WOU honours two outstanding women leaders

The fifth convocation ceremony of Wawasan Open University held at the main campus on 29 November 2014 saluted two outstanding women leaders for their enormous contribution to civil society and to higher education with the award of the Honorary Doctor of Letters degree.

A prominent social activist, Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir, 57, and internationally-known educationist Prof Tian Belawati, 52, received their honorary degrees from the Chancellor, Tun Mohamed Dzaiddin Abdullah.

Datin Paduka Marina, the eldest child of former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, was recognised for her service to society and nation, particularly in championing social and cultural issues irrespective of ethnicity and political persuasion.

In her acceptance speech, she declared, "We must educate people to be bold thinkers, to stand up against what is unjust regardless of who is perpetuating the injustices. We must, through education, forge a citizenry that..."
We ushered in 2015 fully resolved to accomplish the goals set out in our reviewed strategic plan for this growing University. Before I proceed, I would like to wish every staff and student a productive and rewarding year!

WOU recently graduated 400 students at its convocation. We witnessed several programmes – MBA in Construction Management, MBA in Manufacturing & Production Management, Master of Education, Bachelor of Technology (Hons) in Construction Management, Bachelor of Arts (Hons) in Liberal Studies, Bachelor of Arts (Hons) in Psychology, and Bachelor of Education (Hons) in Primary Education – producing their first batches of graduates. From the graduates’ own accounts, it is clear that they cherish their learning at WOU. The convocation also awarded honorary degrees to two outstanding women achievers, Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir and Prof Tian Belawati.

The hype about MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) has attracted much global as well as local interest. Our Ministry of Education and several universities have announced interesting MOOC plans. While the pros and cons of MOOCs are being debated between the followers and sceptics, most people agree that MOOCs will make an impact on the way we teach both students and adult learners in the future. For the past four years, WOU has actively been incorporating open educational resources (OER) into our open distance learning courses. The knowledge, experience and training that our academic staff have received put us in good state to venture into developing MOOC-type courses.

I applaud the work of the Centre for Professional Development & Continuing Education (PACE) for having successfully trained a team of academics from the Open University of Sri Lanka on different aspects of online recruitment, course development and course delivery. I understand that there may be more similar requests from other universities in the region. WOU is always looking for opportunities to collaborate with universities, local and abroad, towards the offering of training workshops, programmes, or student/faculty exchanges so that we can together progress and grow as providers of tertiary education.

On another note, I want to commend Karen Khor from the School of Science & Technology for winning the ‘gold’ medal for her conference paper which was evaluated under the Young Innovators Award category at the 28th AAOU Annual Conference.

Moving forward, there remain many challenges on various fronts for us to take on this year. We will do this together as we have done in all the past years.

WOU is always looking for opportunities to collaborate with universities, local and abroad, towards the offering of training workshops, programmes, or student/faculty exchanges...

Prof Tian Belawati, the Rector of Universitas Terbuka (UT), Indonesia, was honoured for her contribution to open and distance learning (ODL) and her leadership in efforts to bring higher education within the reach of everyone.

In his address, Tun Dzaiddin remarked that the honorary degree recipients “exemplify passion, dedication and excellence in their respective field of work throughout their lives.” He added, “Datin Paduka Marina has clearly not conformed to the mould of what is expected of her as an individual nor to how society views the women population in general. Prof Belawati meanwhile stands tall in the field of open and distance learning.”

Meanwhile Prof Dato’ Dr Ho Sinn Chye, in presenting the Vice Chancellor’s report, stated, “As individuals and leaders, they dare to step up and impact their society and nation with the strength of their vision, passion and determination.”

WOU Pro-Chancellor Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon described Datin Paduka Marina as a passionate social activist and well-known columnist in Malaysia, and Prof Belawati as a scholar and rector of the largest open university in South-East Asia. He spoke of “the privilege of working under the administration and premiership of Marina’s father” while serving as Chief Minister of Penang. He applauded Prof Belawati for her contributions to “higher education development in Indonesia and Asia.”

understands that the mark of a democratic society is one that cares for its poorest, its most oppressed and marginalised, not one that perpetuates a small elite through power, corruption and fear.”

Professor Dato’ Dr Ho Sinn Chye, Vice Chancellor of Wawasan Open University (WOU), said that the University had a significant role to play in providing quality education that is accessible to everyone, anywhere and anytime. He highlighted the importance of MOOCs in bridging the gap between formal and non-formal education, and emphasized the need for universities to adapt and embrace new technologies to remain relevant in the 21st century.

