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WawasanLink

Linking Students, Partners And Communities

wawasan open UNIVERSITY

the people's university

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Chancellor's Scholarship launched

A major financial support programme has been initiated to help students who are academically capable but are constrained by financial restrictions to pursue studies at Wawasan Open University.

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Implemented under the new Chancellor's Scholarship Fund, the programme aims to provide grants to all needy students - no matter how large their numbers - as long as they achieve academic distinction.

Monumental in its scope, the scheme resonates with the university's aspiration as Malaysia's first private not-for-profit Open Distance Learning educational institution dedicated to adult learners. WOU is supported extensively by the Wawasan Education Foundation (WEF), a charitable body.

Over the last two semesters, the university has given out more than 700 scholarships, through financing from WEF and Gerakan, to almost half of its enrolling student populations.

The Chancellor's Scholarship Fund was launched by WOU Council Chairman Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik in conjunction with the preview of *Road to Dawn (see page 2)*.

Also in attendance were WOU Chancellor Tun Dr Lim Chong Eu, Penang Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon, Deputy Information Minister Dato' Seri Chia Kwang Chye, WEF Chairman Dato' Seri Stephen Yeap Leong Huat and WOU Vice Chancellor Tan Sri Emeritus Professor Gajaraj Dhanarajan.

The occasion at GSC Gurney Plaza was ringing with the loud public oath that Keng Yaik once made "not to deny any adult the opportunity to study because they do not have money."

Keng Yaik, who is also the minister of energy, water and communications, noted at the launch that the university has set for itself a target to support, through education, every Malaysian who wants to be a knowledge worker.

"The cost of study in almost all of our private colleges and universities is fast reaching a stage," he said, "that even middle class parents have to consider re-mortgaging their homes, pulling out most of their savings, foreclosing their insurance policies and borrowing extensively from financial institutions."

"If this is the case for middle-class citizens, just think what befalls those who are lower down the income ladder?"

Under the programme, scholarship grants are given on a "means-tested" basis where financial support is reviewed term-by-term, to ensure that student recipients are motivated to continuously meet the academic achievement criteria.

WOU currently offers eleven undergraduate degree programmes. Six are in Business and Administration and the remaining five in Science and Technology.

Further undergraduate programmes and at least two post-graduate degree programmes are in the offing.

Since it began offering academic courses in January, the university has an accumulated student population of more than 1,700. Of these, the 700 who obtained grants based on financial merit were covered fully from paying tuition fees.

"The right to an education for all citizens is a fundamental right where the public purse can support this ideal," stressed Keng Yaik. "It is only just that provisions be made available for citizens to access that right."

"Unfortunately in our country we have not reached that level of public provision which leaves many talented individuals unable to educate themselves further."

Koh, in his speech, stressed that WOU is expected to be self-sustaining within seven years when its student numbers reach about 30,000.

"The university is subvented extensively by a charitable foundation and at the moment does not receive any government grants," he added.

"All of us here today have the power to change the world by how we invest our resources and ourselves," he added. "There is no greater investment than knowledge through education. We should all do our part in investing in all of our futures."

Vice Chancellor's voice

Most of us are probably busy now with a flurry of activities to mark the end of 2007. At the same time it is an exciting time for Wawasan Open University as we gear ourselves for the third intake in January 2008.

Welcome to the second issue of our quarterly newsletter

We are especially excited to offer the Commonwealth Executive MBA (*CE*MBA) for students enrolling at the university in January. *CE*MBA, the first of its kind in the country, recently received approval from both the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) and the National Accreditation Board (LAN). WOU is proud to receive the green light to enrol students for this Executive Master's programme for the January 2008 intake.

The programme is a collaborative effort between WOU and the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), based in Vancouver, Canada, with a consortium of four participating universities in Asia, namely the Indira Gandhi National Open University, Bangladesh Open University, Allama Iqbal Open University and the Open University of Sri Lanka. Two others are expected to join this consortium in the near future.

The *CE*MBA course materials were developed by subject experts from Commonwealth universities and they are adapted to suit local industries and environment to ensure world class quality while being locally relevant and contemporary.

Since our last issue, we have seen launching ceremonies conducted at the regional centres in Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh and Johor Bahru. The university is now geared to launch more regional centres to cater to the needs of all Malaysians; and two more centres are expected to be opened in Kota Bharu and Melaka next year.

These centres are significant to WOU's aspiration in becoming a truly accessible open distance learning institution, as they mark the university's expanding presence among the people across our nation.

It is also of no less import that the Chancellor's Scholarship Fund was launched during this same period. A unique programme that literally provides full financial tuition support to any and every needy student who excels in studies at WOU, the scholarship is a crystallised reflection of the university's commitment to be truly accessible and affordable to the people.

In January, it will be exactly a year since our pioneer students began their courses in open distance learning with WOU. And we anticipate even more new programmes and schemes to be introduced as we work towards making the fruits of learning available to every deserving individual within our reach.

Tan Sri Emeritus Professor
Gajaraj Dhanarajan
Vice Chancellor and Chief Executive Officer

in the limelight

A revolutionary movie launch

***Road to Dawn*, the acclaimed new movie based on a historic but little-known episode in the life of Chinese revolutionary leader Sun Yat Sen, hit the screens in Malaysia with a grand dash of style.**

Graced by celebrity actors Winston Chao, Angelica Lee and Wu Yue, as well as Hong Kong-based director Derek Chiu, the movie opened to packed houses at Golden Screen Cinema theatres over two consecutive nights in Penang and Kuala Lumpur.

Local audiences have long anticipated the screening since the movie was launched at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing in the presence of high-ranking government leaders of both countries in June.

Road to Dawn won top media awards at the Shanghai International Film Festival for most popular actor (Chao for his leading role) and most promising newcomer (Wu).

