

# EVALUATION STANDARD FOR INSTITUTIONAL EVALUATION OF OPEN UNIVERSITY

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## ABSTRACT

*This study is to develop the standards and indexes for evaluating the open university as an institution. Having successfully taken root in their societies since their launching, Asian open universities now need to further up their teaching and learning system which demands a rigid evaluation and assessment of a university as an institution. For the past ten years, Korea National Open University (KNOU) was evaluated twice by Korean Council for University Education (KCUE), which is in charge of the evaluation of the Korean universities; the result was not so satisfactory. It was because its evaluation standards and indexes were not appropriate for KNOU as an open university. They were primarily for the conventional universities. Thus KNOU needed its own assessment indexes, and this is a research looking for the proper ones for evaluating KNOU within the frame of university evaluation in Korea. Other open universities in Asia also have experienced or will face such problems in terms of the university evaluation. The result of this research will be helpful not only for KNOU but for other Asian open universities preparing for the university evaluation.*

Keywords: .....

Korea National Open Universities (KNOU) has been the first and largest distance university in Korea since its foundation in 1972. KNOU has nurtured the new intellectual that the society need. Moreover as a leading institution of cyber education in Korea, KNOU offers advanced educational media and learner-oriented educational methods to help individuals succeed in acquiring professional knowledge and higher-degrees.

Thirsty six years of KNOU's history proves its great success by itself. This great success in the area of lifelong and higher education is viewed as results of strict management of school affairs, providing student-oriented educational circumstances and supporting high-quality lectures etc.

As a first national distance and open university, KNOU has been recognized and evaluated as one of conventional universities by ministry of education, science and technology of Korea

(MEST) and Korea Council for University Education (KCUE)<sup>01</sup> which is the authorized evaluation association in Korea. Unfortunately the uniqueness of KNOU has not been fully acknowledged by them.

Since its foundation, KNOU has been evaluated twice by KCUE. The latest evaluation was conducted in 2006. However, due to the inappropriate evaluation standard and indexes, the results of evaluation were not welcomed by KNOU.

Therefore more proper and reasonable evaluation standards and indexes for an open university, especially KNOU, will be discussed in this study.

### **WHAT IS THE UNIVERSITY EVALUATION?**

In Korea there are four types of university evaluation in terms of the organization a managing the evaluation; i) MEST, ii) Joong Ang Il Bo (newspaper), iii) academic society, and iv) KCUE. Since KCUE carried out the evaluation on KNOU, the evaluation of KCUE is mainly discussed in this study.

For the purpose of evaluating the quality of universities systematically, improving their educational environment and enhancing public trust in universities of Korea as well as contributing to their unique and varied development, KCUE conducts periodic university evaluations. The university evaluation has objectiveness to guarantee the quality of educational and research activities of the university through evaluation based on the standards and indexes which are framed by KCUE. It also assists and promotes the university to receive a rational understanding and support from the public with respect to the establishment and operation of the university.

The university evaluation by KCUE is based on the following policy.

- i) Evaluation focused on educational activities: The educational and research activities of the university are examined with focusing on educational activities.
- ii) Evaluation based on standards and indexes: The educational and research activities of the university are evaluated with focusing on whether they meet the standards or not.
- iii) Evaluation acknowledging distinctiveness: Although the evaluation is conducted following the standards, the distinctive and unique features of each university are reflected.
- iv) Evaluation based on self-assessment: Before the evaluation committee visits to the university, the report of self-assessment is submitted by the university. The evaluation is carried out on the hands of this report.
- v) Evaluation by experts: In order to conduct the proper evaluation, experts and intellectuals of appropriate field are included in the evaluation committee.

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<sup>1</sup> *KCUE is a non-profit, non-governmental organization comprised of approximately 200 member universities and colleges, both public and private, in Korea. The mission of KCUE is two-fold; i) work for the sound development of higher education by promoting inter-institutional cooperation concerning major issues common to four-year universities and colleges, ii) increase the autonomy, initiative, public accountability and overall quality of higher education institution by making recommendations to the government and ensuring their realization in education policies.*

The following table shows domains and categories of evaluation.