In addition to MOOCs, WOU has actively been incorporating open educational resources (OER) into its courses to provide additional learning materials for students. The University has also been seeking partnerships with other universities to facilitate student and faculty exchanges.

Moving forward, WOU aims to continue its commitment to providing quality education, embracing new technologies, and collaborating with other universities to enhance the learning experience for its students.
Significant firsts as WOU produces 400 graduates at 5th Convocation Ceremony

There were some significant firsts when a total of 400 graduates received their scrolls at WOU’s 5th Convocation Ceremony held at the main campus on 29 and 30 November 2014.

The event witnessed the first batch of WOU graduates from three Master’s degree programmes. They comprised 11 from MBA in Manufacturing & Production Management (MBA-MPM), four from Master of Education (MEd), and two from MBA in Construction Management (MBA-CM).

The School of Education, Languages and Communications also proudly produced its first batch of five graduates in Bachelor of Education (Hons) in Primary Education.

Meanwhile, the Bachelor of Technology (Hons) degree recipients included a sole inaugural graduate in the field of Construction Management.

And for the first time, the School of Foundation & Liberal Studies celebrated the graduation of 21 of its students. The School had 15 graduates in Bachelor of Arts (Hons) in Liberal Studies and six in Bachelor of Arts (Hons) in Psychology.

Altogether, 308 students graduated from the wide range of undergraduate programmes, while 92 received postgraduate degrees.

At the undergraduate-level, 170 graduated from the six Bachelor of Business (Hons) programmes. Another 98 received their Bachelor of Technology (Hons) degrees while 14 were awarded Graduate Diplomas and Graduate Certificates.

At the postgraduate-level, 56 were conferred the Commonwealth Executive MBA, four the Commonwealth Executive Master of Public Administration (CeMPA), and 15 the Post-Graduate Diploma in Education.

The convocation also gave recognition to two top graduates. Lecturer Cheah Phaik Hoon from Penang, who graduated in CeMPA, received the Tun Dr Lim Chong Eu Memorial Prize for emerging as top graduate at the postgraduate-level.

Assistant bank manager Wong Liang Yeong from Kuala Lumpur, a graduate of Bachelor of Business (Hons) in Banking & Finance, was awarded the Chancellor’s Gold Medal for excellent performance at the undergraduate-level.

Pioneer Liberal Studies grads gain value for their professions

Launched in January 2009, the Bachelor of Arts (Hons) in Liberal Studies produced its inaugural batch of 15 graduates at the university’s 5th convocation ceremony on 30 November 2014. Many of the pioneers testified to how the programme serves to cultivate a generation of independent and highly-motivated professionals.

- Jacintha Jeyaleela Xavier, 41, has worked in a law firm in Petaling Jaya for some 15 years, of which the last four have seen her serve as its legal manager and head of the conveyance department.
  "I took up liberal studies because of its wide scope. The studies cover human resource management, political, psychological and social studies," she said. "It equips me to motivate myself and my colleagues to move up in life, to not look back or give up when there are difficulties. Whatever I learnt, I can apply in my work to counsel people."

Her aim is to move into the education or counselling line, whether in HR management or any office environment that requires providing motivation and training.

WOU was recommended by her ex-boss and she has never looked back since.
  "At the same time I heard from colleagues and friends that the quality in WOU is very good, especially the standard of education and materials," she said.
  "The materials are really helpful. You can study on your own."

- Penangite Edwin Lim Chii Wei, 26, who has been a teaching staff for year 7 to 11 students at Prince of Wales Island International School, Balik Pulau, for close to three years, felt the programme helped him better guide children to learn. Many of the elective courses he took were largely on psychology and child development.
  "I have a better understanding of the kids, how the younger generation thinks, and how to help them with their education and careers," said the happily married father of a one-year-old. "Many kids are coming back to me for advice on which course to go for, and the pros and cons of their decision."

Edwin is currently pursuing his Master of Education at WOU after enrolling in July 2014. He hopes to take on a PhD here, and become a university or college lecturer.

- Choong Yoon Chien, 57, who has run his own firm in Kuala Lumpur for the last 20 years, said the programme taught him to be “more systematic” in organising his many charity events. He has been a member of Kiwanis Club for 15 years now, having served as president at one stage. He also gave 27 years of service as a police volunteer reserve officer before retiring.
Exchanges and collaborations with Toyohashi University of Technology

WOU and its sister institution DISTED College in Penang are all set to undertake valuable faculty and student exchanges with Toyohashi University of Technology (TUT) in Japan.