Its writer Maezi also won the award for most outstanding newcomer in scriptwriting at China's most prestigious film event, the Huabiao Film Awards in Beijing, in August.

As the organiser and presenter of *Road to Dawn* in Malaysia, the Wawasan Education Fund (WEF) plans to use the movie to raise funds for WOU's Chancellor's Scholarship. The university owns exclusive copyright of the movie for five years in Malaysia and Brunei.

Based on historical events, the movie was filmed entirely in Penang from August to September last year. The scenes specifically highlight the rich and nostalgic heritage, culture and traditions of the island during the first decade of the 1900s.

Crowds thronged the cinemas to watch Penang's many landmarks which were used as colourful locations for the film, as well as local personalities who featured as supporting actors.

Penang Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon hailed *Road to Dawn* as "a very meaningful and touching movie".

"Not many people know that the planning of the Guangzhou Uprising by Dr Sun took place at 120 Armenian Street in Penang when the island was then part of the British Straits Settlements."

"It is especially appropriate that this movie is a joint-effort by Malaysia and China, and has received full support from the governments of both countries," he added.

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HELPing Hands

Dean of School of Business and Administration Prof Cheah Kooi Guan, demonstrating to Chan (centre) WOU's innovative IT support for its students.

Morgan giving a brief rundown on the many advantages of Ink-Media's revolutionary PC.

As an institution that applies advanced methods to deliver learning to adult students in flexible innovative ways, WOU has found it beneficial to work with education partners facing similar challenges.

These benefits include sharing of resources and knowledge. WOU recently found synergy with HELP University College in exchanging common concerns, challenges and opportunities.

The understanding transpired over long discussions during a day-long visit by senior officials from HELP University College to WOU headquarters.

While both parties had extensive discussions on developing partnerships in academic staff improvement, they also exchanged ideas on issues like joint programmes and content development.

HELP was represented by its President Dr Paul Chan Tuck Hoong, its CEO Chan Kum Yoke, Vice President Dr Choong Yeow Wei, Group Director for Marketing and Business Development Fiona Woo Yoke Fong, and Marketing and Corporate Communications Director Katherine Poh.

They were received by Vice Chancellor and CEO Tan Sri Emeritus Professor Gajaraj Dhanarajan, as well as the deputy vice-chancellors and heads of schools.

A partner of HELP University College, Gerry Morgan, who is founder of Canadian technology company Ink Media, was also present during the visit.

Morgan gave a demonstration on Ink Media's line of cost-efficient and unique internet-ready laptop computers which boast some rather nifty performance features.

Visit to Open University of Hong Kong

A highly specialised Online Tutor Training course has been developed by the Open University of Hong Kong (OUHK) to guide tutors in handling the virtual education environment.

The course was one of several new facilities for open distance learning that representatives of Wawasan Open University were exposed to while participating in a workshop on rapid e-learning at the OUHK.

Course Co-ordinator Dr Wendy Bong from the School of Science and Technology, together with Educational Technology Instructional Designer Marnisya Abdul Rahim visited the OUHK in July to attend the workshop, which was held on the heels of a conference on e-learning.

The tutor-training course was especially seen as a system that WOU can benefit from. As the university expands, resources on tutor training may be centralised and tutors may access all their guides online.

The OUHK workshop included presentations on rapid e-learning by Dr Ray Jimenez, an international authority on the rapid application of knowledge and learning performance systems.

Jimenez stressed that feedback from students is the fastest and most important answer to solving instructional problems and to improve delivery of e-learning.

The workshop participants also had the opportunity to look at the content material for the engineering courses by the School of Science and Technology at OUHK.

Bong and Marnisya later visited OUHK's technical support for its e-conference room and editing studio where some of the ETPU works were edited and published for the education purposes of the local television station.

The WOU representatives also held discussions with Dr Andrew Lui and Dr Vanessa Ng of OUHK on ways to collaborate and on learning how to run courses in the most optimal away.

Welcoming valued partners

Companies and organisations across Malaysia may now reap significant benefits from a new programme at Wawasan Open University that allows external parties to establish long-term partnerships with the institution.

Dubbed the Valued Partners Programme, the scheme features constructive and worthwhile incentives such as group concessions for staffs of partner-organisations who become students at WOU.

Organisations that sponsor their staff to be upgraded and re-skilled through further education at Wawasan Open University can then benefit from greater overall cost savings.

There are many other advantages to be accrued by valued partners through this programme, which is now incorporated as part of WOU's marketing campaign.

WOU is also offering up to five scholarships to the valued partner under the umbrella of the Chancellor's Scholarship Fund.

The fund offers financial assistance to any new student in the partner organisation who wishes to advance his education and training, but is constrained by limited financial ability (see cover).

The Valued Partners Programme also enables participating organisations to preview the university's latest offerings such as new course programmes and on-site registration exercises.

Special previews can also be held for employees on matters like working and studying at the same time without having to leave their jobs.

Aussie Economists Ahoy!

Prof Norris and Prof Peter Drake were warmly welcomed by WOU Vice Chancellor, Tan Sri Emeritus Prof Gajaraj Dhanarajan and Deputy Vice Chancellor (academic) Prof Wong Tat Meng.

Wawasan Open University headquarters recently played host to two eminent economics professors from Australia – Emeritus Prof Peter Drake and Prof Keith Norris.

Drake was the founding vice-chancellor of the Australian Catholic University from 1991 to 1998, while Norris, a labour economist, is the author of the acclaimed *The Economics of the Australian Labour Markets*.

Drake is currently a professor emeritus of the University of New England and of the Australian Catholic University. He was a foundation member of the management board of the Asian and Pacific Development Centre (APDC), Kuala Lumpur; a board member of IDP Education Office, North America. He was also a member of the AVCC Academic Standards Panel on Economics from 1989 to 1992. Drake also served as the project manager of Australia's A$15 million Project of Assistance to Institut Pertanian Bogor, Indonesia.

