

Study Opportunities and Grants for ALL

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Part-time students registering during Open Day.



Full-time students of WOU.

The grand vision of world-class education standards, as envisaged in Malaysia's national ideal of Wawasan 2020, includes the development of higher education that is accessible and affordable, even as it is ever-enhancing and evolving in quality.

In line with this very principle, Wawasan Open University (WOU) has put in place a substantial set of incentives to provide financial assistance to all who entrust the institution as their choice for higher study.

WOU's Chief Administrative Officer, Yeong Sik Kheong, who is spearheading these thoughtful initiatives, is optimistic and keen about the desired impact they will bring. As it is, the market is reacting very positively to the extensive rebates, grants and allowances that have been rolled out to motivate students in their academic journey.

Furthermore, the University has lowered the barrier of cost towards obtaining a good education by ensuring that those who desire to study do not miss the opportunity and are not hindered by high financial burdens. This is done through the philanthropic and not-for-profit practices adopted by the University.

WOU actively endeavours to keep higher education within reach of our knowledge-seeking society.

The University has introduced the Wawasan Education Foundation (WEF) Study Grant, the WOU Study Grant, the Return to Study Allowance (RTSA), and the third course rebates. These have directly and indirectly enabled those wanting to study to have the option of enhancing their professional qualifications and broadening their job prospects.

Despite all the rebates and other financial assistances extended to students, the University however is steadfast in maintaining its high quality standards.

This is clearly reflected in the Tier 5 or 'excellent' rating awarded to WOU by the Ministry of Education in the SETARA 2013 assessment (and previously in 2011) of quality of undergraduate teaching and learning.

cont. page 2



Mr Yeong (left) outlines the initiatives to his Marcom team.

Malaysians are likely to face a challenging period ahead this year in the wake of changes that affect the business of selling and buying following the imposition of the Goods and Services Tax (GST).

The University has been tracking this development closely, studied the prescribed GST requirements and tax-exempt list to ensure full compliance, and promptly instituted appropriate steps to see that the provision of higher education at WOU remains as affordable as possible. The University remains rooted to its core principle of widening educational access to all knowledge-seeking Malaysians, including marginalised groups in the remote areas.

Our Chief Administrative Officer cum Registrar, Mr Yeong Sik Kheong, together with his able team of planners, deserves special mention for rolling out various financial assistance schemes to benefit our students. This is obviously the right time for prospective new students as well as those already in the university system to take full advantage of what WOU is currently offering to register for part-time or full-time study in WOU.

Students would also be pleased knowing that WOU has begun to collaborate with interested academic institutions to establish new Learning Centres at their premises in as many locations as possible. The aim is to bring WOU's quality academic programmes and learner support services closer to where students live and/or work. I hereby thank and welcome our new complementary academic partners (CAP) into the fold.

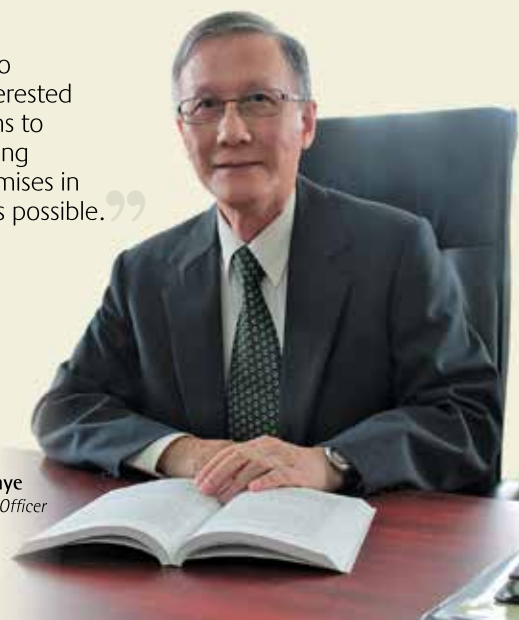
This issue of *WawasanLink* also highlights the in-house training workshops conducted to further enhance the skills of our academic staff to provide value-added learning support services to our students. Such practices form part of WOU's HRD culture.

On another front, the University recently hosted study visits by top academics from Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University, Thailand and the Bangladesh Open University to get to know more about WOU's open distance learning (ODL) programmes and student learning management system. WOU is indeed honoured to be receiving more and more such requests from foreign institutions of higher learning in recent years. We always took these opportunities to forge collaborations with the visiting institutions.

Next I wish to mention that our full-time on-campus students have recently organised themselves and formed for the first time their own autonomous On-Campus Student Council. Congratulations to the newly elected Student Council members. I wish them every success in running the Council.

Finally, I must commend and congratulate all the 48 full-time students from Year 2 and their academic advisors for their noble initiative and amazing achievement in raising a significant amount sum of money to help cover the cost of heart surgery for baby Nurul. Their heart-warming feat is hard to emulate.

“...WOU has begun to collaborate with interested academic institutions to establish new Learning Centres at their premises in as many locations as possible.”



