

Distance Education at Ho Chi Minh City Open University

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Abstract

With the principle of "Lifelong Education" as the philosophy, Distance education operation and research are the important tasks given by the Government. Open and Distance education (ODE) is the only solution to many people who are not able to take face-to-face courses for various reasons. The ODE programs really create opportunities to the people in islands, remote and mountainous regions. The needs for education and continuous retraining really exist and become more popular in the community, especially in the market-oriented economy. Besides, the tradition of learning and hard-working of the people to improve themselves are the stable foundation for developing ODE at Ho Chi Minh City Open University (HCMCOU).

HCMCOU is recognized as one of the first universities that offer the open way of training to implement the directions of the Communist party and Government in socializing education and multi-formalizing the types of training.

HCMCOU had some significant contributions to education and training of the country and will continue to its contribution to the development of the country in the future.

Introduction

HCMCOU was founded on July 26, 1993 according to the decree 389/TTg signed by the Prime Minister on the basis of Ho Chi Minh City Institute of Open Education established on June 15, 1990 founded by the decree 451/TTg signed by Minister of Ministry of Education and Training. It is the first university that is managed by semi-public regulations and it offers the open way of training to implement the directions of the Communist party and Government in socializing education and multiplying the types of training. The school became a state university in June, 2006.

HCMCOU is an institution of higher education offering a variety of programs ranging from distance learning, learning at satellite academic centers, aiming at meeting various learning needs of society and contributing to the enlargement of the human resources for the country.

At the beginning of its establishment, HCMCOU determined its own purposes: increasing human knowledge, training human resources and fostering talent for the country.

Mission and Objectives

Training is provided by HCMCOU with various kinds of training: full-time training, part-time training, and distance education.

Based on study experiences in distance education of the countries in the region and around the world, the purposes of distance education in HCMCOU are as follows:

- To provide multiple opportunities for working adults to pursue higher education certificates and degrees.
- To meet the increasing demands for continuing, life-long

education for those in the work force to upgrade the quality of their life and their work and to keep up with scientific and technological advances.

These purposes satisfy the demands and wishes of people therefore were many register in this program.

Majors and Areas of Study

Distance education by credit system has been offered since 1993 in the following areas:

- Computer Science
- Civil Engineering
- Economics
- Business Administration
- Corporate Accounting
- Finance Banking
- Commercial Law
- English
- Southeast Asia Studies
- Sociology
- Social work

Co-Ordinated Units With HCMCOU

Distance education operation and research are the important tasks given by the Government. Currently, HCMCOU is the main provider of distance education in Vietnam. The needs for education and continuous retraining really exist and become more popular in the community, especially in the market-oriented economy. Besides, the tradition of learning and hard-working of the people to improve themselves and the policy of the Government to promote distance education are stable foundations for developing distance education at HCMCOU. Distance education is the only solution to many people who are not able to take face-to-face courses for various reasons.

The ODE programs really create opportunities to the people in islands, remote and mountainous regions.

To support the students HCMCOU cooperates with 45 training units, of which there are about 27 local study centers in provinces and cities from the central to the south of the country.

Student Support Services

HCMCOU's distance education system allows students to study independently using the materials the university provides as their principal resource. In this way, most students study by themselves and they may obtain educational and career counseling services from the university from the time they apply as students to the time they graduate. The services are intended to allow students to quickly become acquainted with the distance education system and to study by themselves effectively.

As an open university, HCMCOU provides a distance teaching/ learning system which employs such educational media as correspondence materials, radio and television programs, and other methods which enable students to study independently.

To help students study on their own, HCMCOU employs distance teaching techniques and uses the following media to impart instruction:

1. Main media: correspondence texts, textbooks, handbook, etc.
2. Support media: radio and television broadcasts, course materials recorded on cassette tapes, CD and Internet
3. Tutorial and counseling sessions at various regional and local study centers.

Current Status

Distance learning is based on the needs of individual learners, not the interests of the teacher or the institution; it gives students as much control as possible over what and when and where and how they learn; it commonly uses the delivery methods of distance education and the facilities of educational technology; it changes the role of the teacher from a source of knowledge to a manager of learning and a facilitator (Johnson 1990).

