration and management rules and regulations of each university will be written in each university's act. Most administration and management decisions will be finalized at the university level, except for some issues that will be proposed to the Cabinet through the MUA.

- University staff will be changed from government officials to university employees under the personnel regulations of the university. There will be an evaluation process specified by each university to change personnel status to university employees with appropriate titles, compensation, and responsibilities.

- The government will allocate an adequate budget to guarantee quality education. The budget allocated is deemed the university's revenue.

In 1998, after long and hard efforts on the part of its leaders, King Mongkut's Institute of Technology Thonburi became the first public university to be transformed to autonomous institution and renamed King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi.

In addition, the 1999 National Education Act (Section 36) has promoted the greater autonomy of public HEIs prescribing that the state educational institutions providing degrees should be legal entities and enjoy the status of government or state-supervised agencies, and that these institutions should enjoy autonomy, be able to develop their own systems of administration and management, have flexibility and academic freedom and be under the supervision of the institutional council. Currently, the process of creating autonomous universities is continuing. Many public universities have had their acts approved, while many other institutions are in preparation.

4. Profiles of AAU and BPU and their distinctions

'A Autonomous University' (AAU)[2], a former public university that has been transformed into a so-called 'autonomous university', and 'B Public University' (BPU)[3], share highly similar characteristics. Both were established as technical colleges in the second half of the 1950s and the first half of the 1960s, respectively, before being upgraded to 'university status' in the 1980s. Both of them have been specialized institutions focusing on science and technology. They are also small in size, with, in 2002, 8 faculties, 92 programs, an enrollment of 10,776 and a teaching staff of 487 for the AAU, and 6 faculties, 78 programs, an enrollment of 16,448 and a teaching staff of 626 for the BPU. Thus, these two institutions were selected as the basis of a case study on the grounds that 1) AAU is the first and so far the only public university that has been transformed to autonomous university, and 2) as small and specialized institutions, AAU and BPU offer fewer complications in the making of a comparative study than other HEIs would. Except for their status, they are very similar in many ways. Thus, it is reasonable and worthwhile to compare the two universities. Furthermore, the comparison focuses on particular faculties, which are the backbones of the two institutions. They are the Faculty of Engineering and the Faculty of Industrial Education or Technical Education for BPU and the Faculty of Science or Applied

Science for BPU.

The difference in status between AAU and BPU is, therefore, responsible for the differences in many of aspects of the two universities, as mentioned above. **Table 2** shows some characteristics of and distinctions between autonomous and public universities in general and AAU and BPU in particular. It is clear that, despite the fact that AAU and three other newly established autonomous universities have become independent of the bureaucratic system, they are still government-owned and -financed institutions. Thus, they are still considered public universities. In this regard, they must serve the public as the public goods the same way other conventional public universities and government agencies do. What makes AAU different from BPU is its degree of autonomy over financing and personnel issues. This autonomy is the essence of the autonomous university. AAU and other autonomous universities receive financial support from the government on the basis of block grants, whereas of the grants funding BPU and conventional public universities are in an itemized form. As a result, AAU's administrators are able to generate and allocate the budget within the campus as they see fit. Furthermore, any annual surplus can be retained as the institution's own profit, which is contrary to the situation at BPU. As regards their employment status, the majority of AAU's staff are university-contracted employees whose job performance is seriously evaluated[4]. Because AAU is allowed to set up its own salary scale for its contracted personnel which is 1.5 times higher than those of public ones, it is assumed by the stakeholders that such practices and conditions implemented by AAU and other autonomous universities will make them more efficient and productive. These practices, therefore, are not only for AAU but also to be applied to other autonomous universities.

Table 2. Distinctions between autonomous (AAU) and public universities (BPU)

Univ. types / Criteria	Autonomous univ. (AAU)	Public univ. (BPU)
1. Ownership	Government-owned	Government-owned
2. Financing	Government supported	Government supported
3. Budget type	Block grant	Itemized/earmarked
4. Annual surplus	Retain as its own	Return to government
5. Salary	Its own salary scale	Government's salary scale
6. Staff status	University employee	Government servant
7. Employment condition	Contract basis	Life-long employment
8. Personnel management	Under its own system	Under bureaucratic system

5. Indicators and the selection of indicators

In measuring or evaluating any activities or performances, measurements or performance indicators are crucial. Thus, the selection of these indicators is important. According to Teichler and Winkler (1994:136-7), the use of indicators is a favorite method among economists, and most indicator approaches strongly reflect the economists' views of what the 'quality' of the process or outcome of higher education means. Therefore, the use of indicators enables researchers to see efficiency and productivity of and in higher education, but the matter of 'quality' is still doubtful, since the number of pub-

lications does not necessarily attest to the quality of those publications. This research focuses on the number of academic activities of academic staff rather than on its quality.