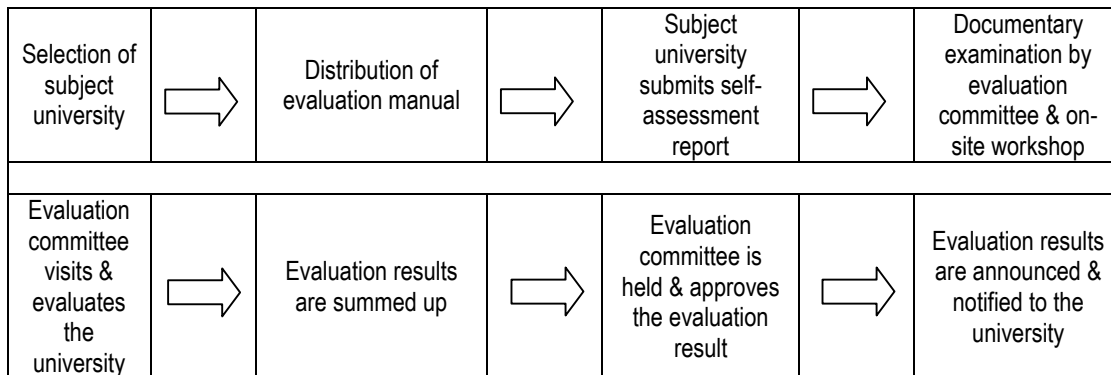
Table 1. Domains and categories of evaluation

| Domains of Evaluation                           | Categories of Evaluation           |
|---|------------------------------------|
| University management and finance               | Management strategy and operation  |
|   | Distinctive features               |
|   | Finance                            |
|   | Reflection of previous evaluation  |
| Development strategies and vision               | Goals and vision                   |
|   | Development strategies             |
|   | Action plan                        |
| Education and community service                 | Educational object                 |
|   | Curriculum and methods             |
|   | Control of school affairs          |
|   | Welfare service                    |
| Research and educational-industrial cooperation | Research accomplishment            |
|   | Research circumstance              |
|   | Educational-industrial cooperation |
| Students and faculties                          | Students                           |
|   | Professors                         |
|   | Staffs                             |
| Educational environment and supporting system   | Student supporting                 |
|   | Education supporting               |
|   | Research supporting                |
|   | Information supporting             |

As previously mentioned, KCUE provides standards for evaluation including domains and categories of the university. Under the categories of evaluation, there are more detailed and subdivided indexes. As of 2006, there are 55 indexes specified by KCUE. All of these indexes cannot be discussed in this study, due to the limit of space. However, some of them will be examined whether they fully reflect the uniqueness of KNOU as an open university.

There are several steps to proceed with the university evaluation by KCUE. The figure 1 shows this process.

Figure 1. Evaluation progress



## CONTROVERSIAL POINTS OF EXISTING EVALUATION

The university evaluation by KCUE is a representative evaluation in Korea. However, several questions have been raised about the appropriateness of the evaluation.

One of the biggest obstacles to success in university evaluation is diverse understandings about evaluation. Some consider the purpose of university evaluation as grading and ranking universities. Others consider it as ensuring and promoting the development of university. Thus, these diverse viewpoints of evaluation result in different attitude on the necessity of university evaluation and the acceptance of university evaluation. For example, the universities, which regard the purpose of university evaluation as grading universities and are afraid that they are in lower ranking, are unwilling to be evaluated or trying to avoid evaluation. In this case the main function of university evaluation disappears.

The classification of universities is very complex. They can be classified by founding organization, type of university, size of university, regions and specific gender education and so on. The following table shows various types of university.

Table 2. Classification of universities

| Classification            | University                              |
|---------------------------|---|
| Founding organization     | public, private university              |
| Types of university       | education, theological, open university |
| Size of university        | mega, middle, small university          |
| Regions                   | capital, regional university            |
| Specific gender education | women's university                      |

Each university has its own distinctive features and uniqueness. Therefore the university evaluation should reflect these distinctive features and uniqueness. However, the standards of university evaluation do not fully reflect them. Recently KCUE provides types of standards for specialized universities and open universities, but they are still problematic. Especially, the uniqueness of an open university such as KNOU has been neglected. Some of them will be mentioned later.

