Higher Education for Persons with Disabilities in Thailand

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The population of Thailand is approximately 64 million (2005), with an annual growth rate of about 0.6 percent. According to the report of the 2002 disability survey, the Thai population of 63,003,000 includes a disabled population of 1,098,000 or 1.7 percent.

Higher education for persons with disabilities in Thailand dates back to 1961 when a blind man entered the Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University. During the past 44 years, approximately 1 percent of persons with disabilities graduated from the higher education level, mostly the blind.

In 1994, Rajabhat Suan Dusit Institute started to integrate Hearing Impaired persons in their special education program. In 1996, Ratchasuda College was established within Mahidol University as the first higher education institution dedicated toward the work for persons with disabilities in Thailand. Presently, there are 166 deaf, blind and physically disabled students enrolled in Ratchasuda College.

Since 1999, the Year of Education for Persons with Disabilities, the number of persons with disabilities in schools has increased. In cooperation with Persons with Disability Organizations, and supported by the Prime Minister’s Disability Advisory Committee, the Ministry of Education greatly developed and funded several special education programs throughout the country.

In 2004, the number of persons with disabilities in higher education has increased to 1,044 among 92 educational institutions. Because of the increasing number of persons with disabilities in school, Ratchasuda College cooperated with PWD’s leaders and the Commission of Higher Education to work on the first strategic plan of Higher Education for Persons with Disabilities. This plan will open opportunities for persons with disabilities in higher education tremendously.

According to the strategic plan for persons with disabilities (PWDs), as mentioned, it will be an important step for Thailand’s higher education to start working with people with disabilities.

Ratchasuda College, Mahidol University is a Higher Education institution focusing on rehabilitation for the disabled in terms of providing educational services in both bachelor’s and master’s degree level, including training, research, and other academic services.
There are 4 programs offered by the college.
- Masters Degree Program in Rehabilitation Services for PWDs
- Bachelor Degree in Deaf Studies
- Graduate Diploma in Interpretation (Thai Sign Language)
- Certificate Program in Interpretation (Thai Sign Language)

Ratchasuda College has played an important role on the work of the strategic plan as a resource partner, working with both public and private universities, as well as special schools for children with disabilities and integrated programs in regular schools.

At the same time, Ratchasuda College has established networks with universities in Europe, U.S.A., Australia, and Asia in order to exchange experiences and continue developing joint programs for people with disabilities (PWDs).

It is about time for us to have an Asia Network or Asian Bond for higher education for persons with disabilities because many Asian countries need Models and Resources for developing their education for PWDs and producing PWDs leaders, which is appropriate for their needs, their cultures and ways of life.

On this occasion, we hope that Ratchasuda College will have the opportunity to work on the strategic plan for PWDs studying on the higher education level by cooperating with Asian Network in order to develop the new higher education history.
STRATEGIES FOR PROVIDING EDUCATION FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES STUDYING ON THE HIGHER EDUCATION LEVEL

Vision: To provide education for persons with disabilities focusing on accepting quality students on an equal basis and assist the students to reach their full potential and gain employment.

Scope: Providing education for persons with disabilities studying on the higher education level

- Strategy 1: Providing educational opportunities
  - Provide opportunities for students with potential to study in higher education level
  Action plan:
  1. Implement pilot projects where higher education institutions accept disabled students into a different curriculum.
  2. Every higher education institution offers quota system for disabled students.
  3. Collaborate with related organizations to set up a central database to guide students in continuing their education in higher education level.
  4. Collaborate with basic education commissions and related organizations to professionally develop special education personnel and related professions.

- Strategy 2: Motivate disabled students to further develop their learning process
  - Develop Disability Support Services (DSS) in higher education institutions that promote education for disabled students
  - Further develop special education personnel and increase abilities of disabled students
  Action plan:
  1. Support higher education institutions with disabled students by implementing pilot projects on Disability Support Services (DSS) and providing appropriate budget and personnel and relying on Ratchasuda College Mahidol University and Ratjapat Suandusit University as supporting institutions.
  2. Higher education institutions acquire and update technologies, facilities, and other services that facilitate smooth education of disabled students.
  3. Provide training opportunities for personnel working in DSS system in higher education institutions.

- Strategy 3: Developments for new knowledge
  - Conduct research to gain new knowledge in the field of disability
  Action plan:
  - Promote research to gain new knowledge about disability as well as education and employment for the disabled.

- Strategy 4: Promote employment for disabled graduates
  - Promote collaboration to support employment of disabled graduates
  Action plan:
  1. Collaborate with Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, and disability organizations in order to provide funding to implement projects related toward employment of disabled graduates.
  2. Promote opportunities for disabled graduates to gain employment in higher education institutions and open market on trial basis

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