Teichler and Winkler (ibid.) warn, however, that the major problem with using indicators is the accessibility of data. The way in which the indicators are selected is strongly influenced by the facility of access to specific data rather than by their explanatory power in relation to the phenomena under analysis. Kells (1994:174) also states that performance indicators (PIs) are complex and controversial in their nature, and the motivations for the interests of these diverse constituencies (government officials, university leaders and staff members and policy makers) vary considerably. They range from concerns about the quality of the institutions and programs and the utilization of resources to the ability of governments to monitor progress in the achievements of the universities' social, economical or political goals. The indicators employed in this study have been chosen from numerous indicators introduced by the following scholars:

(a) Dochy (*et al*.1990 quoted in Teichler *et al*. 1994:137), 16 PIs (1. Number of applicants per undergraduate place, 2. Entry score of undergraduate intake, 3. Classification or number of honors degrees awarded, 4. Student wastage rates (drop-out-rates), 5. Staff workload, 6. Employability of graduates, 7. Postgraduate completion rates, 8. Research grants and contracts, 9. Research scholarships awarded by particular bodies, 10. Records of publications, 11. Student load and analysis of student numbers, 12. Staff-student ratios, 13. Units costs, 14. Staff numbers according to category, 15. Institutional income and expenditure, and 16. Departmental equipment and recurrent grant and expenditure)

(b) Johnes (*et al*. 1990:9), 5 PIs (1. Unit costs, 2. Percentage of students not completing their degree course, 3. Percentage of graduates with a first or upper second class honors degree, 4. Percentage of graduates unemployed or in a short-term job, 5. Research grants per full-time academic, and 6. Research rating)

(c) Cave (*et al*. 1997:209), 14 PIs (Relating to teaching - 1. Entry qualifications, 2. Exit qualification, 3. Cost per student or staff-student ratio, 4. Value-added, 5. Rate of return, 6. Student progression rates, 7. Employment on graduation, 8. Student and peer view, - Relating to research - 9. Number of research students, 10. Output of research, 11. Quality or impact indices, 12. Research incomes, 13. Peer review, and 14. Reputational ranking)

In this research, the indicators used to measure the efficiency and productivity of the academic staff at public and autonomous universities were chosen on the basis of teaching and research activities that are relevant to the conditions and context of Thailand HE. They are as follows:

1. Number of graduate students under academic supervision,
2. Extent of teaching loads (quantified by credit units),
3. Number of research projects,
4. Monetary amount of research grants supported by the government sector,
5. Monetary amount of research grants supported by the private sector,
6. Number of refereed academic papers published in national-level journals,
7. Number of refereed academic paper published in international-level journals,
8. Number of presentations made at national-level conferences,
9. Number of presentations made at international conferences,
10. Number of academic books written,
11. Number of employed graduates (one year after graduation)

According to the government, government-owned universities both public and autonomous have four

functions: teaching, research, public academic service and cultural enhancement (MUA, 1990:26-32). But this research deals with only the first two functions, teaching and research, because they have been the main and most important roles of HEIs. Since the fundamental and primary functions of public universities in Thailand are to train and educate competent and skillful manpower for national development, the teaching and research that have contributed to that development have been predominant. Teaching performance is examined through indicators 1, 2 and 11, while research tasks are investigated by means of indicators 3-10. Indicators 1-10 are available from 2000 to 2003 (July), while the last one covers only bachelor's degree graduates from 1996 to 2001.

6. Method

6.1 Procedure

Data used for analysis in this research have been acquired through collected documents and questionnaire surveys. In the first phase, government policy papers, reports and published materials, and annual reports and information of both AAU and BPU were collected. These collected documents provided important data, statistics about the universities, policies of the government, and the number of employed graduates. In July 2003, 400 copies of questionnaires were distributed to academic staff members in the Faculty of Engineering, the Faculty of Science and the Faculty of Industrial Education of AAU and BPU (200 each), of which 137 copies (34.25 percent) were returned. Among them 65 (33 percent) and 72 (36 percent) copies of questionnaires were the replies of academic staff members of AAU and BPU, respectively. These answers have been used to analyze the academic performance of academic staff in AAU and BPU in terms of teaching (indicators 1 and 2) and research (indicators 3-10).