Norris, an author of several notable books, is a former dean of the economics department of Murdoch University. He co-authored *Principles of Economics*, a popular textbook read at many Australian varsities.

The two Australians made a courtesy call on WOU Vice Chancellor Tan Sri Emeritus Prof Gajaraj Dhanarajan, and visited School of Business and Administration Dean Prof Cheah Kooi Guan and other faculty members.

The visitors were given a brief presentation on the Open Distance Learning mode of conducting various courses under the school.

The professors were later taken on a quick tour of the new WOU headquarters building at historic Homestead. Both academics were impressed by the conservation work being carried out to preserve the Homestead in its original splendour.

Upon returning to Australia, Drake wrote to Cheah: "We were most impressed with every aspect of Wawasan Open University - the new site, the planning and especially you and your colleagues. With such a wise VC and very good senior academic staff, the venture is bound to succeed."

Welcome MADHU PARHAR

Dr Madhu Parhar, one of the foremost academics on the issue of education technology in India, has joined the WOU family as a senior educational technologist.

Parhar is the co-author of *Indian Education: Development since Independence*. She has also edited seven books, including one on *Eduset*, the national satellite operated by the Indian Space Research Organisation for transmitting educational programmes across India.

Parhar has also served as an educational technology consultant with UNESCO. Her achievements included helping the government of India and UNESCO with a national action plan for in-service training of primary teachers. Parhar prepared three background documents for this project.

Highly experienced in the field of educational technology and open distance learning, Parhar was a professor of distance learning at the Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi, before joining WOU.

Her articles have been published in the prestigious *British Journal of Educational Technology* and *The Indian Journal of Open Learning*.

She also contributed towards a chapter on educational technology in the *Encyclopedia of Indian Education*, and has presented papers before the Asia Regional Literacy Forum.

a system to make a somebody

There is significant potential for new research to be conducted on how students develop through the teaching and interaction within an open learning system, especially through the medium of cyberspace.

Dr Tan Toh Wah, Dean of the School of Foundation Studies at Wawasan Open University, is looking at an in-depth research and implementation plan of how students, tutors, administrators and the very instructional mechanism itself can be made to work together to help foster a positive environment to induce students to excel in their work.

In fact, a comprehensive study on the sustainability of students in the open distance learning environment is due, Tan stresses, because it would be necessary to bring back adults who take time off or take a long time to come back to their studies.

It would be effective in encouraging and drawing such adult students to complete their academic studies and achieve their necessary qualifications.

"I have a concept of a student wanting to be a somebody," Tan explains. "A lot of social interactions involve the individual's yearning to be a 'somebody'. It is a very meaningful and powerful thing."

Tan, a doctoral holder from Cambridge and a lecturer in education and sociology at Universiti Sains Malaysia in the late 90s, has done substantial research on youth culture and deviancy.

"When teachers make these children nobodies through their treatments, the children respond by trying to be 'somebody' and thereby become branded with trouble."

Tan would like to look at how a WOU student can be encouraged and motivated to be a 'somebody' because some may be inclined to withdraw. So Tan hopes to carry out follow-up studies on such students to determine what needs were not catered to and how the system turned them into 'nobodies'.

In schools, children create disciplinary problems when they are not motivated. But in open distance learning, adult students just drop out and disappear.

"Therefore we need to do research on how to sustain the students' aspirations, and the processes involved in achieving this," he stresses. "A lot of people are enthusiastic about coming in and getting their degrees. But can they obtain their degrees in the end?"

> *"We need to take a good look at not just why they drop out but also how they drop out."*

He says key indicators of students who are at risk of discontinuing need to be better explored. These include observations like non-attendance at tutorials, lateness in passing up of assignments, lack of peer support, and of non-participation in discussion groups or in the university's online learning management system, the WawasanLearn.

By working on such indicators, the university's administration can then set about to improve the system and facilities within the academic realm to help and engage the students.

"We need to take a good look at not just why they drop out but also how they drop out," he says.

Common reasons for the adult students' failure to continue include time constraints, professional commitments and financial impediments.

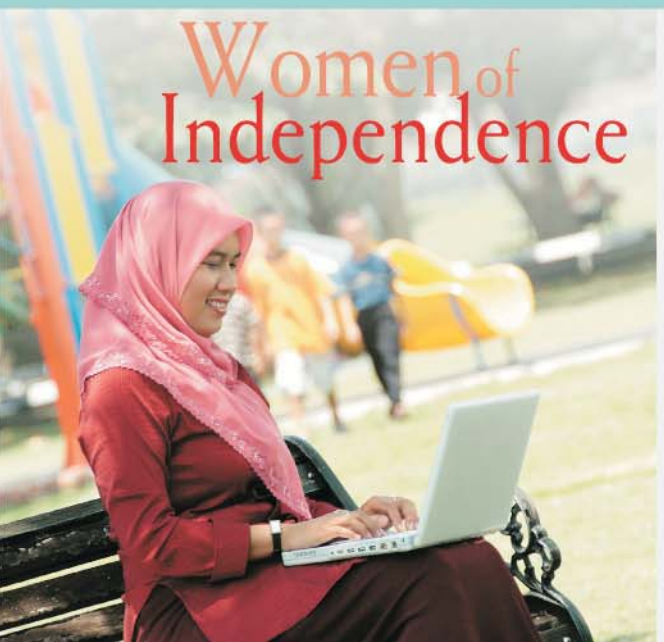
One of the most significant facilities that can be improved on is the WawasanLearn. For example, some students are better able to help others in the online system. By doing so, they are becoming 'somebody'. Can the university channel such leadership potential to help other students?

"I hope to do an actual analysis on how these students can be utilised to benefit the general student community of the university."

