

HEADLINE MAKER**Rassmidara Hoonsawat**, former dean of Mahidol University International College, explains why her students need well-rounded skills

STUDYING TO WIN IN A GLOBALISED WORLD



RASSMIDARA HOLDS Mahidol University International College's Best Practice Award for its Student Exchange Programme given by the Office of Higher Education Commission. Beside her is the Creative Academy Award given by the Commerce Ministry.

WANNAPA KHAOPA
THE NATION

Students at Mahidol University International College (MUIC) are recognised both nationally and internationally, often winning awards and representing Thailand at international meetings, summits and conferences. Last year, they picked up 57 awards and certificates, up from 32 awards in 2009.

Much of their success is their own making but standing right behind them for the last two years and doing more than a little pushing is Rassmidara Hoonsawat, MUIC's dean.

"I'm proud to be one of the supporters. I try to promote my students' leadership and many skills. I encourage them to have well-rounded skills so they have wider vision, which means they'll be wanted by international companies or organisations. "And to be well-

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rounded, students have to learn different culture and languages," she says.

That's why MUIC has a thriving student exchange programme. Launched 10 years ago, the college was recognised with "Best Practice Award in Student Exchange Programme" by the Office of Higher Education Commission late last year after Rassmidara passed on

MUIC's experience to other universities at a presentation session.

The dean, whose two years in the position ended on Thursday but who will no doubt maintain an interest in MUIC even after moving to her new job as acting dean of the University's College of Management this month, also used internships as a way of exposing her students to life in other countries. All in all, the college arranged 63 outbound

exchanges last year, involving 10 per cent of its intake, up from 46 in 2009, and hosted exchange students from 16 countries, among them Germany, Canada, the US, the UK, Australia and Japan.

This college also welcomed 98 visiting groups of from foreign institutions during the last academic year, up from 48 in 2009 and 21 in 2008. Rassmidara says she hopes the award will attract more foreigners to visit the college.

Her attempt to promote well-rounded skill has also boosted another of MUIC's strong points: its liberal arts programme.

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"We focus on liberal arts. So, our students have to be well-rounded. We provide a broad education. All freshmen in different fields have to study general education. The exchange programme is vital as it means our students learn other languages and other cultures," she adds.

"If possible, students should minor in a third language or another subject. An example would be a major in business administration

and a minor in applied mathematics or a field that matches their interest and the career they intend to pursue," says Rassmidara.

MUIC's liberal arts programme offers many choices of courses to foreign students, which helps to promote the student exchange programme.

Rassmidara has been trying to find 14 partner universities in the US with liberal arts and business administration programmes already accredited by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB).

"We will go in the same direction as those universities. MUIC has set up a panel that will work on the international accreditation. Our vision is to turn MUIC into the first liberal arts college in this region accredited by AACSB."

She will also be asking MUIC's new dean to help the college in its national mission as head of several provincial-level universities to promote tourism through Thai history and culture.

"We received the Creative Academy Award along with grants from Commerce Ministry in December last year, under which we

are charged with helping local universities promote historical and cultural tourism. We have related curriculum and master degrees and we have the know-how. The grants are valid over three years. MUIC will work with partners from six universities in different regions. I have already set up a team of MUIC lecturers to continue this project. They will provide the academic services to educate tourism related agencies to conserve and promote history and culture."

"I want the team to do the project well. If they use prominent parts of our culture and history to promote tourism in a suitable way, it will have a positive effect on the communities, provinces and also on the country."

"I will ask the next dean of MUIC to help them. It's a challenging project."

Rassmidara has been involved with Mahidol University for 36 years but says she won't stop working for as long as her health remains good.

"I like working. If I'm healthy, I will continue working. So far, my health is so good. I'm energetic. I'm happy using my energy," she smiles.