Thailand Revealed

A half-century of Thai studies at NIU
Over the past 50 years, NIU has exposed hundreds of American students to the Kingdom of Thailand through academic courses, Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) fellowships, and study abroad programs.

During the same time, nearly 50 Thai graduate students have received degrees at NIU and have become leading citizens in their homeland.
In 1961, M. Ladd Thomas, a graduate of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University, joined the political science faculty as NIU’s first Thai specialist.
• In 1963, Ladd Thomas was chosen to lead NIU’s new Center for Southeast Asian Studies and shared an office with NIU’s training program for Southeast Asia Peace Corps volunteers.

• From 1965 to 1967, NIU prepared 432 Americans to be Peace Corps volunteers in Thailand.
Thai Studies grows as a specialty

• In 1970, NIU began teaching Thai language and culture classes to undergraduate and graduate students. Thai Studies faculty included political scientists Ladd Thomas and Clark Neher and, later, linguist John Hartmann.

• Neher, who arrived in 1969, and Hartmann, who came in 1974, were both Peace Corps volunteers in Thailand before coming to NIU.
In 1972, NIU’s Thai Studies faculty organized the Council on Thai Studies (COTS).

For forty years, COTS has brought together Thai Studies scholars in the Midwest for meetings at NIU, the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and Ohio University. The 2013 COTS conference will be held at NIU in October.
Expanding Thai language training

• In 1974, NIU began offering federally funded FLAS fellowships for students to study Thai and other Southeast Asian languages on campus and in-country. More than 300 students to date have received these fellowships.

• Since 2006-07, the Fulbright Foreign Language Teaching Assistant program has sent seven Thai teaching assistants to offer students the chance to learn from a native speaker.
Taking Thai language online

- In 1983, Thai linguist John Hartmann helped develop a computer-assisted instruction system for learning Thai and computer scientist Jim Henry created the world's first computer font for Thai.
- This U.S.-funded project has grown into SEAsite, a premier online interactive website for learning Thai and Tai languages.
In 1974, NIU entered into a cooperative relationship with Chiang Mai University. Since then, NIU has established exchanges with numerous Thai institutions, including Chulalongkorn, Thammasat, Khon Kaen, Payap, and Prince of Songkla universities.
NIU Thai Studies takes international stage

- In 1982, NIU was the setting for the Rattanakosin Bicentennial Conference, celebrating 200 years of the Chakri Dynasty.
- In 2005, NIU opened its doors to the world’s Thai scholars at the Ninth International Conference on Thai Studies.
NIU Libraries’ collection of Thai research materials has grown into one of the strongest components of the Donn V. Hart Southeast Asia Collection. Approximately 22,000 titles relating to Thailand are available, two-thirds of which are in Thai.
The NIU Anthropology Museum’s Thai collection includes art and artifacts ranging from ceremonial masks to jewelry, offering students a way to experience Thai material culture on campus.
Learning in-country

• NIU Study Abroad programs and summer FLAS fellowships offer opportunities for students to go to Thailand itself.

• Since 2000, 41 students have gone to Thailand on faculty-led study abroad programs.
• The Royal Thai government has generously supported opportunities for NIU students and scholars to study and conduct research in Thailand.

• In 2009, the Royal Thai government donated more than $100,000 to endow a Thai Teaching and Research Fund at NIU for student and faculty endeavors.

• In 2013, the Royal Thai Embassy made additional grants to develop Thai language lessons for handheld devices and to enhance the Thai section of SEAsite.
Thai Studies today at NIU

• Current Thai Studies faculty and specialists include:
  – John Hartmann (Foreign Languages and Literatures)
  – Andrea Molnar (Anthropology)
  – Grant Olson (Foreign Languages and Literatures)
  – Kurt Thurmaier (Public Administration)
  – Daniel Unger (Political Science)

• American and Thai students who come to NIU continue to distinguish themselves in a wide array of fields including anthropology, art history, business, education, history, music, and public service.