The exciting and highly productive prospect came about following the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with TUT at the WOU main campus on 15 December last year.

Besides the exchanges, potential collaborative activities in the development of joint industry-driven education programmes, joint R&D initiatives in areas of mutual interest and institutional capability, or even the co-hosting of research meetings or conferences, are also being explored.

The MoU was signed by WOU Vice Chancellor Prof Dato’ Dr Ho Sinn Chye, DISTED President and CEO Dr Sejak Soo Aun, and TUT President Dr Takashi Onishi. On hand to witness the event were WOU Pro-Chancellor Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon, Chairman of DISTED Board of Directors Dato’ Seri Stephen Yeap, and TUT Vice President Prof Mitsuteru Inoue.

Also present were WOU Board of Governors member Tan Sri Dr Chin Fook Weng, WOU Sdn Bhd Board of Directors member Chia Loong Thye, and several senior TUT representatives.

Prof Ho recalled TUT’s visit to WOU in August. “Even at that early stage, we could sense the potential and advantage of our three institutions working together in specific areas of mutual interest, in accordance with institutional capacity and human resource capability,” he said.

Dr Onishi, in his speech, highlighted the “fine track record” of WOU and DISTED as local providers of tertiary education and in human resources development. He expressed keenness in further exchanges of opinion on collaborative efforts that can benefit all.

Although the TUT-USM Penang Centre has been operating for a year, Dr Onishi said: “We still lack the local experience of involvement in higher education in Penang and Malaysia to expand our university operations here. We are seeking to find what approaches and what means of collaboration are available for a university like our own, specialising in science and technology research, to expand its operations in other countries.”

Sharing the way forward at ‘town hall’

WOU staff members were recently updated on the goals, successes and challenges of the university during a town hall session – the third since the institution’s establishment - at the main campus on 17 December last year.

Elaborating on ‘The Way Forward’, Vice Chancellor Prof Dato’ Dr Ho Sinn Chye highlighted six KPIs that reflect the university’s progress and achievement - student enrolment; number of academic programmes; number of graduates; number of regional centres/support centres; staff strength; and financial sustainability.

He outlined several long-term strategic goals as well for the University. These included partnering offshore education institutions through programme franchise and joint degrees, licensing of course materials overseas, and generating income through the training activities of the Centre for Professional Development & Continuing Education (PACE).

Among the attendees were WOU Board of Governors Chairman Tan Sri Emeritus Prof Gajaraj Dhanarajan and WOU Sdn Bhd Chairman Dato’ Seri Stephen Yeap.

Prof Ho also called for an improvement on the current student intake and for an increase in WOU’s current offering of 45 ODL and two full-time programmes. A total of 1,294 students - 903 were from undergraduate programmes and 391 postgraduates – have so far graduated since WOU began in 2006.

He updated on the situation in relation to staff head count and WOU’s main funding sources, as well as challenges and plans in these two areas, stressing that the ultimate goal is “to generate more revenue using our own steam”.

Several key achievements were highlighted. These included WOU’s year-on-year active student growth, gradual reduction of cost-to-income ratio, market presence, the popularity of programmes, research grants from IDRC and Ministry of Education, and increasing requests from overseas institutions for WOU’s assistance.

“We should continue to build the brand name of the University through our academic programmes and the service we provide, especially at the Regional Centres,” he said.

Sharing plans for the growth of WOU.
Fine-tuning projects under **ROER4D-Impact Studies**

WOU hosted a research methodology workshop at the main campus from 1-5 December 2014 for the shortlisted applicants of research grants to carry out projects under the Research on OER for Development (ROER4D)-Impact Studies [www.roer4d.org].

Eight researchers – out of over 100 applicants – were shortlisted to receive grants, pending further evaluation, from UK Department for International Development (DFID) and the Canada-based International Development Research Centre (IDRC) to conduct projects on Open Educational Resources (OER) across developing Asia and Africa. They are from Afghanistan, Australia, Kenya, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, South Africa and UK.

The researchers were among 17 participants at the ROER4D-Impact Studies workshop titled *OER Impact Evaluation Methodologies* organised by WOU’s Institute for Innovation & Research (IRI).