Professor Dato' Dr Ho Sinn Chye
Vice Chancellor and Chief Executive Officer



Full-time students attending orientation at the main campus.

The University prides itself in delivering quality industry-driven programmes, which are recognised and approved by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency and the Ministry of Education.

To date, over 16,000 students have seized the learning opportunities provided by WOU, including the 1,294 graduates produced since the University's inaugural convocation in 2010.

Yeong, who is also the Registrar of the University, remarked that student enrolments have markedly improved as the working population finds WOU's programmes to be affordable and of high quality standards.

"The initiatives and strategies that we have put into action have achieved our motive of lightening the financial burden on the learners," he said in an interview. "We know only too well that the cost of living has spiralled with families having to fork out more money now for products and services."

"Truly, Wawasan Open University, as 'the people's university', continues to honour its motto of making education affordable, accessible and flexible, even in the face of economic challenges.

"We want all Malaysians from all walks of life to have the option of higher study, as we believe education is a great equaliser that serves to upgrade the lives of individuals, families, and the whole community," he remarked.

WOU is committed to remain an institution of higher learning of superior quality that steadfastly upholds its philosophy of widening access by wielding greater opportunities of study and greater financial support for its students.

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WOU widens access to grants



After having already disbursed some RM4.65 million in financial grants, WOU is expanding its aid schemes to assist more people to fulfil their educational and career goals.

The Wawasan Education Foundation (WEF) Study Grant is being made available to a wider pool of new students who register for any of the more than 20 undergraduate programmes offered via open distance learning (ODL). The University is now also providing the grant to new students who enrol for its full-time business degree programmes.

The grant subsidises the students' first semester tuition fees. It is meant to provide support and encouragement to students afflicted by the prevailing economic situation.

By the end of February 2015, a total of 6,604 students have benefited from the WEF Study Grant since WOU began operating in January 2007.

The disbursement pattern of the WEF Study Grant over the last few years clearly shows that WOU has been offering help to an increasing percentage of new students. In 2014, there were 925 recipients or 56.13% of new students had received the grant, compared to 979 recipients or 52.89% of new students in 2013, and 533 recipients or 32.9% of new students in 2012.

In addition, the University has started this year to offer another grant - the WOU Study Grant - worth RM400 to new students pursuing undergraduate programmes. This grant will benefit students from the middle-income group who may not qualify for the WEF Study Grant. The University has already given out a total of RM18,400 to 46 students who enrolled for January 2015 intake.

WOU Vice Chancellor Prof Dato' Dr Ho Sinn Chye commented: "Our purpose of offering grants is to help cover the cost of the students' first semester of studies, so that those who are uncertain of their academic or other abilities are not inhibited from trying for fear of the financial consequences of taking their academic first steps."

He said the amount of grants offered to reduce the students' financial burden "is a commendable feat by an institution like WOU".

Career people benefit from WOU Study Grants

Some 82% of new students who enrolled for part-time study in January have received Study Grants from WOU. A few of them shared about how the University has not only allowed them to pursue subjects beneficial to their careers, but also provided significant financial support to enable them to study.



- **Gurvinderprit Kaur Bichiter Singh**, 21, from Sungai Petani, Kedah, works as a teaching assistant in an education centre. She enrolled for Bachelor of Arts (Hons) in English Studies to enable her to apply what she learns to improve her teaching.

She was inspired by the passion and dedication of her school teachers and her aunts, who are also teachers. "WOU is definitely the right choice as it has allowed me to pursue my dreams of higher study without any problems," she said. "The tutors are amazing, with good qualifications and truly professionals. They give their best, and readily answer our queries."

"I am very thankful for the Study Grant as it has helped me financially in getting started on my studies. I see it as a blessing."

- **Siti Shaqira Ramli**, 25, has been in events management for four years, including the past year as Events Executive with Universal Event Productions Sdn Bhd, Shah Alam. She enrolled for Bachelor of Business (Hons) in Entrepreneurship & Small Business Management "to have a strong foundation in entrepreneurship before I start my own business".

She aspires to learn how to run a business. Such knowledge, together with her work experience, would support her ambition to open up an art studio. She likes WOU as it "offered me better fees, interesting courses, better time management for classes and assignment submission, and better financial help".

"The Study Grant has lightened my financial load. I am very happy to be able to continue with my studies without worrying too much about money. The grant is a motivation to finish my degree," she said.



- **Benjamin Loo Khoon Lim**, 28, from Bukit Mertajam, has been a NPI (New Product Introduction) Engineer at a factory in Bukit Minyak Industrial Park for more than two years. He enrolled for Bachelor of Technology (Hons) in Electronics because "the programme and courses are what I need to improve my knowledge and progress in my career".

"I can become better equipped to face the challenges in my field and in the manufacturing line. I can learn about the technical aspects involved in development engineering."

"Receiving the grant was a very precious moment in my life," he said. "It will enable me to concentrate and focus on my studies. I am also encouraged to share and promote that WOU is the right choice for higher education with my family and friends."