The most important in the university evaluation is the correct understanding of the nature of the university evaluation and its necessity. It is also important for the university to willingly participate in evaluation. Thus a selection process of the subject university should be reconsidered. For example, KCUE select the subject university which requests the university evaluation earlier than other universities. Then KCUE offers the subject university benefits as an incentive. In other words, the earlier the university requests the evaluation, the more the university gets incentive.

The most significant point of evaluation is how the university makes use of the result of evaluation. Although the results of evaluation are open to the university and public, the subject university does not place a great deal of weight on the results. Therefore, it is necessary for KCUE and universities to find ways that effectively utilize the results of evaluation for

developing the university. If the results of evaluation are not fully and practically utilized, it leads to dissipation of manpower, finances and times of both the subject university and KCUE.

### **DISTINCTIVA FEATURES OF KOREA NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY**

One of the main problems was that the standards and indexes of evaluation do not fully and appropriately reflect the distinctiveness and uniqueness of university. KNOU as an open university is no exception as well.

Internal circumstances have been changed in terms of student of KNOU. According to KNOU (2007-c), the major age group of the students is from 26 to 30 and the rates of students over age 30 have been gradually increased. It is viewed that the participation rates of adult re-education have been slowly increased and the institution role of lifelong education of KNOU has been strengthened.

When it comes to student academic backgrounds before their entrance, in 1994 the rate of college graduates was 13.4% of the total number of new and transferred students. In 2007 the rate of college graduates was 39.3% of the total and the rate of university graduates was 13.0% of the total. These numerical statements display that the numbers of college and university graduates are increasing. KNOU (2007-c) also shows that numbers of transferred students are increasing.

Educational contents users of KNOU tend to pursue their career developments rather than undergraduate degrees, and increase their social demand, on an adult re-education or continuing education. Thus KOU needs to consider the various ways to operate the lifelong education as well as the development of educational contents reflected in student educational demands for building a lifelong society. These requests of students should be connected with providing of various types of delivering methods.

The changes of external circumstances are divided into social changes and educational changes. Firstly, social changes are an arrival of the knowledge information society and changes in the comparison of population. Moreover, the numbers of the aging population will be increasing and those of the adolescent population will be decreasing, so the aging phenomenon in higher education will be maintained for a few years.

Major examples of educational changes are educational improvement in quality, generalization of lifelong education, and activation of an open and distance education. Main social roles of KNOU were an expansion of educational opportunities. Now KNOU's social phase has to be changed with its own merits because as of 2008 there are 17 competitive cyber universities in Korea.

KNOU needs to grow the level of adaptation to the circumstantial changes. And the vision and goals of KNOU should be based on maximizing the difference from other conventional universities. These efforts will end in an embodiment of uniqueness of KNOU.

KNOU is different from conventional universities in terms of educational methods, textbooks, operation of campuses, size of student numbers, tuition fee, educational value, contact method in teaching, flexibility in teaching, reorganization of curriculum, system and so on.

KNOU provides of higher education using television, internet and audio etc, that is, mainly non-face-to-face education. However, the delivering method of conventional universities is basically face-to-face teaching. Students of KNOU use textbooks published by KNOU, but conventional universities are teaching students in limited spaces. The number of students in a traditional university is usually around 20,000; however, KNOU has around 200,000 students. As a national university KNOU provides a higher education to public around 350 US dollars per semester, but tuition of a conventional university per semester is 5 or 10 times more expensive than that of KNOU. The main educational value of KNOU is providing a standardized education, but the conventional universities are providing the education according to various standards. The non-face-to-face system of KNOU is conducting method in teaching, but face-to-face system is for the conventional universities. The flexibility in teaching and reorganization of curriculum of KNOU are comparatively lower than that of the conventional universities. The rigidity in system operation of KNOU is higher than the conventional universities.