Open and flexible learning can be either on- or off-campus and can take many forms, from autonomous resource-based learning to a mix of off-campus mediated learning and scheduled lectures, tutorials and practical work. It is felt that the pedagogic contract that goes with such arrangements is more likely to encourage active and intellectually independent learners. Instead of being the sole initiator of the learning tasks and outcomes, the teacher combines the roles of “resource specialist”, putting the learners in contact with usable information, ideas and techniques, and a “response specialist” with whom the learner can discuss and resolve ideas and issues.

The advantage of distance learning to the adult learner is that there are no strict timetables or classes that require attendance as in the conventional university system, so an adult learner can easily follow a systematic program of study at the open universities while in full-time or part-time employment.

Distance education in HCMCOU was first developed in March, 1993. From this time up until now there were about 27.000 learners who registered for higher education certificates and degrees. The final examination of business management course with more than 470 students was held in June, 1997. This was the first final examination of students in distance education in Vietnam.

Training Organization

Distance education is carried out through these steps:

- Finding information in syllabus and catalogues
- Administrative information on teaching activities such as registration, schedules of tutoring, examination
- Students getting materials and studying by themselves
- Face to face tutoring, analysis on main or difficult points, topics for speculation, assignment, review by stages, questions and answers for a comprehensive review.
- Final examination

Examination And Evaluation

Because there are no conditions for evaluating the process, distance education must use methods of evaluating each module of subjects seriously. This evaluation method requires that it be a must to evaluate the full awareness of all modules of subjects, minimize the chances of rote learning, and ensure objectivity and accuracy. In addition to that, because each distance course usually has many students, it is necessary to select those methods to evaluate many learners as fast as possible. Quite suited to the requirements of evaluation in distance education is the objective test. In order to overcome the shortcomings of the objective test, in classes with not so many students at the end of the course it is possible to use extra methods such as essay writing, oral communication, or assignment writing, etc... The design of evaluation of all modules of subjects for distance education is quite painstaking, especially in the current conditions of the country, because the teachers have not yet familiarized themselves with new methods of evaluation. In order to design evaluation tools through objective tests, there is a need to train the teachers to set up banks of objective tests and organize the writing, the testing and the marking of test papers well with the help of modern technologies.

The university values effectively streamlined and responsible administration as a necessity for establishing and maintaining good teaching and learning conditions.

The students are encouraged to develop self-learning processes on the basis of teachers' guidance and instructions:

The screening process through examination, testing and evaluation system should be very strict to guarantee the teaching quality and the high value of academic degree.

Student Admission And Applicants' Qualification

Goals of distance learning are determined, such as:

- To encourage the students' spirit of studying
- To enhance the ability of self-learning
- To undertake to promote people's knowledge level
- To train the human resources and to foster talent for the country

The University offers 4-year Bachelor degree programs that are accredited by the MOET beside some courses for improving public education.

The applicants' Qualification of Bachelor's Degree Programs is graduation from high school or equivalent level.

Conclusion

During its fourteen years of its existence, HCMCOU has made some significant contributions to education and training of the country, while the system of traditional institutions could not meet the demand for human resources, especially in the period of transition to a market economy of the country.

The experiences developing ODE at our university in the last several years, could be used as a base for the development of open learning and distance education.

- The need for being trained, retrained and life-long educated is a real need which will become greater in the context of a dynamic market economy.
- Many groups of the population, who wish to be trained, cannot undertake any form of training due to various conditions. It is distance education that can create learning opportunities for them. Most of these people are working or have economic problems in the cities, the countryside and remote areas.
- The Vietnamese people are eager to learn, work hard and always wish to be educated.
- The development of modern technologies, especially information technologies can be effectively used.
- Experience accumulated over the years will perfect distance education technologies for designing books and printed materials, producing high-quality training aids and planning for the organization and administration.

Distance education will continue to play an important role in the educational system of Vietnam. The series of directions and decisions on distance education by the Government and the Ministry of Education and training have great significance in the development of ODE in HCMCOU in the future.