The workshop was facilitated by Dr Robert Farrow from the Open University UK (OUUK). Other participants included ROER4D-Impact Studies team leader Tan Sri Emeritus Prof Gajaraj Dhanarajan of WOU, who is also convener of OERAsia, and co-researchers from Singapore; the ROER4D project team headed by Prof Cheryl Hodgkins Williams of University of Cape Town; and IDRC Senior Programmer Officer Dr Matthew Smith.

Dr Farrow stressed that the workshop objectives were: a shared understanding; harmonisation and consistency across the impact studies; sharing of the OER Research Hub (project in OUUK) experience; and refinement of the ROER4D-Impact Studies proposals. He talked about methodologies and the impact of adopting OER into the curriculum, framing relationship between hypotheses and evidence, critique of proposals for improvement, and risk assessments.

The five-day workshop offered a platform for the researchers to present their proposals for feedback. There were also breakout sessions to allow for discussion between grantors and researchers to further fine tune the proposals. The researchers were made aware of the timelines, processes and sharing of project results once completed.

Overall the ROER4D project covers 11 OER Adoption Studies and 8 OER Impact Studies. Among the objectives of ROER4D are to build a knowledge base on the use and impact of OER in education, develop the capacity of OER researchers, and build a network of OER scholars. The IRI at WOU has been catalytic in promoting OER in the Asian region [http://www.oerasia.org].

**Having fun at WOU-DISTED Family Day!**

Over 200 staff of WOU and DISTED College along with their family members had loads of fun at the joint Family Day held at the WOU main campus on 13 December 2014.

The University’s full-time degree students kicked off the event with a song and dance performance. They also organised a host of exciting games, such as ‘ping pong in the cup’, ‘hook the fish’, and ‘pin the moustache’. The students showed their ingenuity with their uniquely-crafted photo booth to allow people to take selfies in remembrance of the Family Day.

Other activities included a children’s colouring contest and the special appearance of ‘Jack the Clown’ to entertain the kids and present them with animal-shaped balloons. One of the highlights was a ‘dress-up’ competition that pitted four contestants who were dressed up on the spot by team members in colourful sarees. The top prize went to the team from DISTED and second prize to WOU’s full-time students.

WOU Vice Chancellor Prof Dato’ Dr Ho Sinn Chye, Chief Administrative Officer Yeong Sik Kheong and DISTED College President Dr Seah Soo Aun took turns to present the 33 lucky draw prizes to the winners.

Among those who attended the Family Day were WOU Sdn Bhd Chairman Dato’ Seri Stephen Yeap, WOU Board of Governors Chairman Tan Sri Emeritus Prof Gajaraj Dhanarajan and wife Puan Sri Sue, and Board members Tan Sri Dr Chin Fook Weng and Loo Choo Teng.
Competency in factory operations

Edmund Yeoh Tay Beng, 45, graduated with an MBA in Manufacturing & Production Management (MBA-MPM). The general manager of a foam packaging manufacturing factory in Nilai, Negeri Sembilan for four years, he has 120 employees under him.

This programme provides me with the tools and the knowledge to manage the factory operations more competently, and to manage my employees. I am able to perform my job better, and understand the various roles and functions within a manufacturing environment. As I was previously from a sales background, this will definitely help me improve my knowledge base and my skills in managing the manufacturing environment.

Rewarded with teaching opportunities

Eunice Kam Ling Ling, 41, is a freelance lecturer in Kuala Lumpur. She chose WOU because her husband insisted that “it is a good, quality university”. She first took a Post-Graduate Diploma in Education, graduating in 2012, and then immediately enrolled for Master of Education.

During my teaching practical for PGDE, I was sent to a private university in Kuala Lumpur. They called me back to teach part-time for a while. And later a coursemate, who happens to be the Head of Department of another college, also asked me to teach in his college.

I took Education to help out with poverty eradication in the community. I did not plan to lecture, but because of my practical training and job offers through friends and tutors, I ended up in teaching,” said the mother of two young kids.

Expansion of business

The 57-year-old managing director of a herbal manufacturing company decided to register for MBA in Construction Management when he entered into the construction industry.

Lee Hock Shim has been running his own herbal business in Ipoh for over 25 years. He then partnered with others in the last few years to undertake construction projects.