Table 3. Comparison of KNOU with conventional universities

|   | KNOU                        | Conventional Universities |
|---|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| Educational method                      | Television, Internet, Audio | Face to face              |
| Textbooks                               | KNOU textbooks              | General textbooks         |
| Campus                                  | 14 campuses                 | 1 or 2 campuses           |
| Size of university (number of students) | Around 200.000              | Around 20.000             |
| Tuition                                 | \$350                       | \$1500-3.500              |
| Educational value                       | Standardized education      | Various education         |
| Contact method in teaching              | Online                      | Offline                   |
| Flexibility in teaching                 | Low                         | High                      |
| Reorganizing of curriculum              | Difficult to complete       | Easy to complete          |
| System operation                        | Difficult to change         | Easy to change            |

### **MODIFIED AND NEW EVALUATION STANDARDS FOR KNOU**

As previously mentioned, there are several reasons why the adequacy and reliability of evaluation standards and indexes have been questioned. There was no adjustment of indexes according to the type of university. Secondly, only weight on indexes is emphasized on evaluation standards. Finally evaluation standards and indexes do not reflect the uniqueness of university.

In order to ensure the righteousness of evaluation, the self-regulation of a subject university should be guaranteed. If the evaluation is conducted without considering the direction and efforts of the subject university, and if there are environmental restrictions on the subject university, the righteousness of evaluation would not guaranteed.

KCUE should take into account of that KNOU is facing diverse circumstances unlike the conventional universities. Therefore it is not appropriate to evaluate KNOU with the general standards and indexes which are used for the conventional universities.

Based on the evaluation standards which KCUE provided for evaluation of KNOU in 2006, the following standards and indexes should be modified and altered in order to properly evaluate KNOU.

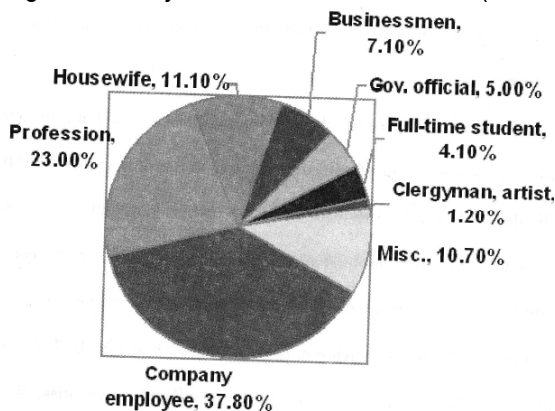
### University Management and Finance

There are indexes which evaluate how much the university is specialized in specific areas. Since KNOU is very much specialized itself from beginning, it is not reasonable to seek the specialized areas in the department level. It is not also appropriate to evaluate tuition per student, the rate of dependence on tuition. Because the tuition of KNOU is one fifth or one tenth of conventional universities and the rate of national fund among total 26.9%. It is comparatively lower than other national universities of which the rate of national fund among total revenue is 59%. Thus, the tuition per student, the rate of dependence on tuition should be altered.

### Education and community service

The curriculum, educational methods and controlling school affairs of KNOU are difficult to adapt to the environment. Since the curriculum, television broadcasting, textbooks and lecturing space are related each other, the school system is difficult to change. The various types of curriculum are dependent upon abilities and decisions of professor. However, the curriculum of KNOU is not solely decided by professors. The television, internet and face-to-face are used at KNOU. Except these delivering methods KNOU can not secure the variety of curriculum. There is also difficulty to reorganize the curriculum which shows social tendency and social climate. For example, it needs 4-5 years minimum to reorganize the curriculum. In order to deliver a lecture, a professor needs such procedures as the development of teaching materials, utilization of teaching materials, filming a lecture for television and internet and broadcasting a lecture. Therefore, it is not possible promptly reflect the social needs.

Figure 2. The job distribution of students (As of 2007)



In terms of community service, the attendance rate of students in community service included in the evaluation index. As of 2007, only 4.1% of KNOU student, are full time students, most of KNOU students are company employees (37.8%), profession (23%) and housewife (11.1%). This numerical statement shows that the attendance rate of student in community service of KNOU should be low. Thus, it is not proper comparing the attendance rate of students in community service of KNOU with one of other conventional universities.