New business programmes inspire dreams of future

The sense of pride within the family, the dreams of a great career and the feeling of relief were evident when the pioneering students of WOU's three new full-time business degree programmes began their studies recently.

The students were among the first batch to undertake Banking & Finance, Sales & Marketing, and Logistics & Supply Chain Management – which are now offered in addition to the existing management and accounting programmes – for the February 2015 semester.



Tan Siew Gim.

- **Tan Siew Gim**, 21, from Ayer Itam, is among the pioneer students for the new full-time Bachelor of Business (Hons) in Banking & Finance (BBBF) programme. She completed her STPM at Methodist Boys School. Her father is an electrician while her mother works in administration at a multinational electronics company.

"The fees are quite affordable. I did not want to burden my parents in having to pay so much for my studies," said Tan, who has an older sister. She discovered that WOU offers full-time study upon seeing some flyers just as she was searching for a suitable college to attend.

Tan's dream is to work in the banking sector. "I really like the pace of work, the customers and the banking environment. I also enjoy doing paperwork and accounting. I want to eventually become a bank officer."

- **Ravinraj Balu**, 22, from Sungai Nibong, is pursuing the inaugural full-time Bachelor of Business (Hons) in Logistics and Supply Chain Management programme. After his STPM at SMK St Xavier's Institution, he worked for more than a year as production operator at a semiconductor plant in Bayan Lepas.

"I became interested in logistics when I observed the logistics aspects there. Moreover, my father is in that same line," said Ravinraj, who is the elder of two children. His father is a senior executive in DHL Express while his mother is a nurse at the Penang Adventist Hospital.

"I had heard that WOU is a good university, and its fees are not as expensive as other private universities. I feel that WOU can help me achieve my ambition," he said. "Once I finish my degree, I want to apply to become an Immigration or Customs officer as it's related to logistics. Or I may go into the private sector like my father."



Ravinraj Balu.

- **Lim Li Peng**, from Ayer Itam, also enrolled in the BBBF programme. She is hopeful that the degree will open up many job options in banking. She obtained 3As in her UEC at Penang Chinese Girls' Private High School.

Her father, a businessman who supplies entertainment equipment, and her mother who is a homemaker are elated at her accomplishment. Lim, who has two siblings, is the first in the family to enter university. She was also confident of getting a 20% rebate on tuition fees because of her UEC results.

"It was my dad's dream for me to go to university, but I wanted to stay in Penang," she said. "My friend, who is pursuing his full-time management degree here, recommended WOU to me. He said the students mix well together like a close-knit family."



Lim Li Peng.

WOU's attractive financial incentives for full-time students

The University rewards excellent academic performance shown in a student's entry qualifications for full-time study at WOU with a **Bursary Award**, as follows:

- **100% tuition fee rebate for 4As in STPM/10As in UEC;**
- **80% rebate for 3As in STPM/8–9As in UEC;**
- **40% rebate for 2As in STPM/5–7As in UEC;**
- **20% rebate for 1A in STPM/3–4As in UEC.**

WOU also offers 10% tuition fee rebate (20% for students from WOU's Adopted Schools) plus RM100 a month or total RM3,000 as living allowance to all full-time students during their three years of study.

First-ever student council a milestone for WOU

WOU achieved a significant milestone with the setting up of a student body and the successful election of its committee members to represent the interests of full-time students of the University. The new 'WOU On-Campus Student Council' marks a new phase of maturity in the University's history.

The inaugural election was held at the main campus in Penang on 5 March 2015. The advisor to the student council, Kevin Tan Pooi Soo, who is a lecturer from the School of Science & Technology, encouraged the students to participate in activities, whether organised by WOU or by the Council, to enhance their learning process and towards becoming more well-balanced, knowledgeable individuals.

The newly-formed Student Council is made up of 10 members from the five semesters, as follows:

President:	Mr Robin Cheah Kai Yang
Vice President:	Mr Forbes Foo Guang Xen
Secretary:	Ms Evelyn Lim
Assistant Secretary:	Mr Elvis Mooi Kah Hoe
Treasurer:	Mr Lee Kah Wei
Assistant Treasurer:	Ms Leo Lay Pheng
Committee members:	Mr Yeoh Lee Yuen
	Mr Chan Yaou Hooi
	Ms Melody Lim Chii Wen
	Ms Phoon Loo Yeng

The President, Robin Cheah, is currently in the third semester of his accounting degree programme and Vice President Forbes Foo is in the second semester of his management programme.

Also present at the elections were School of Foundation & Liberal Studies (SFLS) Deputy Dean/Senior Lecturer Jasmine Emmanuel, who is also advisor to the Council, and Dr Chuah Poh Lean, the full-time programme coordinator.



Return to Study Allowance (RTSA)
Up to **RM400***



WOU Study Grant
Up to **RM600***

**Terms and conditions apply*

Rewards and rebates for new ODL students

Committed to help Malaysians gain a valuable 'second chance' at tertiary education, WOU has prepared an array of financial assistance schemes for students. These include attractive rewards and rebates for adult learners who choose to enrol for part-time study via open distance learning (ODL) in July.

