

Trip Report

26 February 2013

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Institute to visit: Faculty of Public Health, Mahidol University, Thailand

Visiting period: From February 17th, 2013 to February 23rd, 2013

Objectives: By visiting the No.1 faculty of public health in Asia, which has more than 65 years' history and more than 1,000 alumni overseas members with MPH, to learn how to manage the MPH course (especially education in English and acceptance of overseas students), with discussion about the possibility of academic/student exchange program.

Itinerary:

February 17th (Sun) - 18th (Mon): Departure from KIX, arrival at Bangkok

18th (Mon): Resting at the international guest house of Faculty of Tropical Medicine, Mahidol University until noon. Afternoon, briefing of the Faculty of Public Health by the Dean and explanation about the education in graduate school by the Deputy Dean (Graduate course education), Dr. Kwanjai. In addition, discussion about the contents and statements of MOA (memorandum of agreement) and MOU (memorandum of understanding) with the Deputy Dean of International Affairs, Dr. Suphaphat.

19th (Tue): Presentation about the current situation of education and research of public health in Japan and discussion. Afternoon, brief discussion at the meeting of education committee, and interview of one of the supporting staffs for international students.

20th (Wed): Until noon, visiting the Department of Microbiology: Briefing by the head of the department, detailed explanation and seeing around guided by Dr. Charnchudhi. Afternoon, the workshop for preventing plagiarism for the graduate students and faculties and interview of two graduate students.

21st (Thu): Discussion with the steering committee members of Master of Public Health program until noon. Afternoon, visiting the Salaya campus and seeing its facility.

22nd (Fri): Debriefing for the visit: discussion for the future destination of cooperation, including MOA and MOU.

23rd (Sat): Departure from Bangkok, arrival at KIX.

Report:

(1) Brief explanation of the Faculty of Public Health, Mahidol University

Faculty of Public Health, Mahidol University has been established simultaneously with the foundation of the Mahidol University itself since 1947, almost 1,400 students graduate every year in total of bachelor, master and doctor.

They share the campus close to the Victory Monument with the Faculty of Tropical Medicine and Faculty of Dentistry. Seven buildings belong to the Faculty of Public Health, composed of 13 Departments, offices, lecture rooms, amenity spaces for the students, and so on. The 7th building has the library at 6th and 7th floor, which is shared by other two faculties. The dormitory or guest house for visiting scholars is going to be established in the new building under construction, so that currently visiting scholars stay in hotels or the guest house of the Faculty of Tropical Medicine. The accommodations for the international students are arranged by the supporting staffs: Usually monthly rent for apartment costs about 45,000 yen.

The Faculty of Public Health provides 4 years undergraduate education for Bachelor of Public Health, in which majors are nursing, nutrition, health administration and so on. The 1st year and 2nd year education for undergraduate students get their education in the Salaya campus. The education for graduate students are separated into two: professional degree course for MPH and Dr.PH and research degree course for M.Sc. and Ph.D. The former has course for Thai students and international students, but among the latter, international courses are provided only for M.Sc. of

Health Informatics major (provided by the Department of Biostatistics) and Ph.D. (all majors).

(2) International program in graduate education

The period of MPH course is 13 months. More than 1,000 students including Japanese have already graduated the international program of MPH course and held MPH degree. The objectives of MPH international program are providing skills needed to improve the health and QOL of the people towards healthy world to the health/medical professionals.



Applicants for MPH course must hold the any title of MD, MBBS, BPharm, DDS, DVM, BN, BSc or comparable degrees of the accredited educational institution by Mahidol University, at least 2 years' working experience (excluding internship) in public health or related area, at least 480 or more score in TOEFL or equivalent achievement in English performance examination. Applicants usually prepare them until December and submit to the Admission Office. When they are approved, they must take the prerequisite course from March to May to acquire the basic knowledge needed to understand the course of MPH. MPH course is composed of three parts: The 1st semester begins from May, the 2nd semester begins from September, then the summer session from January to April follows. MPH course includes 8 majors: Urban health, Primary Health Care, Dental Public Health, Health Promotion, Public Health Technology, Human Health Development, Community Health Services Development, and Reproductive Health.

