



Global Development Studies Institute

*John P. Rorke
Executive Director*

Royal Thai Scholars - A Program Description

In 1897 King Rama V of Thailand formally and systematically created the King's Scholarship program to gather western skills and knowledge appropriate for the development of his nation. This initiative, along with many others, stimulated country's modernization so that Thailand alone in Southeast Asia retained its independence from the imperial domination of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries. The King was anxious to maintain that freedom. As he considered the issues, he decided that the development of the nation and the new knowledge of his time, especially regarding science and technology, went hand-in-hand. Therefore, King Rama V selected young people to go to Western universities to bring back their learning to Thailand. He also established schools and universities within his own country.

The program has expanded and developed over the years. The scholars are no longer selected solely by the King, but achieve this honor based upon merit. The Civil Service Commission of the Royal Thai government administers nation-wide, highly competitive exams. The results of these tests determine who will be awarded the scholarships offered for that year. All graduating high school students who have achieved an A average are eligible to take the exams. The students choose which scholarships they seek at the time they take the test. Based upon the results of the exam and an interview for the highest-ranking candidates, the Scholars are selected. They are clearly exceptional young men and women—the best and brightest of Thailand.

Different types of scholarships have also emerged based upon the needs of this Newly Industrialized Country. Some continue to be designated as King's Scholars. They may study whatever they wish in the categories of science or the humanities. The specific category or categories are determined at the time of selection. This scholarship supports the student through his or her undergraduate years and requires only that the student spend time working in Thailand.

Other scholarships, which come from various ministries and agencies in the government, are more specific in their requirements. The Civil Service Commission, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Ministry of Science, Technology, and the Environment, the Bank of Thailand and Royal Thai Air Force are among those who offer scholarships. Having determined their long-range needs, these organizations direct their scholars to gain the precise expertise that their organization requires. Unlike the King's Scholars, these scholars are supported through graduate school.

For each year of education, the students, other than the King's Scholars, are expected to serve their sponsoring organization for two years, which can mean making a twenty-five to thirty year commitment to Thailand. Often they become university professors or research scientists and all become leaders in their fields and within their organizational sponsors.

In 1992, the Office of Educational Affairs of the Royal Thai Embassy concluded that the scholars who came to the United States would benefit from an Orientation to American culture and the American educational system. The original program began in the Spring of 1993 at Wyoming Seminary in Kingston, Pennsylvania designed by the Global Development Studies Institute. In the years following 1993, an additional session on writing and college guidance was developed at Brewster Academy in Wolfeboro, New Hampshire. The entire program has been at Brewster since 1999.

The achievement of these students in their boarding schools and colleges over the years has certainly justified the faith American educational institutions have had in them. Their many and diverse contributions to the development and growth of Thailand has confirmed the vision of King Rama V.

This description is authorized by the Office of Educational Affairs of the Royal Thai Embassy for distribution. Questions regarding the students or the program may be addressed to:

Khun Visoot Prasitsiriwongse
Minister Counselor,
Office of Educational Affairs
Royal Thai Embassy
1906 23rd Street NW
Washington, DC 20008

or

John P. Rorke
Executive Director
Global Development Studies Institute
433 Kent Cornwall Road #22
Kent, CT 06757
860-927-3817