New students registering in at least two courses are guaranteed to receive the **Return to Study Allowance (RTSA)** worth RM300 for undergraduate study and RM400 for postgraduate study.

Undergraduate as well as postgraduate students, new or returning, who enrol for three or more courses are also offered course rebates. Additionally, new undergraduates can also apply for WOU's **Study Grant** worth up to RM600.

Furthermore, the University is introducing the **Bursary Award** for new students below 21 years of age with excellent STPM/UEC examinations, who enrol in part-time study from July at WOU. Those who obtain 4As in STPM/10As in UEC will receive full tuition fee waiver, and others can get 20% to 80% rebates according to the number of As achieved.

New students in the July 2015 intake are also eligible for other substantial rewards, as follows.

- The **Exclusive Alumni Rebate** is applicable to all new undergraduate and postgraduate alumni students who enrol for a minimum of two courses. They will get 50% rebate on tuition fees for the July semester. This promotion is offered together with the 3rd course rebate.
- The **NGO Rebate** is conceived as a move to encourage non-governmental organisations to send their members and staff to pursue higher studies and can be enjoyed in addition to all the other WOU promotions.
- The **Friends & Family Programme** is for students - new and current - to earn further rebates on tuition fees for every friend and family they refer to WOU.

All these are available even as recognised tertiary qualifications can still be pursued at WOU at comparatively lower costs than at other private universities.

New mechatronics degree at WOU

A new part-time study programme, the Bachelor of Technology (Hons) in Mechatronics (BTME), is being introduced at the main campus in Penang for the upcoming semester that starts this July.

The field of mechatronics – the word is put together from 'mechanical' and 'electronics' – has expanded significantly since it was envisaged in 1971. It has grown from covering pure technical systems to encompassing more complex mechanical engineering combined with electrical, computer and industrial engineering.

In recent times it has inevitably expanded to cover intelligent integrated machines, systems and processes. Offered through the School of Science & Technology (SST), BTME is a 124-credit hours programme. It would take about five years for completion.

Associate Prof Dr Wendy Bong Chin Wei, Dean of SST, explained that students can apply their acquired knowledge and technical competency in mechatronics to engineering design, processes, systems or methodologies. "What they learn about mechanical, electronics and software integration will empower them to design systematic solutions for broadly-defined mechatronic engineering technology problems," she said.

Graduates of BTME can find employment in manufacturing, production, electronics, automation, mechanical technology, design, development, research, and related fields.

BTME shares several courses with WOU's Bachelor of Technology (Hons) in Electronics programme, except for six. Of these exclusive courses, three require use of mechatronics facilities such as machine shop, pneumatic kits, robotics arm and vision systems to cover the courses' mechanical hardware provisions.

Among the major courses in BTME are: *Electrical Circuits & Power; Digital and Analog Electronics; Engineering Mechanics; Process Control & Instrumentation; Automation & Robotics; Intelligent Systems for Decision Support; and Computer Aided Design & Manufacturing.*

Certificate or diploma holders, technicians, manufacturing specialists and technical staff with relevant working experience in mechanical and electronic related areas can enrol in this programme to upgrade their know-how and professional qualifications.



Dotting the nation with Learning Centres

In an effort to open up more opportunities for adults to study while extending its own market reach, WOU is establishing Learning Centres across the country through collaboration with like-minded institutions of higher learning.

It is the University's hope to dot Malaysia with its presence through such centres. WOU's Director of Regional Operations & Marcom, K H Chong, highlighted this in explaining the role of the Learning Centres (LCs) in complementing WOU's eight Regional Centres and Regional Support Centres. "The Learning Centres will assist WOU to service areas where the University currently has no physical presence or effective representation," he said.

Three Learning Centres have already been earmarked for the northern region, with agreements either signed or in the process of being finalised, to support the Penang Regional Centre (PGRC). They are the Penang Skills Development Centre (PSDC) in Bayan Lepas, Stradford International College (SIC) in Prai and Institut Profesional (IP) in Alor Setar.

"The PSDC will act as WOU's Learning Centre for students on the island taking up Bachelor of Technology (Hons) in Mechatronics," Chong said. "This is a mutually beneficial partnership for both institutions."

SIC is entrusted to support WOU students from the industrial areas on mainland Penang and the northern region covering Seberang Prai, Bukit Minyak, Sungai Petani and Kulim. Meanwhile, areas further north like Alor Setar and Kangar are suitably covered by Institut Profesional.

As for the central region of peninsular Malaysia, two institutions have expressed interest to act as Learning Centres and complement the Kuala Lumpur Regional Centre. They are Malacca International College of Science & Technology (MiCost) and East West College in Seremban.

WOU gives priority to learner support



WOU academic staffs were recently presented with expert ideas on making learner support more effective in open distance learning (ODL).

The in-house workshop by freelance education consultant Dr Kuldeep Kaur highlighted approaches and strategies to help ODL towards the retention, graduation and success of learners.