The study period for MSc is 2 years, as same as other master courses of graduate school. The students in MSc course must complete master thesis. Only the medical informatics major provides international program for MSc, but it is planned for microbiology major in the future.

For doctoral degree, either Ph.D. or Dr.PH usually require more than 3 years to complete, but both can be taken in English. There are 2 ways to enter Dr.PH course: After taking MPH and after taking B.PH, in which required credits are 54 in 3-5 years and 87-96 credits in 7-8 years, respectively. The majors of Dr.PH program are: Public Health Nutrition, Epidemiology, Public Health Administration, Health Education and Behavioral Sciences, Public Health Nursing, and Parasitology. The proceedings are published as international peer reviewed journal.

The Faculty of Public Health provides various international short course trainings (for 1-2 weeks), which are possible candidates for student exchange programs. Those training programs are, for example, listed below.

Title	Contents
Primary Health Care	This course focuses on enhancing knowledge of the main features of the primary health care approach in changing situations and its implications to health care systems and also covers strategies to strengthen community participation in health development programs.
Reproductive Health	This course focuses on the concepts and significance of reproductive health utilizing the life cycle approach. Study also includes examination of the scope and significance of reproductive tract infection. HIV/AIDS and its sociocultural impacts on health, adolescent reproductive health in terms of adolescent sexuality, and sexual relationships and marriage.
HIV/AIDS prevention training	This course is designed for participants interested in approaches for prevention and control of HIV/AIDS. A combination of lectures and visits to number of agencies on the frontline will provide an interdisciplinary perspective of issues specific to HIV/AIDS.
Hospital Management	The Hospital Management course aims to expose participants to issues in leadership and management as applied to public health. Via lectures and workshop sessions participants will explore AIC concepts and Methods. Creative Principles of Hospital Management and Problem Analysis, Knowledge Management, Best Practices and their application to Hospital Management and Improvement, Hospital Finances, Primary Health Care Management and Improvement as well as Hospital Reform and Accreditation.

Communicable Disease	This course focuses on communicable diseases and their public health impact at the local, national and regional levels. Participants will explore the epidemiology of infectious disease, particularly zoonotic illnesses, HIV/AIDS, clinical approaches, surveillance and response practices and the role of infection control professionals.
Non-communicable Disease	This course reviews non-communicable diseases, such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and others of importance to public health in the region, in terms of their prevalence, impact, risk factors, prevention and control. Through field visits and briefings participants will gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between the occurrence and management of these diseases and their impact on public health. Prevention strategies, activities and policy development will also be explored.
Health Promotion	This course introduces the basic concepts, strategies and methods that make up the foundation of community and population based health promotion within the context of public health and offers a broad overview of health promotion strategies and activities as well as policy formation, planning, implementation and evaluation designed to improve health and promote wellbeing.
Health Promotion in the Elderly	This course focuses on factors contributing to aging including lifestyle, culture, environment and how they are related to aspects of maintaining health and promoting wellness. It examines strategies which support the development and improve function and quality of life. Taking a holistic approach, the course explores factors such as nutrition, exercise and activity, prevention of hazards to health, maintaining self responsibility, managing stress, and meeting continued developmental, emotional and spiritual needs.

(3) Admission policy and current status

Admission of students is done based on fulfillment of eligibility criteria approved by Admission Office. About 45 to 55 students enter the MPH course international program every year. In 2012 fiscal year, 2 Japanese (both medical doctor) admitted, and in 2013 fiscal year, 6 Japanese (2 medical doctors, 3 nurses, and 1 hygienic technology specialist) will admit. Tuition is about 7,500 US dollars in 2012 and planned to increase 8,000 US dollars in 2013, which is cheapest price for MPH course in the world.