As I needed knowledge on construction, I immediately enrolled when WOU started to offer this MBA through distance learning. I learnt a lot about how to carry out my construction projects and also how to run my herbal business.
Theory adds to work experience

The first graduate in Bachelor of Technology (Hons) in Construction Management from WOU, Lim Chee Leong, 46, has been in construction for some 20 years. He currently works as a mechanical and electrical manager in Kuala Lumpur.

I was able to pick up management skills, writing skills as well as technical knowledge on construction. I have lots of practical know-how but through this study I learned the theory behind it all. I found the Building Services course especially useful as my job involves carrying out mechanical and electrical inspections of buildings, checking on air-conditioning, passenger lift, escalator, electricity, fire-fighting, and sanitary services.

He plans to pursue his MBA in Construction Management and become a tutor so that he can share his experiences in construction with students.

Teacher colleagues motivate one another

They have been friends and colleagues at Taylor’s International School, Kuala Lumpur for more than 15 years. Teachers Mastura Mohd Yusoff, 47, and Zeti Akhtar Mohamad, 43, graduated together from Bachelor of Education (Hons) in Primary Education at WOU.

We took this programme to improve our English and knowledge and to develop our confidence. The courses really help us in conducting lessons for the primary school kids in our classrooms,” said Mastura.

They have discussed and plan to enrol together for Master of Education at WOU, perhaps in July.

Brighter outlook for a career in IT

A deep interest in IT drove 36-year-old Ninitha Balakrishnan to register for Bachelor of Technology (Hons) in Computer Systems and Networks some five years ago. She learned about WOU through the website and liked its flexible part-time study mode.

She has been a QA technician at Western Digital, Penang for close to nine years. “I have gained a lot of knowledge in networking. The courses related to programming and visual basic were extremely helpful.”

With this degree, I can look for vacancies in IT in my company or elsewhere, as I hope to become an IT officer.

Psychology for public service

After 33 years as a staff nurse at Johor Bahru Hospital, 60-year-old Chen Lee Lee retired five years ago. She soon enrolled in Bachelor of Arts (Hons) in Psychology “out of interest and to equip myself to help the public”.

With this degree, I plan to volunteer at a counselling centre that needs help. The programme not only equips you to help others but also assists in self-development. You learn how to be a better person, how to interact with others, and to become more sensitive in how you talk and what you say.

Chen researched a few universities before deciding on WOU “because I found that its lecturers are more qualified”.

Poised to become a manager

Tan Siew Mooi, 34, has been a team leader in planning and customer service at Multitest Electronic Systems (Penang) Sdn Bhd, a test handler system company in Bayan Lepas, for two-and-a-half years.

She graduated in Bachelor of Technology (Hons) in Electronics. “I gained a lot of knowledge on engineering software and engineering mathematics,” she said, acknowledging her husband’s support in caring for their 7-year-old son so as to give her more time to study.

She has already enrolled for her MBA in Manufacturing and Production Management at WOU.

I find that I do not have much management skills and this MBA will enable me to climb up the management ladder. I hope to eventually land a manager position.
Are MOOCs the new game changer in higher education?

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) have become one of the big game changers in online education and distance learning, with its own set of backers and critiques, said Dr Som Naidu of Monash University, Australia.

His talk on Emerging themes and big game changers in contemporary distance education was held at the main campus on 16 October 2014 under the auspices of the WOU Seminar Forum.

Dr Naidu offered some staggering figures on MOOCs, extracted from a January 2013 survey report based on 10 years of tracking online education in the United States. It showed that while the number of institutions with MOOC has doubled in 2012, only 2.6% of higher education institutions have a MOOC, 9.4% are planning a MOOC, while most remain undecided or have no plans for a MOOC.

He shared that many academic leaders remain unconvinced that MOOCs represent a sustainable method for offering online courses, with concerns that credentials awarded for completion of MOOCs creating confusion about higher education degrees. The academics however conceded that MOOCs do allow institutions to learn about online pedagogy and can be used to attract more students to their mainstream courses and programmes.

“No matter what we say about the current form of MOOCs, people agree it’s a game changer and that it’s strategic to get on board,” he added. He believed that as proponents of MOOCs become familiar with online education and distance learning, we can expect better versions of MOOCs to emerge and transform higher education.

Dr Naidu stressed that although MOOCs provide open access to learning and open scholarship, students will still need the guidance of teachers to locate and evaluate learning resources, to understand and apply these resources to real life challenges, and to learn how to study online.

Expert: Make training relevant to 21st century skills

The type of skills in demand by employers has changed in the 21st century, with the market looking for people with self-regulation, critical thinking and interacting capability amongst others.