Dr Kuldeep reminded the academics who attended the event at the main campus on 6 February 2015 on the special needs of online distance learners. These include good access to information to help them relate to the institution and understand its system; contact with tutors to help maintain motivation and overcome learning problems; a sense of institutional identity to help them feel that they are part of a body of learners; and advice on good study techniques.

She stressed on the role of academics, course coordinators and Regional Centres to identify problems affecting learning among adults, and to address them through learner support. Common problems faced include busyness, family pressure, lack of confidence, lack of motivation, no undisturbed study time, and a lack of own study space.

Dr Kuldeep also highlighted three factors critical to the successful retention and graduation of learners. The first is that one or more individuals must drive the process of ensuring the provision of quality learner support. "If you are a course coordinator, you have to drive it for your course. If you are a Regional Centre director, you have to drive it for that centre," she said.

"Secondly, a process based on detailed data must be developed, measured and monitored closely for at least five years in order for quality to thrive," she added. "We want evidence-based research, and a reasonable judgement based on the data." The third is having a team of individuals from across the university who are committed to student success and meet often to assess student progress, she added.

She also touched on specific strategies, such as having academic and advising services, expanded tutoring services (online), a structured programme to work with undecided students, providing coaching for groups of students who are at high risk for non-retention, expanded opportunities for high-achieving students and economically disadvantaged students, and early intervention.

DVC Academic on how WOU learner support benefits students

The diversity of learner support inevitably lends various strengths and weaknesses in related processes and systems. Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic-ODL) Prof Madhulika Kaushik, a veteran in the field of open distance learning (ODL), shares her thoughts on the current status of learner support at the University.

Q: How do you rate the learner support provided by WOU?

M: Based on my experience with other ODL universities, I can safely rate the learner support at WOU as one of its strong points. There are several modes of support planned to cater for variation in learner preferences, from face-to-face to telephonic and online support, from pre and post-admission counselling to in-depth academic and tutorial support to troubleshooting administrative processes.

We however need to achieve a greater standardisation across all service providing points to ensure that variations in individual engagement with learners do not leave room for dissatisfaction. In terms of service quality measures we must aspire for high reliability which translates into a scenario that every single person dealing with the learners "does the right thing, the first time and every time he/she serves".

Q: What do you see as some of the strengths/uniqueness and weaknesses of the learner support system of WOU?

M: The strengths include:

- Availability of a wide array of support measures to ensure the learner is well provided for.
- Clearly defined responsibilities and accountability for communication and support at the various service points – Registry, Schools, Regional Centres, tutors and CCs.
- Possibility of feedback and monitoring through learning management system (LMS), tutorial observation, tutor and student dialogue.

- SOPs to ensure timely redress of learner queries – on LMS and through mails.

Among the weaknesses are: variations at times in the standard of learner support provided between courses, tutors or CCs; tutor training component over time has become a bit lax; and complaint redress can sometimes take time.

Q: How can we enhance learner support at WOU to meet the needs of the learners?

M: In-depth analysis of all learner complaints, feedback from tutorial visits and tutor/student dialogue can provide clear pointers to areas requiring improvement. One of the areas that have been underlined is the required strengthening of both generic and course wise tutor training, and the University is taking concrete steps towards that.

While SOPs are in place for most support-related indicators, a critical analysis to study gaps in following these must be carried out annually. There have been instances of lapses in tutor qualifications, adherence to timetables, glitches in technology leading to disruption of sessions, lack of adequate communication between the CC and tutors and between tutors and students which indicate situations where laid down procedures were not followed.



Penang Science Café boost for SST projects

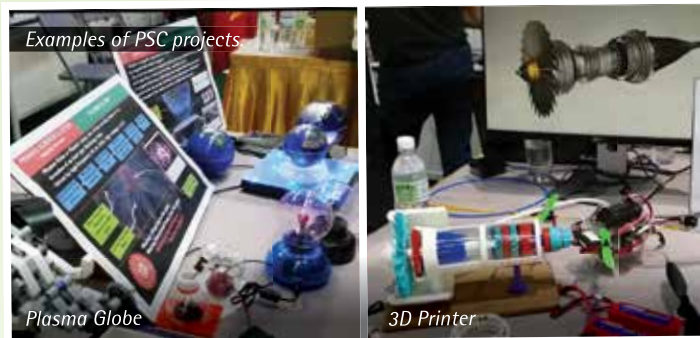
The Penang Science Café will soon be an inspirational setting for many final-year project works from WOU's School of Science & Technology (SST) to be carried out.

This comes on the heels of an agreement between WOU and the Penang Science Cluster (PSC), which operates the science centres known as Penang Science Café. The move would help students conducting the projects by opening up opportunities for sponsorship and recognition.

The collaboration was cemented on 1 December 2014 with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) by Prof Dato' Dr Ho Sinn Chye, the Vice Chancellor of WOU, and Mr Ooi Peng Ee, the Chief Executive Officer of PSC.