Tutors can also be trained to be more attuned and sensitive by being both responsive and proactive towards students, including those who are exhibiting signs of waning participation.

"Face-to-face interaction is good. However, our interaction is virtual. So we need to look at how we can use the virtual mechanism not just for instruction and sharing of knowledge, but also for support and motivation, and for indirectly turning our students into 'somebody'."

Women of Independence



In an effort to embody the strengthening of women's independence in this country, a conference on Women of Independence was held in August, in conjunction with the nation's 50th year of independence

Three unit heads from WOU - Marketing Director Usha Veeriah, Publishing Manager Grace Lau Pee Hoay and Corporate Communications Manager Agnes James - participated in the event to share information and ideas.

Among the featured speakers during the two-day conference, which was slated to allow professional issues pertinent to women of this country to be discussed, were personalities from the worlds of business, politics, academia and philanthropy.

They included UNIFEM (USA) Executive Director Dr Noeleen Heyzer, Hong Leong Bank (Malaysia) CEO and Group Managing Director Yvonne Chia, Merrill Lynch Japan Securities President Izumi Kobayashi, Thermax Limited (India) Director Anu Aga, Standard Chartered Bank (Malaysia) Chief Financial Officer Foong Pik Yee and Pole-to-Pole explorer and lecturer Datin Paduka Sharifah Maslina.

The speakers showcased their accomplishments and achievements in their respective fields. The event was held in collaboration with the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development Malaysia.

Budget 2008: a paradigm shift

When the Malaysian Budget for the year 2008 was announced, there was general anticipation that it would be a "pre-election" antic loaded with goodies. There was also, on the other hand, a perception that it would entail an increase in taxes – the budget is conventionally a platform to raise additional funds – in view of swelling development and operational costs.

Neither took place. What the budget instead did was to confirm a new paradigm shift in the way the government now resorts to financing its coffers and in the manner it publicises its strategies.

"A budget is a plan," says Prof Dr Cheah Kooi Guan, Dean of the School of Business and Administration at WOU, after the budget was announced on Sept 7. "Traditionally, a budget is an indication of where the federal government obtains its funds for the coming year and how the money is to be used."

"And from the recent announcement, there now appears to be less reliance on traditional sources of funding," comments Cheah, a veteran analyst and academic authority in finance and business.

In previous years, both the public and the business sectors have expected more taxes to be imposed in each budget, in order for the government to cope with the burgeoning number of projects and expenses.

But for the 2008 budget, personal income tax rate has not been increased at all, and corporate tax rates have in fact been slashed. "The corporate tax rate for 2008 will be 26 percent, which is one percent lower than that in 2007," Cheah notes.

"And the government can afford to even lower the corporate tax because the stream of revenue it gets from national oil agency Petronas is reasonably high."

In fact, the finance minister, who is also the prime minister, announced that the corporate tax rate would be further cut by another 1 percent to 25 percent in 2009.

What the move confirms is that the tax base in Malaysia is in fact very small, and the scope for the government to continue to rely on it as a source of funding has become very limited.

"There are only about 900,000 personal income tax payers in Malaysia," Cheah explains. "This constitutes about 9 percent of the 11 million workforce. That means less than 10 percent of our working people actually pay income tax, which is very low."

"But this statistic also shows that there is a need for the government to broaden the tax base by making more people contribute to government coffers... A lot of people are actually either not declaring their income taxes or not paying."

Another reason for the authorities not to resort to increasing taxes is the high petroleum revenue that the country is now enjoying. "Petroleum revenue constitutes a significant source of funding for the government," Cheah says.

"And the government can afford to even lower the corporate tax because the stream of revenue it gets from national oil agency Petronas is reasonably high." Furthermore, this government-linked company also pays taxes, thus providing significant revenue for the national coffers.

Very importantly, the budget is in line with the government's new strategy to tap non-traditional sources of funding.

"A lot of development projects that the government now announces are being funded by private finance initiatives (PFIs)," says Cheah. "So instead of the government trying to find money from taxes, all it does now is hand over whole projects to the private sector."

"And the private sector will act on its own initiative to find the money," he adds, pointing to the second Penang bridge project where a loan deal has been privately arranged with China as an example.

"In the past, every project was paid for from the government's pocket. But now a lot of projects are privatised."

Cheah does however give a note of caution. "We must remember that PFIs are actually commercial and profit-oriented. They are different from government projects which are social and non-profit oriented."

"The PFIs do not fund the government directly; they only fund the projects. And that means the government does not have to spend very much."

While the budget does not include an increase in taxes, it has not offered, contrary to expectations, many "goodies" in the form of financial exemptions. "The reason for this," Cheah remarks, "is that the government now announces new measures as and when it is timely. It no longer waits till the budget day, which comes once a year, to do so. This is very different from the past."

For example, in Feb 2007, the government announced the Iskandar Development Region (IDR) project, and in March it annulled the real property gains tax (RPGT) nationally to zero percent to boost the property development sector.

The rescinding of the RPGT was a significant move. Prior to that, buyers were taxed 50 percent for selling their property within the first year of purchase, and paid less tax if they kept their properties longer according to a stipulated schedule. "But now, even if you buy a house today and sell it tomorrow, there is no tax on the profit. It's a big difference."

In May, the government announced a massive civil servant pay hike and in July the Northern Corridor Economic Region (NCER) blueprint. It also announced in July a 25 percent increase in cigarette excise duty.

Why did the government not wait till September to announce all these in the budget, and thereby generate immense positive publicity? Cheah feels that by staggering the announcements throughout the year, the government is, from a political perspective, seen to be responsive, timely and making financial planning known on a flowing basis.

Cheah also comments that the costs of some goodies announced in the 2008 Budget are actually not as high as the public perceives. For example, the Budget contains a policy adjustment in the Text Book Loan Scheme.