This was revealed by Dr Jessica N Aguti, Education Specialist in Teacher Education from the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), Canada, during her talk on Training for the 21st Century held at the main campus on 22 September 2014.

Highlighting that higher education is about “liberating the potential in students,” she reasoned that any training must therefore promote interaction, debate, discussions, collaboration and critical thinking. She stressed, “What we need is quality education that is relevant to meeting individual, national and global needs.”

In elaborating on 21st century skills, she said, “The market wants people with self-regulation, not the kind you must follow up all the time, who don’t have self-control and who cannot drive themselves.”

The other in-demand skills mentioned by Dr Aguti were: curiosity and imagination; a willingness to learn, to grow and to explore; initiative, self-direction and entrepreneurialism; creativity; communication and collaboration; critical thinking and problem-solving; information, media and ICT literacy; productivity and accountability; and leadership and responsibility.

“As trainers for the 21st century, we have all these skills that we should bring into the training and make sure we have a balanced curriculum, as that’s what the market requires.”

She concluded her talk with a question: “So if we are educating for the global job market, what type of workers are we producing? Are we producing trainees/graduates who are neither here nor there, and then wonder why they don’t get jobs?”
PACE trains foreign academics

WOU is always keen to share its expertise in open distance learning (ODL) with other institutions. Through its Centre for Professional Development and Continuing Education (PACE), it recently conducted a pilot professional development training attachment for eight academics from The Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL).

The academics from four faculties in OUSL underwent 10 days of training at the WOU main campus from 10–21 November 2014. The training followed the signing of an agreement between OUSL and WOU on 7 October 2014.

The training covered topics such as programme planning, academic administration, course development and delivery, learner support services and assessment procedures. The participants from OUSL also learnt how to leverage on technology to fine-tune their delivery of ODL. Each participant was subsequently presented a Certificate of Completion by Vice Chancellor Prof Dato’ Dr Ho Sinn Chye.

Overall, the OUSL academics were happy with what they had learnt and suggested that similar attachments at WOU be extended to their colleagues from Registry, Examinations Department, Regional Education Centres, and Student Affairs.

According to Prof Mohandas Menon, Acting Director of PACE, one of the objectives of the training was to identify best practices of WOU that could be applicable at OUSL. He expects more batches from OUSL to undergo training at WOU. “The exposure they receive not only within the university, but culturally, in Penang, would be valuable. We will replicate our successful pilot model and customise accordingly.”

He stated that a few potential areas of collaboration have also been identified, particularly in relation to course development. “They can be course writers for some of our courses here. They have academics experienced and qualified in different subject areas. Or maybe we undertake collaborative research together.”

OUSL is an ODL institution established in 1980. It has about 34,000 registered students every year pursuing some 60 programmes and more than 250 courses. The university operates most of their courses offline and uses mainly print-based course materials.

Applying WOU best practices at OUSL

Q: What best practices do you find at WOU, and what can you adopt at The Open University of Sri Lanka?

Ranjan Gonsalkorale
Head, Department of Secondary & Tertiary Education, Faculty of Education

“First is the standardisation of programmes and courses at WOU. This makes the educational administration of the programmes much easier. We have huge differences between the programmes conducted by the various faculties, and sometimes for the programmes in the same academic department. One programme may have 10 courses, while another may have 5-6 courses. We have lots of different credits, and this causes a problem in the ranking of students, in examination matters, and even in course fees.

Another good practice is your semester system, where all courses start and end at a certain period. But in OUSL, there is student registration, examinations or academic activities for one programme or other, the whole year round.

I also like your learning management system (LMS), where all your courses are available online. The number of our students coming online is low as not all courses are on the LMS. Students can either come to the LMS or learn from the printed course materials. We face a problem of language as the LMS is in English, while our courses are offered in Tamil, Sinhala and English.”

Judy Pullenayegem
Senior Lecturer, Department of Language Studies, Faculty of Humanities & Social Sciences

“One outstanding feature is standardisation, which I would like to see adopted in our university for smoother running. Standardisation in course material development, the units, examination procedures, the way questions are set, the coordination taking place in the regional centres and the checklist you have to ensure you meet the required standards.

OUSL deals with thousands of students, and this may present some difficulties in adoption. However, the standardisation of programme and course units across the faculty is one best practice, and so is your liaising with regional centres and the monitoring of tutors and new students.