The MoU enables students pursuing the Bachelor of Technology (Hons) in Electronics (BTel) programme under SST to undertake projects at the centres. PSC has a centre in Bayan Lepas while another is expected to open soon at Wisma Yeap Chor Ee in China Street Ghaut. The "science café" concept was envisaged as a means to promote hands-on science activities to help make the field appealing to the public, especially youngsters.

Associate Prof Dr Wendy Bong Chin Wei, the Dean of SST, said: "The final year BTel students who choose to conduct their final year project works at the PSC will be allowed to use the facilities provided by the PSC. They may conduct their work under the supervision of their project supervisors, who are also tutors appointed by WOU, or work on their own without their supervisors present."



"PSC will offer sponsorship of up to RM1,000 per student if it deems the WOU students' projects have industry value. PSC may also liaise with industry to provide extra coaching by engineers or related professionals, as needed, to the selected students," she added.

The MoU between the parties also enables WOU students and their respective supervisors (tutors) to use the PSC facilities for other purposes, such as to conduct oral presentations and to discuss the progress of the project work.

Dr Wendy believes this is a win-win situation for WOU and PSC since the innovative final year project works by the students could prove valuable to the industry, while the students themselves have access to financial sponsorship. Another benefit, she stated, is that "WOU students can interact freely with students from other institutions who are also using the PSC facilities, for the purpose of exchanging knowledge through intellectual discussions".

The PSC, a non-profit organisation set up in 2009 through an industry-led initiative and with the support of the State Government, aims to promote interest in science and technology and create a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship in order to fulfil the industrial demand for science, engineering and technology graduates.

Bangladesh Open University eyes exchanges with WOU

Aspiring to keep abreast with advances in ODL, especially the delivery of education through IT, the Bangladesh Open University (BOU) has sought to collaborate with WOU in academic exchanges and sharing of resources. BOU, established in 1992, has a total student population of about 600,000.

A three-member delegation consisting of Vice Chancellor Prof Dr M A Mannan along with Prof Mostafa Azad Kamal and Associate Prof Zahir Raihan from BOU's School of Business visited WOU on March 30. The delegation was briefed on WOU and its technology-mediated learning support services such as the student portal, learning management system (LMS), online assignment submission, digital library and the OER (Open Educational Resources) Repository.

Vice Chancellor Prof Dato' Dr Ho Sinn Chye was on hand to elaborate on WOU's academic support and its course development process. The visitors inquired about various issues, including WOU's OER policy, use of Moodle for LMS, course delivery, and on its tutors and course coordinators.

Prof Mannan suggested the possibility of WOU providing training to selected BOU staff in setting up an OER Repository using the WEKO open source software. He also expressed an interest in sending the BOU's

video production team here to WOU to shoot tutorials for uploading onto LMS, as free reference for students of both universities. "We can develop, for example, fifteen videos of 20 to 25 minutes lengths for a course," he said. "We will do the post-production edits at our cost as BOU is strong in in-house video production.

"We have only a few teachers who can give lectures in front of the camera for CeMBA (Commonwealth Executive Master of Business Administration). I know you have some good teachers. You can use our production resources without cost. We should help each other," Prof Mannan added.

He said that BOU has more than 500 courses and wants to develop video lectures for every one of them. He hoped to have a Memorandum of Understanding between both universities to cement their collaboration.

"Since WOU is good in using IT and online education, BOU has many things to learn from it," Prof Mannan remarked. "We can explore how we can mutually benefit each other, because we want to provide education globally but we want to act locally. We can share our resources, free of costs, in many areas. And we can also exchange manpower from the different fields."



Prof Mannan (in white shirt) chats with WOU management.

Beijing school students gain insights from WOU visit

About a dozen school students from China recently joined some Penang Chinese Girls' Private High School pupils in gaining valuable insights on education, culture and community during a visit to the WOU main campus recently.

The highlight of the tour on 8 February 2015 was a dialogue with WOU Pro-Chancellor Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon, who is also former Penang chief minister and Malaysian cabinet minister.

The students from Beijing Sanfan Middle School and their colleagues from Penang were accompanied by their teachers and representatives from the China Soong Ching Ling Foundation (CSCLF). Also present were the local coordinator of the visit and representative from the Sun Yat Sen Museum in Penang, Goh Mai Loon, and WOU Penang Regional Centre Senior Marketing & Admissions Executive Teoh Soo Ling.

The students were participating in the annual student exchange programme started in 2011 between the Sun Yat Sen Museum and CSCLF to promote friendly relations between Malaysia and China.

The visit to Malaysia was arranged through the CSCLF, set up by then Chinese Premiere Deng Xiao Ping in 1982 to commemorate Soong, the wife of revolutionary leader Sun Yat Sen, and to undertake charitable, educational activities.

Dr Koh, who briefed the visitors on WOU and the various programmes offered, was quizzed about his experiences as a former state and national leader. He was also asked about the differences between

educations in traditional Asian society and the Western model, and on his views on the relationship between Malaysia and China.