6.2 Background of questionnaire respondents

Although there is a divergence between autonomous and public universities in many respects, due to the differences in their status, there is also a convergence in some aspects, since both types of university are government-owned and -funded institutions. The majority of questionnaire respondents of AAU came from the Faculty Engineering (80%), while it was scattered over all three faculties at BPU. In terms of academic position, most of the academic staff members in the two institutions are lecturers. In AAU, 51% and 49% of respondents are government servants and university employees, respectively. This is due to the fact that, unlike the situation in newly established autonomous universities that used a single system in which all university staff are university employees, AAU applies a dual system in which there are both government servants and university employees. In addition to the new recruits, AAU's members are free to decide their own status, whether to remain civil servants or to become university employees instead. Meanwhile, 85% and 15% of BPU's teaching staffs are government servants and university employees. As in the case of AAU, all the new staff members of BPU are university employees.

6.3 Scoring and analysis

An independent-sample *t*-test approach was employed to analyze the returned questionnaires. The questionnaire contained 25 questions about personal data and academic performance from 2000 to 2003 (July), with respect to the number of graduate students under academic supervision, the extent of the teaching loads (quantified by credit units), the number of research projects, the monetary amount of

research grants (supported by both the government and the private sectors), the number of academic publications (published in national- and international-level journals), the number of academic conference presentations (at the national and international levels) and the number of academic books written. Groups (AAU and BPU) were considered to be significantly different if $p < .05$. Then the employability of the graduates of two institutions from 1996 to 2001 was investigated. Data analyzed were based on the reports of the former MUA, '*Job Searching Status of Graduates*'. The MUA's surveys deal only with undergraduates who obtained a job within approximately one year after graduation.

Table 3. Background of questionnaire respondents

	AAU		BPU	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
1. Faculty				
1.1 Engineering	52	80	25	35
1.2 Science	11	17	24	33
1.3 Industrial Education	2	3	23	32
2. Academic Position				
2.1 Lecturer	31	48	40	56
2.2 Assistant Professor	25	39	23	32
2.3 Associate Professor	8	12	9	13
2.4 Full Professor	1	2	0	0
3. Employment Status				
3.1 Government Servant	33	51	61	85
3.2 University Employee	32	49	11	15
4. Length of Career				
4.1 Less than 5 years	15	23	13	18
4.2 5-10 years	21	32	14	19
4.3 11-15 years	8	12	14	19
4.4 More than 15 years	21	32	31	43
5. Degree				
5.1 Bachelor's Degree	5	8	1	1
5.2 Master's Degree	23	35	40	56
5.3 Doctoral Degree	37	57	30	42
6. Institution				
6.1 Thai University	26	40	38	53
6.2 Foreign University	39	60	34	47
Total	n=65	100	n=72	100

7. Results

Table 4 shows how the academic staff of AAU and BPU perform academically. Regarding the num-

ber of graduate students under academic supervision, there is no significant difference between lecturers of AAU (*M*=5.55, *SD*=7.33) and BPU (*M*=6.10, *SD*=10.33), *t* (135)=-.352, *p* > .05. In terms of extent of teaching loads (quantified by credit units), staffs of AAU (*M*=2.69 range 'more than 10 credits', *SD*=.53) and BPU (*M* =2.71 range 'more than 10 credits', *SD*=.57), *t* (135)=-.171, *p* > .05 did not differ in their performance. However, in the area of the number of research projects, the academic staffs of AAU (*M*=2.89, *SD*=2.52) have conducted significantly more research than their counterparts at BPU (*M*=1.57, *SD*=1.82), *t* (115.487)=3.489, *p* <.001. Consequently, in the area of the amount of research grants, AAU's lectures (*M*=1.51 range 'less than 500,000 Thai Baht', *SD*=1.02) received significantly more financial support from the government sector than their counterparts at BPU (*M*=.89 range 'less than 500,000 Thai Baht', *SD*=.86), *t* (126.294)=3.815, *p* <.001. Similarly, AAU's lecturers (*M*=.92 range 'less than 500,000 Thai Baht', *SD*=.83) received significantly more financial support from the private sector than their counterparts at BPU (*M*=.43 range 'not receive at all', *SD*=.67), *t* (122.443)=3.787, *p* <.001.