Lastly is your use of technology. We can cut cost at OUSL if we do not give out hard copies of course materials but instead provide more CD-ROMs.”
WOU ‘strikes’ gold at 28th AAOU Annual Conference

Karen Khor Ean Teng of SST.

Karen won gold in 2014 and silver in 2013.

WOU grabbed top prize at the 28th Annual Conference of the Asian Association of Open Universities (AAOU) hosted by The Open University of Hong Kong (OUHK) from 28-31 October 2014.

School of Science and Technology (SST) senior lecturer Karen Khor Ean Teng received the Young Innovator gold award for her paper on Virtual Collaborative Learning Using Wiki for Adult ODL Learners: The case of Wawasan Open University under the sub-theme of ‘Research and Innovative ODL Practices in Student Learning Support’.

Her research paper looked at the effectiveness of Moodle-Wikis for virtual collaborative learning, in which students’ perceptions and their performance were measured. “The research indicated that Wiki can be used as an additional learning tool to support adult ODL learners for effective learning,” stated Karen.

“This triumph not only recognises my work but it also enhances the image of the university. The international recognition enhances the university’s leadership positions in the global arena and reaffirms the quality of WOU’s ODL programmes,” she added.

Karen was part of a six-member delegation from WOU, led by Vice Chancellor Prof Dato’ Dr Ho Sinn Chye, to the conference in OUHK. The others were QA & External Relations Director Dr Andy Liew, and academics Dr Loo Choo Hong and Prakash Arumugam from the School of Business & Administration, and Dr Teoh Ping Chow and Vincent Chung Sheng Hung from SST.

More than 250 participants from some 15 countries across Asia attended the 2014 AAOU Annual Conference themed Advancing Open and Distance Learning: Research and Practices in OUHK. Among the countries represented were Vietnam, Pakistan, Japan, Hong Kong, Indonesia, China, Korea, Philippines, Thailand, Sri Lanka, India, Taiwan and Malaysia.

WOU explores joint programmes with President University

A five-member delegation from President University, Indonesia visited WOU on 17 November 2014 to explore collaboration in offering degree and MBA programmes via open distance learning (ODL) in Indonesia.

The delegation was led by Rector Dr Chandra Setiawan and included its Head of Academic Bureau and Learning Development, Suresh Kumar. The visitors had discussions with Pro-Chancellor Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon, WOU Sdn Bhd Chairman Dato’ Seri Stephen Yeap, Vice Chancellor Prof Dato’ Dr Ho Sinn Chye and other senior management staff.

The Indonesian delegation were briefed on WOU’s programmes, practices, procedures and processes, such as open entry, tutor recruitment, learning management system and online enrolment. They expressed particular interest in WOU’s MBA in Manufacturing & Production Management programme.

Dr Setiawan highlighted the advantages of being an English language medium university located in the fast-growing Jababeka Industrial Estate since it enables their students to do internship at the nearby companies which need more English speaking employees.

He stated that the Indonesian government will soon open up applications for other universities besides Universitas Terbuka to offer ODL programmes as well. He said this puts President University in prime position to cooperate with institutions like WOU to jointly run MBA programmes.

Dr Setiawan was also open to the proposal for President University to run a degree for WOU in the ODL mode in Indonesia.

President University, established in 2001, currently offers over 30 degree programmes via the face-to-face mode through its four Schools. The 144-credit degree programmes are completed over 10 semesters, with three semesters per year. The only private university in Indonesia offering all courses in English, it boasts of an estimated intake of 1,500 students every year from Indonesia and globally, namely China, Vietnam, and South Korea.
WOU did not forget the less fortunate during the Deepavali celebrations last year, with donations collected from staff members helping to provide school uniforms and shoes for kids at the Children’s Protection Society (CPS).

Dean of the School of Education, Languages and Communications, Prof Santhiram Raman, led a six-member delegation to visit the Shelter on 9 November 2014. Thirty-two children, 17 girls and 15 boys aged from 6 to 18 years, reside in the Shelter which is run by full-time and part-time staff and volunteers.

The total of RM4,045 raised from WOU’s in-house charity drive was used to purchase vouchers that can be redeemed at Kimnovak Sdn Bhd to provide each child with two sets of school uniforms and a pair of shoes. Prof Santhiram handed over the vouchers to the Head of the Shelter.