School textbooks are to be provided to all students irrespective of their families' income and with no restrictions on the number of eligible children, beginning in the 2008 school session.

While the measure will definitely cost the government additional money, the costs of such an initiative are in fact relatively low in the framework of the whole national budget, Cheah says. What a policy like the Text Book Loan Scheme does is to reduce the burden of administration among teachers and school staff, so that they can spend their time on teaching, which is the core business of the school.

"So the cost is relatively low," Cheah remarks. "But to the public it sounds good."

"An annual budget actually creates a platform, it provides an opportunity for us to look deeper into issues that are ongoing, while also revisiting old issues," says Cheah. "The issues are ongoing, but events like this allow people to rekindle, to restart or revisit old issues."

New phase for Commonwealth Master's programme

The Commonwealth Executive MBA and MPA (*CE* MBA/*CE* MPA) programme, run by the world's only inter-governmental organisation to provide education and training through open learning, is slated to undergo a new phase in its development as it goes fully online.

Five years after the programme was established, an international workshop of participating institutions has initiated its complex conversion to suit the online medium.

The 5-day workshop, held at the WOU headquarters in September, was attended by participants from eight nations and was led by the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), the education arm of the Commonwealth of Nations.

COL developed the instructional materials for each course with the help of experts from four participating institutions in the Commonwealth and expertise sourced from across the commonwealth.

The programme features flexible and modular delivery modes and academic pathways that allow students to choose either business administration (MBA) or public administration (MPA) as a major field of study.

"While the materials are very global, WOU is looking to localise the content with case studies where appropriate."

The *CE*MBA/*CE*MPA programme is now expanding through partnership with universities in Asia, Africa, the South Pacific and South America.

As the chief host of the gathering, Prof Madhulika Kaushik, dean of the centre of graduate studies at Wawasan Open University, said the workshop was highly significant as it included extensive discussions on common protocols for conversion to online format.

Madhulika is spearheading the development of the *CE*MBA and *CE*MPA programmes at WOU. The programmes are targeted to be offered here next year.

When implemented, these will be the first postgraduate degrees to be offered at WOU.

"It is important for the programme to go online as soon as possible, the working professionals today are constantly on the move and the facility of accessing their programme along with all the support services from anywhere they are, will be a significant advantage for the learners," she explained.

"The participants generally agreed on common platforms and discussed principles of sharing of resources among the representative institutions," she explained.

"We agreed that the programme's contents can be placed on a multimedia CD with a shelf-life of three years so that it is easier for the institutions to adjust the teaching based on the needs of their students."

"While the materials are very global, WOU is looking to localise the content with case studies where appropriate," Madhulika stressed.

The meeting also came to a decision that the online format should adopt as a basic platform the open source Moodle, which is the e-learning software on which WawasanLearn is based.

Because the participants comprised institutions that have joined the programme at different stages, there was rich sharing of experiences.

What makes the programme's medium especially flexible is that students will now have the option to choose from either the online medium or the print.

The workshop was attended by representatives from Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) (Ghana), University of Papua New Guinea, University of Guyana, Indira Gandhi National Open University (India), Bangladesh Open University, National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) and Allama Iqbal Open University (Pakistan).

Also in attendance was a representative from Epilson learning, a Vancouver based concern that provides expertise in the research, development and training of e-learning.

WOU was represented by its deputy vice-chancellor (academic) Wong Tat Meng, the School of Business and Administration, the Educational Technology Unit, and Information Technology and Services.

The business web of WOU

Like the web of the spider, in which each thin strand is weaved and laced with other wispy strands to collectively generate the sight of a great geometrical artwork of nature, the organisation of Wawasan Open University is comprised of a complex interplay of different departments and offices.

WOU is in the business of Open Distance Learning (ODL). Thus its focus is to provide market-driven tertiary education programmes and prescribed courses that are targeted predominantly at working adults who are interested in pursuing a university education leading eventually to the award of degrees or diplomas.

This enormous objective is supported by an elaborate business web of WOU, explains Dato' Dr Ho Sinn Chye, Dean of the School of Science and Technology. It is a web that involves very fine coordination and interaction between the different strands of roles and responsibilities.

It involves, firstly, the schools of the university as the knowledge scouts and providers. "In practice, these schools will identify and develop the new degree and diploma programmes, and design the necessary courses after conducting an educated scan of current market needs and prospective student profiles," Ho explains.

It then involves the Regional Offices as sales and service outlets, as well as essential business supporting units like marketing, communications, publishing, information technology (IT) and educational technology (ET) units, and the Wawasan library.

"Of course the whole venture has to have the full backing of the University's management and administrative complex, consisting of the chancellery, the registry, the human resource unit, finance, and general services."

"The tangible products in the present context are in the form of new course modules that have been designed, written, published, officially accredited, and then delivered (or presented) to the enrolled or prospective students who are the knowledge consumers."

"The University adopts a sound business strategy that is translated into tactics."

"One cannot but overly emphasise that the revenue catchments for WOU are found in the large pool of prospective students out there in the market."

"All the key functional elements of the production line are already in place in WOU," Ho says. "The challenge from now on is to ensure that the individual efforts and capacity of these key elements of the value chain are cost-effectively synergised and enhanced."

"The University adopts a sound business strategy that is translated into tactics. All stakeholders in WOU would then adopt appropriate operational methods to implement the tactics and strive to achieve the business targets set by the University."