For the number of refereed academic papers published in national-level journals, the results showed that there is no significant difference between the staff of AAU (*M*=.94, *SD*=1.85) and that of BPU (*M*=.65, *SD*=1.51), *t* (135)=.993, *p* >.05. However, in international-level journals, the academic publica-

Table 4. Academic performance of academic staff between AAU and BPU, 2000 - 2003

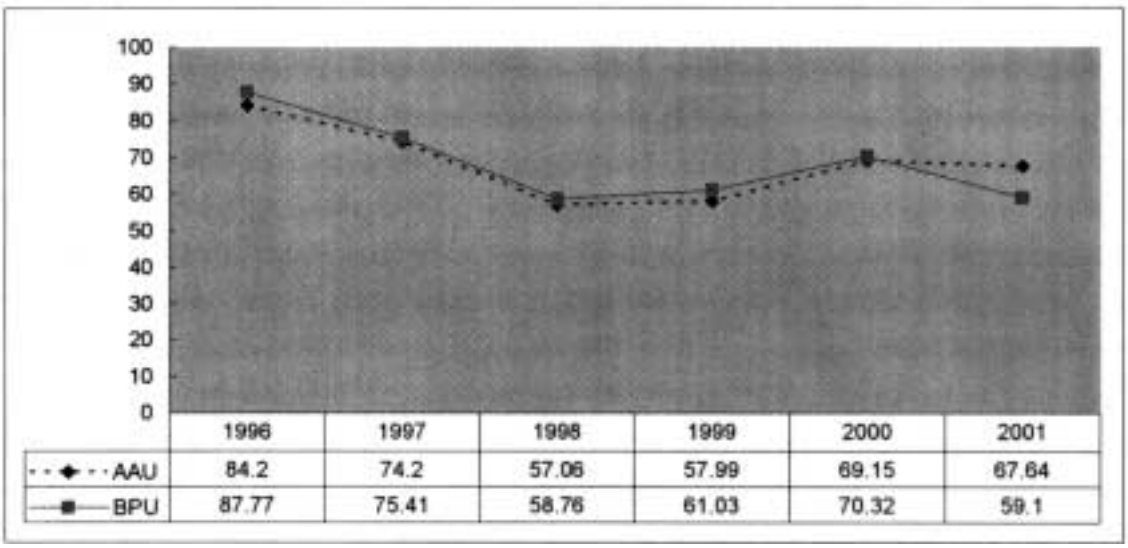
	AAU		BPU			
Indicators	M	SD	M	SD	*t*	*df*
GSTUDENT	5.55	7.33	6.10	10.33	-.35	135
CREDIT	2.69	.53	2.71	.57	-.171	135
RESEARCH	2.89	2.52	1.57	1.82	3.48*	115.48
GOVRESEA	1.51	1.02	.89	.86	3.81*	126.29
PRIRESEA	.92	.83	.43	.67	122.44*	3.78
NAPAPER	.94	1.85	.65	1.51	.99	135
INTPAPER	1.15	1.80	.39	1.25	2.86*	112.82
NAPRENEN	1.02	1.80	.89	1.50	.44	135
INTPRESE	1.08	1.84	.42	1.29	2.41*	113.10
ACABOOK	.31	.73	.61	.83	-2.27*	134.87

* p<.05

Note: GSTUDENT=Number of graduate students under supervision, CREDIT=Extent of teaching loads (quantified by credit units), RESEARCH=Number of research projects, GOVRESEA=Amount of research grants supported by the government sector, PRIRESEA=Amount of research grants supported by the private sector, NAPAPER=Number of refereed academic publications published in national-level journals, INTPAPER=Number of refereed academic publications published in international-level journals, NAPRENEN=Number of national conference presentations, INTPRESE=Number of international conference presentations, ACABOOK=Number of academic books written

tions of AAU's academic staff (*M*=1.15, *SD*=1.80) were significantly more numerous than those of BPU staff members (*M*=.39, *SD*=1.25), *t* (112.826)=2.863, *p* <.005. With respect to academic presentations at national conferences, there is no significant difference between the academic staff of AAU (*M*=1.02, *SD*=1.80) and of BPU (*M*=.89, *SD*=1.50), *t* (135)=.449, *p* > .05. However, internationally, lecturers from AAU (*M*=1.08, *SD*=1.84) made significantly more academic presentations than their counterparts (*M*=.42, *SD*=1.29), *t* (113.106)=2.410, *p*<.05. Finally, the results showed that the academic staff of AAU (*M*=.31, *SD*=.73) produced significantly fewer academic books than those of BPU (*M*=.61, *SD*=.83), *t* (134.870)=-2.278, *p* <.05.

The employability of graduates could be regarded as an important indicator showing a university's educational quality in general and that university's academic staff's teaching performance in particular. Thus, this indicator can be used to assess the performance of the individual institutions in terms of teaching (John & Taylor, 1990:122). **Figure 2** below illustrates the employment percentage of bachelor's degree graduates of AAU and BPU from 1996 to 2001. There is not much difference between the two institutions. Because both institutions specialize in the market-demanded science and technology disciplines, the direction of the labor market has more influence over the graduate employability than university education *per* se does. The lowest employment of their graduates occurred only during the peak of the economic recession in 1998 and 1999. However, the employment of AAU's graduates in 2001 is obviously higher than those of the BPU.