The WOU team also arranged a feast of home-made sandwiches, roast chicken, curry puffs, nyonya kuih, butter cake and snacks, and initiated a few games, bringing cheer to the children.

Over 100 staff of WOU came together as a family for the Annual Staff-cum-Christmas lunch gathering held at the main campus on 17 December 2014.

The occasion saw the presentation of five-year and six-year service awards to 25 University staff. Among the recipients were School of Foundation & Liberal Studies (SFLS) dean Dr S Nagarajan, Kuching Regional Centre (KCRC) director Jimmy Chai, and assistant HR manager Sharizal Inche Mohamed.

On hand to present the gifts and certificates for the service awards were WOU Sdn Bhd Chairman Dato’ Seri Stephen Yeap and Vice Chancellor Prof Dato’ Dr Ho Sinn Chye.

The much anticipated highlight of the gathering was the numerous lucky draw prizes up for grabs. For the first time, the draw was open to staff from the different WOU regional centres and regional support centres.

WOU Board of Governors member Tan Sri Dr Chin Fook Weng did the honour of picking the top winners of the lucky draw. The 1st prize, a Toshiba 32-inch TV, went to SFLS lecturer Ooh Seow Ling, while a Samsung 32-inch LED TV was won by Justin Martin (KCRC). The 3rd prize, a Samsung microwave oven, went to K Ranjini (SFLS).

Among those present were Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic-ODL) Prof Madhulika Kaushik and Chief Administrative Officer Yeong Sik Kheong.

The Children’s Protection Society at Scotland Road is a non-profit, non-governmental organisation catering to the needs of the neglected and/or abandoned children in Penang. It was officially launched in April 1992. It offers a supportive environment to nurture the children’s self-esteem and self-awareness. It has volunteers coming in to provide extra tuition to the children.

For details on CPS, you can refer to http://www.cpspg.org.my
Gaining understanding of business and public policy

Borne out of the zeal to enhance her teaching skills and to be better equipped in supervising her final year students in their projects, Cheah Phaik Hoon enrolled at WOU in January 2011 to pursue her Commonwealth Executive Master of Public Administration (CeMPA) degree.

She has been lecturing for some 15 years now, including the last five years as a lecturer at a private college in Penang. “I am very happy guiding students, as I feel that’s what I am good at. This Master will enable me to move up to a senior lecturer position,” said Cheah, 47.

She chose CeMPA because of its larger perspective in covering both aspects of business and public policy. “It helps you better understand the system of administration in Malaysia, and the importance of plans and policies. With CeMPA, you see the whole picture and not just from a business point of view. During a management review exercise in my college, I was able to use the knowledge gained to contribute towards the planning process.”

She said that WOU suited her as tutorials are only held on weekends and everything is online. “We have time to do our work and to study. Also, I heard from friends who graduated that the Master’s programme here is good, and the tutors are good.”

Cheah’s husband and daughter were on hand to see her graduate during the recent convocation ceremony and receive the Tun Dr Lim Chong Eu Memorial Prize for emerging as top graduate at the postgraduate-level.

Climbing the banking ladder

In spite of the long hours demanded by his job, Wong Liang Yeong, 39, still found time to excel and become the top graduate at the undergraduate-level. For his excellent academic performance, he received the Chancellor’s Gold Medal.

Wong was amongst the latest batch of graduates from WOU’s Bachelor of Business (Hons) in Banking & Finance (BBBF) programme. He is an Assistant Manager at Public Bank in Kuala Lumpur, and deals with the processing of loans. He has been with the bank for 19 years, having been promoted from senior bank officer a year ago.

“BBBF has helped me a lot in terms of executing my work more efficiently and effectively. I especially found the Banking and Financial Systems in Malaysia course useful as it gives us a better idea of the financial systems in Malaysia. We learn about banking regulations, how to generate money, as well as the role of Bank Negara Malaysia, the banks and the customers.”

He was introduced to WOU by his cousin, a CeMBA graduate. Finding out that WOU had the Master of Business (Hons) in Banking & Finance (BBBF) programme. He is an Assistant Manager at Public Bank in Kuala Lumpur, and deals with the processing of loans. He has been with the bank for 19 years, having been promoted from senior bank officer a year ago.

On the key to his academic success, Wong remarked: “You never procrastinate. You never wait until the last minute to revise your studies. You start to study once you receive the course materials and just go from there. My job involves long hours, so I study at home, often burning the midnight oil.”

For more details, visit wou.edu.my
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