Currently the Faculty of Public Health has no dormitory/guest house. However, for faculty exchange, the guest house of the Faculty of Tropical Medicine is available at cheap price (about 3,000 yen per night, fully equipped). Similar guest house for the Faculty of Public Health will be available within 2013 at the new building under construction. For graduate students, the student office can arrange the apartment nearby the campus at reasonable price (15,000 to 17,000 yen per month). The supporting staffs always stand-by the room just after passing through the door of International program section at 5th floor of the 7th building. The students can easily get consultations with them. Basically the information from the Faculty to students are given by e-mails, but the billboard is also used.

As amenity facility, the rest room (see, photo) provides the space to talk with each other or to take rests for the students in the International program of MPH course. This enables the communication among inter-majors.

(4) The interviews for the graduate students

Two graduate students who will complete the MPH course 2 months later are interviewed about the difficulties which they faced in the course.

According to their answer, the greatest difficulty was language barrier. Basically everything can be done in English, but some staffs are not very good at English or have somewhat localized pronunciation/intonation which makes listening comprehension difficult. On the other hand, the students in Thai program of MPH course do the cooperative fieldwork in remote villages with other discipline students for 5 weeks, the students in International program cannot attend it. Instead, 1 week fieldwork is undertaken by the International students twice.

The second problem is very condensed study schedule: The students must get 39 credits within 13 months. Some students from Middle-East Asia have no experience of statistical analysis ever, so that the coursework of epidemiology and biostatistics is very difficult for them. Since there are many group workings in course work, the leader faces difficulty to achieve agreements among the group members with diversified cultural background. But similar situations will occur after the graduation, so that it is to be a good practice.



The 1 week fieldwork by the students in International program is done after the several times simulations that the students assume the situation to find and evaluate the public health problem to solve it. It is very tough work, but very beneficial.

The life in Thailand is comfortable: Prices of goods for daily life are cheap, people in Thailand are kind, and most students in the International program of MPH course come from Asian countries and are familiar.

(5) The comments from the steering committee of MPH course.

The comments by the Deputy Dean of International Affairs on MOU were, (1) it is better to change the sentence about the duration of student exchange, and (2) the expression "provide" accommodation for exchange students is so vague that should be reconsidered.

The comments by the steering committee members were, (1) the lectures and practices which can be taken by exchange students should be listed, (2) the double degree program is very difficult (it must be accredited by the government), so that it should be the future target: starting from informal student exchange or workshop, (3) the remote conference or lecture system should be established between the Faculty of Public Health, Mahidol University and the Kobe University Graduate School of Health Sciences, (4) the accreditation about Public Health education and degree should be well considered (accreditation by APACPH, government, or US CePH?).

In addition, they requested to introduce any example of double degree program ever conducted, so that I reported about the Campus Asia program (among 3 Universities including Kobe University Graduate School of International Cooperative Studies).

(6) The possibility of cooperative researches

The Department of Microbiology has many laboratory with machines like PCR-related ones (see, photo), some of which treat genetically modified organisms. They earn money by commercial examination of bacteria or virus ordered from outside institutions, and by selling culture media. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Charnchudhi, who obtained Ph.D. from Nagasaki University, studies zoonotic infectious diseases covering virus, rickettsia, and bacteria from the viewpoint of "one health", for example, dengue fever and influenza. He had great interest in cooperative studies and is willing to accept 1 week study tour (including short-term field visit) even for undergraduate students.

(7) MOA, MOU

It is possible to conduct short-term student exchange, faculty exchange or inter-laboratory cooperative work without any MOU for Mahidol University side. However, MOU is needed for credit transfer and double degree program. To establish the dual degree program, working groups for curriculum, which specifies contents with periods and credits, may be needed for both institutions. I suggested to start from short-term student exchange program.