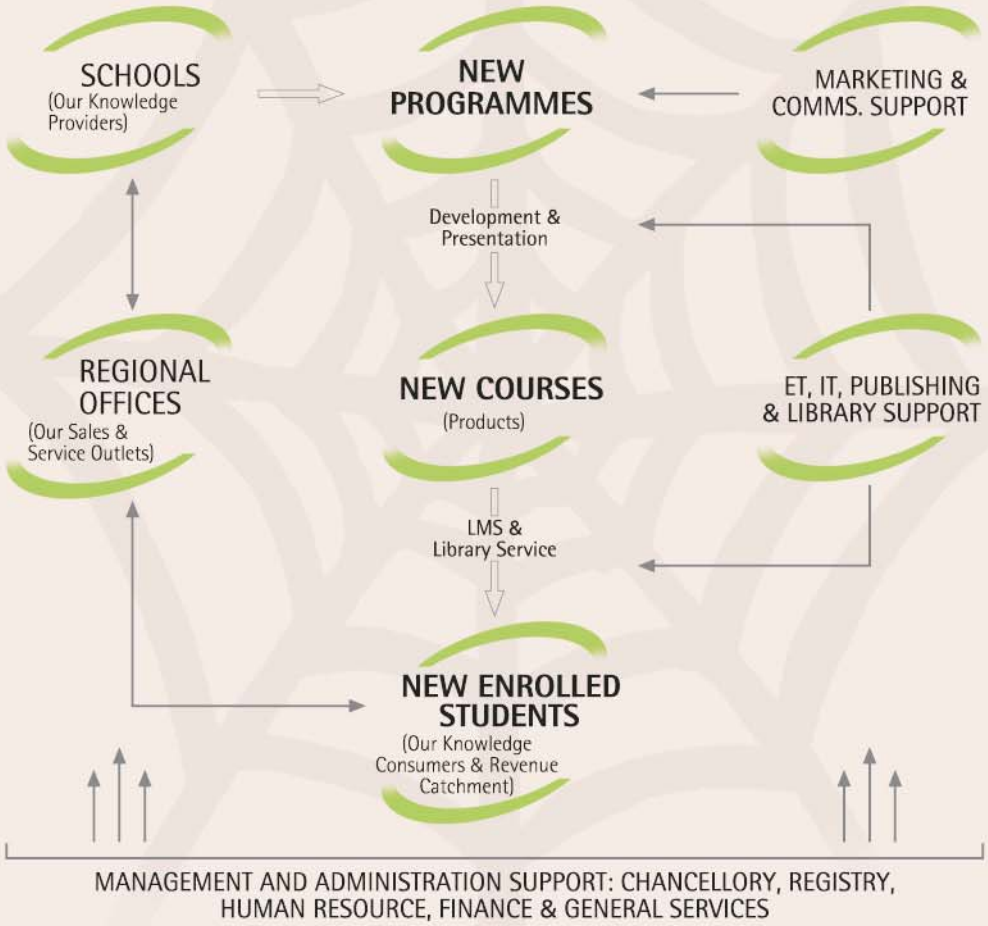


Figure 1: Key elements of the ODL business chain of WOU

Student buzz

in Ipoh Regional Office

Group discussion in the library.

As the time draws near for students to submit their first assignments, the Ipoh Regional Office is literally abuzz with activities.

The library experiences "heavy traffic" - the computers are occupied, the tables filled, group discussions held at the counselling corners.

The determination and commitment of some students from the second semester to do well again is very obvious. They gather regularly in the evenings after work and also during the weekends, to be immersed in their studies in the hallowed space of the library.

Student club for Johor Bahru

In an effort to help foster productive and beneficial ties, students at the WOU Regional Office in JB recently called for a gathering to form the university's first ever student club at the centre.

A total of 26 students responded by coming together to show their support for the formation of the club. They were welcomed by the office's director, Ng Peng Long.

See Kaw Him was made the inaugural president. The meeting also came up with a succinct maxim for the club: "Commitment to excel academically and success in life through WOU."

Thoughts of a finance student

Since I am a financial services practitioner, I enrolled in the Banking and Finance course at Wawasan Open University as I needed to develop good foundations in financial knowledge. In the few years that I have been involved in this industry, I have found that understanding about finance in Malaysia is rather low.

People who are marketing products in the industry need only to pass their SPM before they go on to obtain their licensing qualifications.

As a result of such a lax standards, many customers have been left dissatisfied, giving rise to prejudices against the industry, especially in fields like insurance and unit trusts.

I therefore wanted to have a deeper understanding of finance to educate my customers and prospects, so that they will fully comprehend the nature of the product they are participating in. At the same time, I wanted to be able to understand the intricacies of the new financial products that originate from the West. This situation is inevitable as the world develops and financial products become more complex and sophisticated.

Yap Lock Too
Student,
WOU Johor Bahru
Regional Office

KLRO Official Launch

Dhanarajan and Yeap witness the plaque signing by Chia to commemorate the official launch of WOU KLRO, followed by presentation of souvenirs.

The Kuala Lumpur Regional Office of WOU has been officially launched in grand style at its premise in the Menara PGRM, by Deputy Information Minister Dato' Seri Chia Kwang Chye.

The impressive crowd of about 200 guests included VIPs from Gerakan, the education ministry's national accreditation board, academicians from various institutes of higher learning, as well as family and friends. They were welcomed by the KL Regional Office's affable director, Meilina Puteh.

Wawasan Education Fund Chairman Dato' Seri Stephen Yeap Leong Huat, Vice Chancellor Tan Sri Emeritus Professor Gajaraj Dhanarajan and WOU council members graced the event with an entourage that included Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) Prof Wong Tat Meng, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Operations) Dr. Seah Soo Aun, Finance Director Dr. Wong Thian Soon and other colleagues from the headquarters.

In his speech, Dhanarajan stressed that the modern facilities and amenities at the learning centre reflect WOU's keenness to provide an efficient learning channel for students.

Chia, in his opening remark, emphasised the importance of promoting educational opportunities and social justice through high-quality tertiary education to all who wish to realise their dreams and fulfil their potential.

Penang Student Body formed

In an effort to get students to know each other better, the Penang Student Body was formed to provide a forum for students to exchange latest information and to participate in interesting events.