	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
AAU	84.2	74.2	57.06	57.99	69.15	67.64
BPU	87.77	75.41	58.76	61.03	70.32	59.1

Figure 2. Employability of graduates

8. Discussion and conclusion

The results of this study show that there are statistically significant differences in certain aspects of the academic staff's performance in the teaching and research areas between AAU and BPU. As stated above, in terms of the number of research projects (3), the monetary amount of research grants (4 and 5),

the number of international academic publications (7), and the number of international conference presentations (9), AAU's academic staff's performance is significantly better than that of BPU. Brimble (1999:11), who performed a similar study, revealed that by introducing a contract-basis of employment, three autonomous institutions in Chulalongkorn University, Thammasart University and Mahidol University have provided higher salaries in return for the higher quality of lecturing, research and publications from the faculty. He had concluded that this type of competitive environment and demands for accountability are contributing factors encouraging the faculty to produce more publications than other leading public universities.

A similar explanation could be offered to account for the difference in status of academic staff's performance in the areas of teaching and research. As stated above, even though the two universities share highly similar characteristics in many aspects, AAU as an autonomous university, has been run under an administrative system of its own making. Being out of the bureaucratic system, it has independence to decide administrative and management affairs, including the staff working conditions that are most suitable for their missions, natures and needs. Specific incentives and unprecedented practices that are not available in the bureaucratic system, for instance, the flexibility of internal budget allocations and the use (through the block grant system), and the serious evaluation of work performances (through a contracted employment system), have been implemented in AAU, as well as at other autonomous universities.

Although all lecturers in both autonomous and public universities are obliged to conduct research that will lead to academic publications and conference presentations for their career promotion and knowledge advancement, the study shows that the academic staff of AAU have been more productive than its BPU counterpart. All AAU staff, both government servants and university employees, have been evaluated their work performance using the same standards and conditions. One of the important evaluation conditions is the requirement of, beyond public service and administrative jobs, a certain number of research projects and academic publications and presentations. This competitive requirement, therefore, provides an incentive for AAU's lecturers to be more active in performing academic work, as confirmed by one male teaching staff member who reported that if he does not deliver (participating in frenetically paced meetings with potential corporate partners in Thailand and abroad to fund his laboratory), he could lose his job (Asiaweek, 2000:38). This is regarded as one of the important factors making AAU's staffs more productive than those of public universities. As regards the institutions overall, in 2002 the AAU staff conducted 198 research projects, double to the amount of 1999 (97 projects). Meanwhile, the BPU staff undertook 129 research projects in 2002.

Having been granted greater autonomy, AAU has applied a private-style managerial approach, which is accompanied by factors such as efficiency and productivity. An institutional administration is output- or outcome-based rather than activity-based, as has been practiced in public universities or other government agencies that are under bureaucracy. Being autonomous universities provides HEIs with a chance to improve their efficiency and productivity in terms of teaching and research. Thus, the performance-based evaluations and competitive working conditions that have been employed in autonomous institutions augment the staff efficiency and productivity. Additionally, under its own salary scale, AAU or other autonomous universities can attract competent lecturers with higher salaries as well. Therefore, it can be concluded that the status difference results in or leads to the difference in academic performance. Being out of the bureaucracy provides HEIs with the greater autonomy and specific eligibilities that under-bureaucrat public universities cannot afford. Furthermore, it is expected that these special treat-

ments will bring about efficiency in autonomous universities. In its Autonomous University draft, BPU states that, under the bureaucracy system, it is inefficient and irrelevant to socio-economic development. To be more efficient and academically and administratively flexible, BPU should be transformed from a public to an autonomous university (BPU, 2003:i). This statement only confirms the difference.

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Notes

1. Since August 2003, it has been merged with the Ministry of Education and the Office of the National Education Commission and become the Commission on Higher Education under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education.

2., 3. The real name is undisclosed throughout this paper, including references, for anonymity reasons. In addition, although AAU is an autonomous institution, it is still regarded as 'public university'. For clarity, throughout this paper an autonomous university means an 'out-of-bureaucracy public university', as contrasted with an 'under-bureaucracy conventional public university'.

4. In addition to the new recruits, AAU's staff members are free to decide their status, that is, whether to remain civil servants or change to become university contracted employees. Its administrators, however, have been convincing those who are civil servants to change their employment status. Now, 58% of AAU personnel are contracted employees, and this number should reach a plateau of around 80% within 10 years.