### **Research and Educational-Industrial Cooperation**

Since students of KNOU study the textbooks which are written by professors of KNOU and published by KNOU, professors of KNOU have responsibility for writing 3-4 textbooks per 5 years. In addition they regularly have to revise them. Therefore, it is necessary to adjust weight of indexes which evaluate outcomes of research done by professor. Unlike other conventional universities there are no full time students who help professor to research. These given conditions come to weaken research function of KNOU and become a barrier to obtain research funds from the outside of KNOU.

KNOU is an education oriented university and there are only two research institutes. One is Institute of Distance Education which has 31 years history and another is Institute of Human Research which was established in 2007. These two institutes are not closely related with educational-industrial cooperation and most of students of KNOU: are company employees, profession and housewives, therefore it is not possible for KNOU to form such educational-industrial cooperation as other conventional universities do.

Thus the standards and indexes evaluate research and educational-industrial cooperation of KNOU should be modified and adjusted.

### **Students and Faculties**

In order to examine accomplishment of education, the percentage at employment among university graduates is one of main indexes for the evaluation. However, as mentioned earlier, most of KNOU students are working. It is, therefore, not appropriate to include the percentage of employment among university graduates in the evaluation index.

There are several evaluation indexes which should be reconsidered and adjusted; number of students per full-time professor, dependency rate of part-time lecturer and ensuring rate of full-time professor. The professors of KNOU deliver the lecture through television and internet and they attend the face-to-face lecture too. These face to face lectures are held at 14 regional campuses all over the country. These various lectures lay a burden on professors' shoulders. In addition to this burden, a professor cannot attend all face to face lectures at once and this brings increase of part-time lecturer at KNOU. Thus the dependency rate of part-time lecturer at KNOU is higher than other conventional universities. Without hiring more full-time professors, number of students per full-time professor and ensuring rate of full-time professor are lower than other traditional universities. And KNOU can not hire full-time professor as many as KNOU wants, because number of full-time professor is decided by MEST. MEST has very strict rules regarding this matter.



### **Educational Environment and Supporting System**

As an institution of distance education KNOU provides lecture in types of television, internet and audio and so on. Students are widespread over Korean peninsula and it is not an easy task to fulfill all the needs of students. Especially, it is hard to ensure welfare facilities for student. KNOU provides the online consulting service to students and if student comes to visit consulting office, he or she can consult an expert. From the viewpoint of KNOU, evaluating effectiveness of welfare facilities for students, satisfaction rate of welfare facilities by students, satisfaction rate of consulting services is unfair comparing with other conventional universities. Since most of lectures are conducted in distance education and rest of them is conducted in face to face, students do not use the university facilities as frequently as students of conventional university do. Thus, it is not appropriate for KNOU to apply a number of books per student ensuring rate of experimental equipments, machinery and materials to indexes same as other traditional universities.

In addition to these modified and altered standards and indexes for KNOU, new standards and Indexes should be included for an adequate evaluation of KNOU. Several new standards and indexes for KNOU are suggested here.

### **Various Delivering Methods**

Diversity of delivering methods should be included in the evaluation index under the domain of education and community service. Such various educational methods as television lectures, classroom lectures, textbooks, audio lectures (CDs, MP3s), multimedia lectures and web based instruction (WBI) of KNOU can not be easily imitated by other conventional universities and cyber universities. The provision of these various delivering methods by KNOU answers to diverse requests of students.

### **Various Types of Assessment**

Diversity of educational evaluation is expected to be included in the evaluation index under the domain of education and community service. Unlike other conventional universities, the evaluation forms of KNOU are mid-term exam, assignments, classroom-lecture exam, classroom-lecture substitute exam and final exam. Although various assessment forms are burden to KNOU. KNOU is willing to provide assessment service for the sake of students.

### **New Calculation of Number of Students per Full-Time Professor**

As mentioned earlier, the number of students per full-time professor is included as an index. The number of students per full-time professor at KNOU is comparatively bigger than other national universities in Korea as shown at table 4. If these numbers are applied to evaluate the universities, it is certain that KNOU obtains lower point than other universities.