The student body is intended to provide a platform for interaction and forum discussion on non-academic matters - on anything from pets to shopping, from fun to games.

They run a website that serves as a source of information, activities and a point of contact among students. The site can be viewed at *http://woupenang.multiply.com*.

Students only meet once a month, during their tutorial classes. With the existence of the active web page they now have another reason and means for communicating, and their activities can be made public to all that have access to the page.

According to the group's inaugural chairman, Steve Looi Tat Wah, the body will also serve as liaison between the students and the university, and act as a link in promoting the university to the surrounding community.

"From group studies to durian trips to sightseeing trips, from museum trips to cultural festivals and celebrations, from meetings with professionals from various walks of life to career seminars by famous speakers," added Looi, "we are here to learn while enjoying ourselves."

Training for KL & JB tutors

The KL Regional Office's academic counsellor Ng Yeen Seen showing a tutor how to navigate around the E-Library webpage.

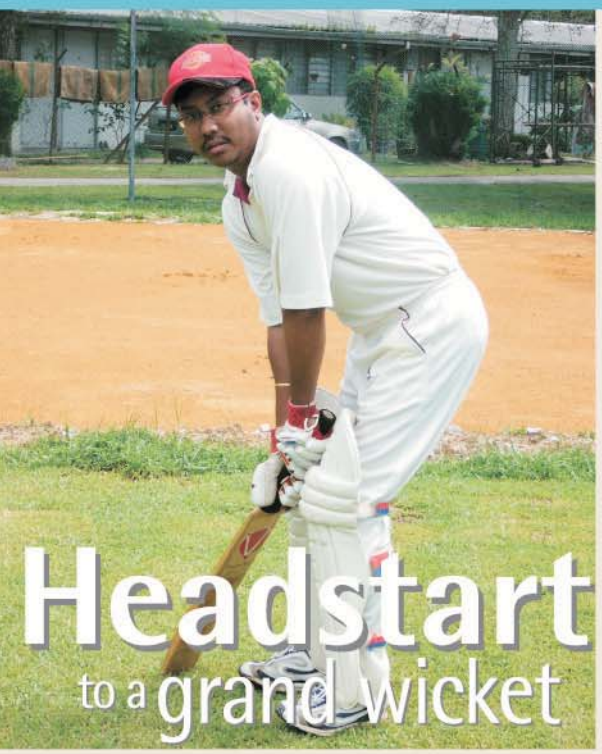
WOU Staff and tutors at the tutor training programme.

Part-time tutors from the southern region recently attended a special training programme for orientation into the university's instructional system.

Held at Menara PGRM, the programme was attended by 57 qualified tutors from Kuala Lumpur and Johor Bahru who were welcomed by Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic) Prof Wong Tat Meng.

Wong also briefed the participants on WOU's model for delivering education to its students. Tutors were updated on several important issues pertaining to assessments, assignments and administration.

Several tutors took the opportunity to browse and familiarise themselves with the comprehensive course materials that have been prepared for the students.



Headstart to a grand wicket

He is a former national cricketer who represented Malaysia in the international arena for seven years. Avtar Singh's sporting glory however hides the fact that he could not gain entry into a public university after his SPM because he had only two credits.

Avtar's technician father, who struggled to make ends meet for the family of five children, advised him to work first and resume his studies when he had the means later.

Now, at the age of 40, the head coach of the Penang Cricket Association has found an opportunity to lift his pen as often as he plays his bat.

"There are many people like me out there who have a strong passion to study again," says Avtar. "Many of them do not know that WOU gives them this opportunity to realise their dreams."

Avtar was particularly relieved as soon as the results for the final exam of the Headstart, a preparatory programme, were announced.

"To pass exams at this age is something that I will cherish because it meant I had to put in double the amount of effort compared to my school years."

"During the good old days, everything was prepared for us by our parents; there was food on the table and enough money to spend. All we needed to do was just study."

"But now I need to work and take care of my family at the same time, so it is very much more difficult and challenging to sit for exams."

"I would say the accomplishment is so much sweeter," says Avtar, who receives a lot of encouragement and support from his wife.

In fact, Avtar has already started to recommend the programme to his cricket mates. "When I first started, I faced difficulties in coping as I had left school for so many years." He says. "But the Headstart actually helped me to manage my life better and that is why I still have time for cricket every Saturday at the Penang Sports Club."

Springing to DREAMS

Anas Silahudin Jarjis had always dreamt of becoming a computer scientist. After leaving school with his SPM, he obtained a computing certificate while operating a business selling computers. However, while pursuing a diploma from 1994 to 1997, he ran into some unusual problems.

On one occasion, his lecturers boycotted and left for another college. The nation later encountered an economic recession, resulting in the college going bankrupt. He then had a brief scuffle with the college authorities over additional charges not stipulated in his agreement. In spite of these problems and a few other minor setbacks, he strived and obtained his diploma.

A year back, Anas spotted a newspaper advertisement for WOU. He signed up for the *Bachelor of Technology in Computer Systems and Networks* at the KL regional office which just happened to be within walking distance from his workplace. The Kelantan-born lad now views the degree he is pursuing as a springboard towards a Master's Degree or even a Doctorate.

Since 2005, Anas, 29, has been working as a technician in a smart school where he handles IT facilities. The experience has provided him with a useful practical approach to networking.

"I do not want to do groundwork for the rest of my life," Anas says in flawlessly accentuated English. "I want to contribute ideologically to society... If I have a higher level of education, I plan to be a motivational speaker to the younger generation."

Anas acknowledges that his parents, who are retired government servants, provided him with invaluable support. "They keep asking, since I'm studying all the time, when will I have the time to get married," he chuckles.

Even after he graduates, Anas is not likely to give up learning. "Education does not have an age barrier, and knowledge is more important than wealth."

