Joint Center's Institute to Aid ASEAN Region

By Charles Spencer
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At the Bangkok signing, from left, Louis Goodman, SIS dean; Astrid Tuminez, Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy; Derrick Cogburn, COTELCO director; M. Rajaratnam, Assoc. of Southeast Asian Nations; and Amitav Acharya, chair of SIS's ASEAN Studies Center.

A joint AU-Syracuse University center has just launched the world's first virtual graduate institute focused on disability and public policy for the Southeast Asia region.

A delegation led by Louis Goodman, dean of AU's School of International Service, and Derrick Cogburn, director of the Center for Research on Collaboratories and Technology Enhanced Learning Communities (COTELCO), traveled to Bangkok for the April 4 signing ceremony to make the Institute on Disability and Public Policy (IDPP) for the ASEAN region a reality.

"Our vision is to build a network of outstanding universities from all 10 ASEAN countries which uses accessible cyberlearning approaches to enable blind, deaf, and physically impaired students to become leaders in the public, private, and NGO sectors," said Cogburn, who will serve as the institute's first dean and executive director.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations' members are Cambodia, Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore, the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam.

The goal of IDPP is to provide opportunities for advanced academic studies, executive education, outreach, and collaborative research.

The Nippon Foundation, a Japan-based philanthropy, has already provided $2 million in funding to kick off the first year of this expected five-year project. Nippon also provided funding for the previous two preparatory phases. COTELCO, the center Cogburn directs at AU, is a joint initiative of American University and Syracuse University.

"I have encouraged and supported this idea since its inception," Surin Pitsuwan, secretary general of ASEAN, who spoke at the signing ceremony, said in a statement.

The five-year grant will average about $2 million per year, said Cogburn, principal investigator and project director. As a result, the center will add additional graduate students and seven new full-time staff members.

Previous Nippon Foundation grants allowed COTELCO to lay the groundwork for the institute. In the first phase of the project, Cogburn and his colleagues considered questions such as where students would come from and which institutions, public and private, they could serve. They also designed a curriculum for the institute.

In the second phase, an organizational model was formed and accessibility and usability testing was performed on the infrastructure.

The current phase concentrates on establishing and operating the institute.

IDPP will offer a master's degree in comparative and international disability policy. All courses will be virtual, and AU faculty and research center members will be among those teaching in the program. SIS's ASEAN Studies Center, for example, will be teaching a summer skills institute on ASEAN affairs.

The institute will begin accepting applications for the upcoming academic year on its Web site starting May 17.

The Nippon Foundation will fund up to 15 students per year, and a cohort of 25 students is expected in the master's program. While the program is virtual, students will attend a two-week residency in July in Bangkok.

By coincidence, some of the COTELCO team will be presenting academic papers on the institute a few days before that date at a conference in Istanbul, Turkey.

Joining AU's School of International Service in collaborating in the project are:

Mahidol University in Bangkok, Thailand

Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy at the National University of Singapore

National Technical Institute for the Deaf at the Rochester Institute of Technology

The Asia-Pacific Development Center on Disability in Bangkok and the International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment are also supporting the project.

Source: http://www.american.edu/americantoday/campus-news/20110406-Cotelco-Launches-Institute.cfm