Table 4. Comparing the Number of students per full-time professor between KNOU and major national universities in Korea

| University                  | Number of students | Number of full-time professor | The number of students per full-time professor |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------------|--|
| KNOU                        | 182,413            | 135                           | 1351.2   |
| Seoul National University   | 22,493             | 1,751                         | 12.9   |
| Kangwon National University | 25,481             | 931                           | 27.4   |
| Pusan National University   | 25,821             | 1,087                         | 23.8   |

There are proper calculations of number of full-time professors for conventional and cyber universities which is suggested by MEST. The following tables shows the numbers which are calculated by these proper calculations.

Table 5. Proper number of students per full-time professor for KNOU

| Number of students at KNOU<br>(As of 2007) | Suggested number of students per<br>full-time professor | Proper number of students per<br>full-time professor for KNOU |
|--|---|---|
| 182,413                                    | Conventional Univ.                                      | 7,296   |
| 182,413                                    | Cyber Univ.   | 912   |

However, the number of students per full-time professor for KNOU which is suggested at table 5 is irrational.

Thus it is more reasonable for KNOU to find out a comparable index with the number of students per full-time professor. The legally fixed number of full-time professors is similar one. In order to decide the legally fixed number of full-time professor, it is proposed to calculate the number of professor per 4 courses. Generally speaking, one professor teaches 6 courses per year in the conventional universities. Since professors of KNOU have to develop the textbooks, revise them, develop the contents for internet and television lectures and face-to-face lectures and so on, they have more duties than professors of other conventional universities. Thus, it is reasonable for professor at KNOU to teach fewer courses than professor of other conventional universities. The table 6 displays the calculation of the legally fixed number of full-time professors at KNOU.

Table 6. The legally fixed number of full-time professors

|   | Undergraduate | Undergraduate |
|---|---------------|---------------|
| Number of courses at KNOU                       | 642           | 114           |
| Number of courses per year by a professor       | 4             | 4             |
| The legally fixed number of full-time professor | 160.5         | 28.5          |
| Total   | 189           |               |

The legally fixed number of full-time professors provides a basic data for ensuring ratio of full-time professors. This legally fixed number of full-time professors and ensuring ration of full-time professors are more rational indexes to evaluate open universities.

### Regional Accessibility

Regional accessibility should be included in the evaluation index under the domain of educational environment and supporting system. With 14 regional campuses and 35 study centers around the nation, the entire peninsula serves as KNOU's lecture hall. All areas of academic affairs, from admissions to graduation, are carried out in similar fashion at every regional campus. This convenient regional campus network provides students with an easy access to university.

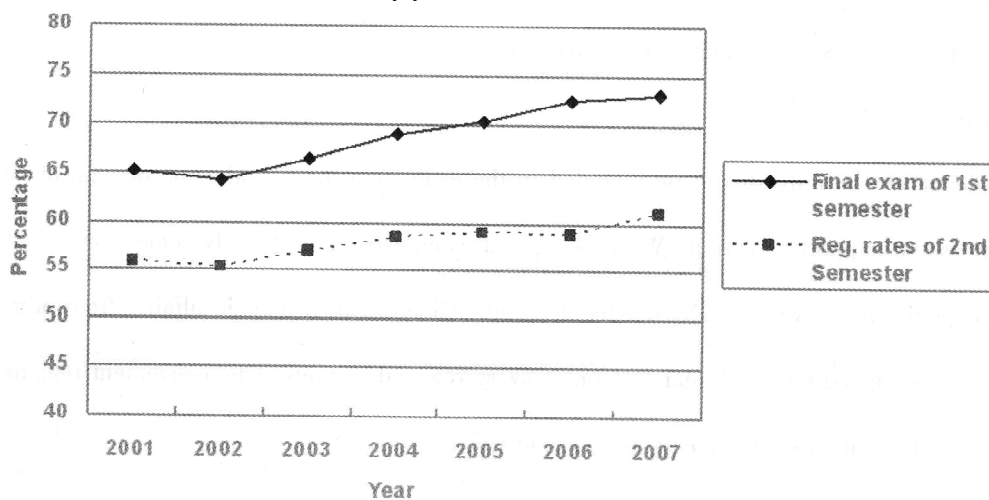
### Role of Lifelong Education

Institutional role of lifelong education should be included in the evaluation index under the domain of students and faculties. As described before, the rate of students over age 30 has been gradually increased and the numbers of college and university graduates are increasing. This means that numbers of transferred student are increasing. It is also viewed that the role of lifelong education and role of admit re-education of KNOU has been strengthened. In order to properly evaluate the institutional role of lifelong education, the rate of transferred students among new students should be examined and included in the evaluation index.