Anas Silahudin Jarjis

Syndy Ho

Trial of a double agent

As one of the staff members at the Ipoh Regional Office, Syndy Ho has found it very challenging to play a double role at Wawasan Open University where she is now also a student.

Syndy is taking four subjects this semester as she pursues a *Bachelor of Business in Management*. While she tries to divide her life between her studies, her family and her job, it is certainly proving to be quite a task for her to complete all the required assignments on a regular basis.

But the 26-year old, who works as a Student Services & Admissions Executive, is geared up for the challenge. "The picture I have of me succeeding in my work and studies drives me to strive, and not to give up," she says.

One of the pressures Syndy faces daily is in juggling her time between studies – to do her assignments and prepare for tutorial classes – and carrying out her duties at work. Her other pressure is that besides being at the office or on WOU's frequent roadshow, she needs to divide her hours effectively so that she can spend time with her parents, brothers and sister who are in Taiping, near Ipoh.

With determination and discipline, Syndy has been able to effectively juggle all the tasks she is faced with. "I would like to know the extent of abilities," she says. "I really want to know if I can make it!"

"At WOU, we have a culture of encouraging and motivating each other to keep meeting the university"s targets," she adds. "All of us want to do well in our jobs and also in our studies."

"With the pressure I face in doing my assignments and missing my family members at the same time, I keep telling myself not to give up. I know that my parents will definitely be very happy and proud of me when I eventually succeed."

Assignment delivery innovation

A unique online Assignment Submission System is being introduced in Wawasan Open University to enable students to deposit their assignments with immediate acknowledgment.

Through this system, to be implemented early next year, the student needs only to log in and click on the relevant course he signed up for to submit his assignment. The student receives almost instantaneous acknowledgment for the submission that he has made.

One advantage of the system is the convenience it offers – students need not travel to their regional offices to deliver their assignments, nor do they need to go to the nearest post office to mail their projects.

The system also allows administrators to have a centralised and accurate record of submissions. As the assignments are automatically deposited into the system, they are instantly recorded. Tutors can retrieve the students' assignments from any place with internet access, and proceed to provide the necessary attention and feedback.

The IT innovation that makes this sort of system possible lies in the synthesising of a variety of platforms to connect people, technology and process requirements.

Tips for ODL

Adult learners are extremely motivated to achieve academic, career and personal goals. Many of you are making significant personal sacrifices to study. Wawasan Open University realises that, unlike traditional students, adult learners like you have many other responsibilities to balance against the demands of learning. Here are a few factors that can ensure your success.

Managing your time effectively

Time management is critical and begins with proper planning and prioritising. You have to be proactive and take responsibility for your own learning. It would be advisable to reserve and dedicate an average of 6 to 7 hours a week for a course. Stay committed to the allocated time and treat it like an appointment that cannot be postponed. This will allow you to read all the course materials carefully, attempt the questions provided, complete the assignments and other related activities.

Study environment

Some people need absolute silence; others cannot concentrate without noise in the background. No matter what your preference, a well-lit area that is free from distraction is recommended. You will make much better use of 30 minutes of disruption-free study than an hour's worth of commotion-filled learning. Schedule your study time in a distraction-free environment and your chances of success will increase and the time you need to devote to your course will decrease.

Computing skills

Since you will be supported by the Learning Management System (WawasanLearn), you will need basic computer technology skills such as being able to search for information, using the Web for research and an ability to communicate online. Having access to an internet-ready computer, either at the place where you live or work, or going to the nearest regional office for internet services will facilitate your learning process.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Student Info

Registration Deadline for New Students

The last day for new students to register for courses will be 13 January 2008 (Sunday) a week before the January 2008 semester starts.

WOU's Kota Bharu Regional Office is now open, new students may proceed to the KBRO to register by the deadline above.

Re-enrolment and Deadline for Adding Course

Continuing students can begin re-enrolling from 3 October (Wednesday) until 15 January (Friday). The deadline for adding courses is 27 January 2008 (Sunday).

*CE*MBA

Malaysia's premiere Commonwealth Executive Masters in Business Administration programme is open for enrolment until 13 January 2008 (Sunday). Students can enjoy early bird fees if they sign up before 16 December 2007 (Sunday).

Student Orientation Day

This familiarisation event will help explain to students the services and facilities available at their respective regional offices and learning centres, while acquainting them with the university's regulations and procedures.

Student Orientation Day for the January 2008 intake

Date : 20 January 2008 (Sunday)
Venue : Learning Centres nationwide
*for KBRO, orientation day will be on 17 January 2008 (Thursday)

WOU Main Campus Launches January 2008

WOU Main Campus along Jalan Sultan Ahmad Shah, Penang will be launched on 19 January 2008 by our Prime Minister. It will function both as WOU's headquarters as well as a beautiful new campus for all our students.

In the minds of our readers

We would like to hear from you. Whether it's a view, a comment or even a question, don't hesitate to drop us a mail at mediainfo@wou.edu.my

For more details, visit wou.edu.my

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Regional Offices and Learning Centres
Open Tuesday to Sunday: 10.00am - 7.00pm

Penang Regional Office
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Ipoh Regional Office
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56100 Cheras, Kuala Lumpur.
Tel: **03-9281 7323 / 9283 8323** | Fax: **03-9284 9323**
Email: **ro_kl@wou.edu.my**
(Library Services available Tuesday to Friday, 10.00am-10.00pm)

Johor Bahru Regional Office
17 & 19 Jalan Jaya 2, Taman Jaya, 81300 Skudai, Johor.
Tel: **07-556 4323 / 556 6323** | Fax: **07-554 9323**
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Email: **ro_kb@wou.edu.my**
**Open Monday-Saturday from 10.00am-7.00pm*

KY1/JS/DT1/US/PT01