### Retention of Student

One of the main concerns of open universities is the drop-out of students. The open universities make every effort to decrease the drop-out rates. Therefore, it is necessary to measure how much effort the university makes to prevent students dropping out of the school. There are two exemplary indexes to evaluate these efforts; the applying rate of final examination of 1st semester and 2nd semester registration rates of new students. These two indexes are related each other and reflect the retention rates of students. For example, the applying rate of final examination of 1st semester increased from 65.1% (2001) to 73.2% (2007) and registration rate of 2nd semester of new students also increased from 55.79% (2001) to 61.11% (2007) at KNOU.

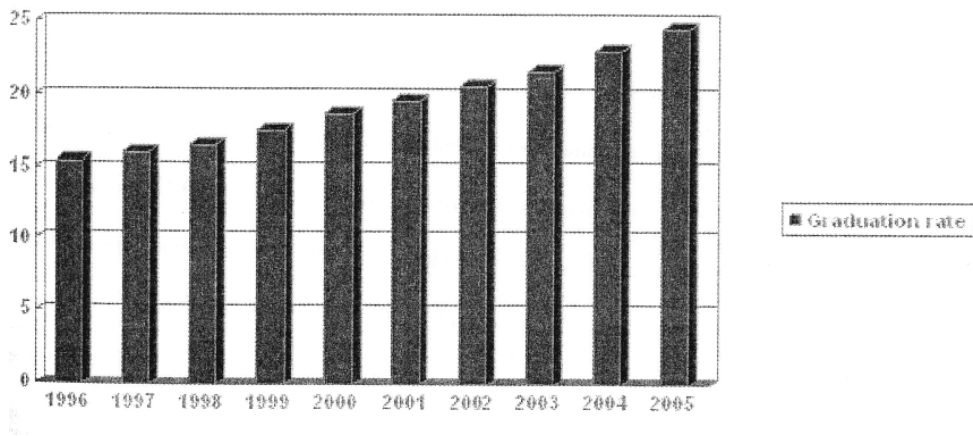
Figure 3. The trend of applying rate of final examination (1<sup>st</sup> semester) and registration rates of 2<sup>nd</sup> semester by year



### Rates of Graduation

In Korea the average graduation rate of conventional universities is about 84% as of 2006. This statistic statement shows that the average graduation rate of conventional universities is comparatively high and these statistics are not meaningful for conventional universities. However, numerous new students of KNOU are not able to complete the whole course. This is of course most problematic challenge to open universities. Thus, KNOU tries to keep students studying at school and obtaining degree. And the rates of graduation can be an index which reflects the effort by KNOU and open universities. Regarding this matter the average graduation rate of KNOU has been increased past ten years. The following figure clearly shows it.

Figure 4. The tendency of average graduation rate



Besides these new standards and indexes, the students supporting system such as operation of mentor and tutor can be another index which also can assess the effort of university for decreasing the drop-out rates.

### CONCLUSION

In this study the definition of university evaluation, controversial points of existing evaluation and standards are discussed. It is also pointed out that the existing standards and indexes are not appropriate for KNOU as an open university. Thus, the modified and new standards and indexes are discussed and suggested. It is necessary for university to conduct evaluation. The adequate evaluation will help examine and understand universities. The results of evaluation will also help develop the university and lead the university to right track in the future.

The regional and specialized evaluation agencies serve significant roles in today's higher and distance education environment. Given this important role, it is not a surprise that interest of members of AAOU in it are high and that appearance of such commission or bureau under control of AAOU will be an issue. Thus it is about time to think about organizing a commission or bureau under AAOU. This commission or bureau sets forth the domains of evaluation, standards of evaluation and indexes of evaluation which can be used to evaluate members of AAOU. The evaluation committee or bureau can point out the weakness of a subject university

and advice for improvement of the university. This evaluation and advice give the subject universities an opportunity to review and examine themselves.

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