He asserted the importance of culture to society, recalling his own first trip to China in 1988 as political secretary to the then chief minister, Tun Dr Lim Chong Eu. He also spoke about his three subsequent working visits to China as chief minister and the vast changes and improvements he has observed in China.

Dr Koh reminded the youngsters "to be open-minded, and to learn as much as you can, and to be aware of the presence and the role of other cultures and communities, and to constantly take opportunities to interact and to promote mutual understanding".



The delegation from China are dressed in cheongsam.

Thailand's STOU plans to offer courses in English

Thailand's Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University (STOU) hopes to use WOU's feedback on course development to help improve certain programmes that it plans to offer in English.

In particular, the university is looking to improve the course design of its Master's programmes and Bachelor in Business Administration programme before these are offered in English.

For the purpose, a 27-member delegation from STOU visited WOU on 10 March 2015 to look into course development. The delegation comprised academics from STOU's School of Management Science, representing the departments of Public Administration, Business Administration, Construction Management, Accountancy & Finance and Hotel & Tourism.

Founded in 1979, STOU is the first university in Southeast Asia to use the distance learning system. The coordinator of the visit, Dr Anothai Ngamvichaikit, said STOU now wants to upgrade its academic offerings for the Asian region. "We would like to know the best practices, and so we came here to discuss in detail about the academic programmes in WOU in order to develop and improve the quality of our courses," she said.

"Our undergraduate and postgraduate programmes are now all in Thai. We plan to start by offering our Master's degree programmes, in both Business Administration and Public Administration, in English," Dr Ngamvichaikit added.

The delegation met WOU Vice Chancellor Prof Dato' Dr Ho Sinn Chye and other senior management at the main campus in Penang. Prof Ho briefed the visitors on the University's academic programmes,

course development, and the learning support provided to students. Dean of STOU's School of Management Science, Assistant Prof Dr Suree Khemthong, described the School which has 57 academic staff, including 34 associate professors.

The School presently offers Bachelor of Business Administration, Bachelor of Public Administration, Bachelor of Accountancy, and Bachelor of Technology (Construction Management) and three Master's programmes - Master of Business Administration, MBA in Marketing, and Master of Public Administration (MPA).

STOU plans to collaborate with universities like WOU to offer postgraduate programmes in English. "Future plans include International MBA (IMBA) programmes such as IMBA in Marketing; International MPA Programmes; and International short courses," said Dr Khemthong.



Dr Khemthong shares about her faculty.

WOU launches two online MOOCs

A seminar on the launch of two Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) by WOU heard about the advantages to be reaped from such programmes while also receiving cautions on the pitfalls that those undertaking them should avoid.

Held at the main campus on 29 January 2015, the event focused on the entirely online courses offered from February to May through the University's Centre for Professional Development & Continuing Education (PACE).

The courses are 'Action Research' developed in-house with the support of Commonwealth of Learning (COL), and 'OER in e-Learning' developed jointly with international experts and supported by a grant from the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA).

WOU Board of Governors Chairman Tan Sri Emeritus Prof Gajaraj Dhanarajan highlighted benefits of the MOOCs like free accessibility, presentations by world-class experts, and the simultaneous reach to tens of thousands of students. He however called for caution in the face of all the hype of MOOCs, suggesting a checklist of claims before deciding.

He said the drawbacks included "uncertainties around quality of assessment and credentialing", the requirement for highly developed ICT infrastructure, the high costs by present providers for enrolment leading to certification, and the proprietary platforms that add to costs.

Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic-OCL) and Acting Director of PACE, Prof Mohandas Menon, in his presentation titled *WOU on the MOOC Way?*, said WOU's online courses meet certain criteria of MOOCs,

like their open content, the free participation for guests, affordability, the local cohorts, and the badges or credentials. He said WOU aims to identify the most appropriate platform to offer courses for large numbers, with plans to institute online self-registration, online fee payment, and training of more WOU staff in online tutoring and facilitation.

School of Education, Languages and Communications (SELC) senior lecturer Associate Prof Dr Goh Lay Huah spoke about the Action Research course offered by SELC to help educators, teachers and teacher trainees in writing an action research proposal. Prof Phalachandra Bhandigadi, a Professor of Education in School of Education, Languages and Communications, shared on the 'OER in e-Learning' course.



Prof Dhanarajan explains the pros and cons of MOOCs.

WOU integrating OER in course development

WOU has joined hands with the University of Cape Town and the International Development Research Centre (Canada) to develop a course on Research Methodology by integrating Open Educational Resources (OER).

The undertaking, part of a larger project called *Research on OER for Development* (ROER4D), will investigate the processes and different ways involved in reusing and integrating OER multimedia resources in course development.

Two workshops to develop the modules for the course have been held. The first was in Kochi, India from November 8 to 12 last year, and the second at the WOU main campus from January 21 to 25 this year. The workshops looked at integrating OERs in the development of course modules and documenting the module writers' experiences.

Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic-OCL) Prof Mohandas Menon and Prof Phalachandra Bhandigadi from the School of Education, Languages & Communications were in the core research project team that worked with the module writers in India and in WOU. The writers from India were Prof Rama Mathew, Prof Sudersan Panigrahi, Prof Vasant Bhat, Dr Sitansu Jena and Dr Vineetha Thomas.

At the second workshop in WOU, Prof Menon and Prof Phalachandra, along with School of Foundation & Liberal Studies Deputy Dean/Senior Lecturer Jasmine Emmanuel, teamed up with module writers Associate Prof Dr Lim Peck Choo from Universiti Teknologi MARA, Shah Alam and Dr Kuldip Kaur, a freelance consultant.

The workshops were supported by a grant from IDRC for the ROER4D sub-project titled *A Study on the Processes of OER Integration for Course Development*.

A total of five modules were developed. They were on 'Introduction to Educational Research', 'Methods and Procedures of Educational Research', 'Data Sources and Collection', 'Analysis and interpretation of Quantitative Data' and 'Analysis and Interpretation of Qualitative Data'.



(from left to right) Prof Menon, Dr Lim, Linda Tang, Jasmine, Dr Kuldip and Prof Phalachandra.



Selflessness displayed at blood and organ donation drive

WOU's Staff Recreational Club (SRC) recently organised a blood and organ donation campaign with a group of students, to help stock up the government's blood bank at Seberang Jaya Hospital.

The event held at the main campus on 21 March 2015 saw over 50 people turning up to donate their blood. The majority were WOU students. The participating staff included SRC president Dr Andy Liew and Assistant Finance Manager Kheang Bee Nar.

The day saw a sole organ donor – 28-year-old Tan Zhi Zian – who pledged all her organs. The Tanjung Bungah lass has been working as an education counsellor with an agency for four years now, and is pursuing part-time study in Commonwealth Executive MBA at WOU.



Student donors doing their part.

"I read in the newspapers of people donating their organs when they pass away," she said. "I feel that after I die, my body will be burnt to ashes. So by donating, some parts of me will be still alive, still living. I pledged my organs as there are many people who may benefit from the organs I have donated and lead a much more quality life."

Student Mohd Roezlan Mohd Rozman, who is a biomedical officer at Island Hospital, said he has been a donor since his "polytechnic days". "This is my 13th time. I have been donating since I was 18," said the 33-year-old who enrolled for part-time study in Bachelor of Technology (Hons) in Electronics. "I try to do it two or three times a year. It's what I can do in my life for others. Since I can't help much with money, this is my way of helping other people."

Dhemapriya Nagarajan, a bank clerk for the last seven years, said: "I usually donate whenever such a campaign is organised by my office as this is one way of serving the community." This was the fifth time the 25-year-old from Bukit Mertajam, who is studying part-time for a Bachelor of Business (Hons) in Banking & Finance degree, is donating.

Chew Chin Quan, a full-time student in Bachelor of Business (Hons) in Management, took the opportunity to donate for the second time. "The first was last year at a friend's request. I want to continue this regularly as it's a good effort," said the 22-year-old.

The event served to fulfil the University's corporate social responsibility. Dr Andy expressed his appreciation to "everyone who took time out of their usual routine to participate in this meritorious deed". "I also hope more people will adopt the same spirit as Tan and donate their organs to offer others a second chance at life," he added.

WOU comes to aid of baby with heart defect

When one-and-a-half-month-old Nurul Husna Farhana Mohd Hassani was found to have a congenital heart defect soon after birth, her low-income parents were at a loss as they could not afford the necessary surgery to alleviate the life-threatening problem.

Coming to know about the matter, WOU full-time students from Year 2 recently spearheaded a vigorous fund-raising campaign for Nurul Husna, who suffered from the condition called Truncus Arteriosus Type 1. They raised a total of RM21,425 in the community project which was undertaken as a co-curricular activity.

The surgery undertaken at Gleneagles Hospital Penang on 27 March cost around RM60,000. The operation could only be done at the private hospital as there was no cardiothoracic surgeon in the General Hospital with the required expertise.

Spurred by the zeal to help, the students had held food and book fairs on March 15 and 21 at the main campus in Penang, as well as a charity dinner on March 29 at a hotel in George Town. WOU staff from the other regional centres also participated by setting up donation boxes and receiving contributions for the baby.

Some RM3,452 were raised from the fairs, RM4,850 from the charity dinner, and RM13,123 from donations by the staff and students, as well as their friends and families.

"The students worked hard at this project, which eventually became a whole University effort to help the baby," said School of Foundation & Liberal Studies Deputy Dean Jasmine Emmanuel, the supervising lecturer. "I applaud the spirit of empathy, compassion and community

service among the students as they pushed themselves, not just for grades but to bring about a happy outcome, health-wise, for the baby."



Baby Nurul carried by mum, Mazni Md Isa, as her father, Mohd Hassani Yaakob (yellow shirt), Prof Ho (in tie) and WOU students look on.



Students selling books to raise funds.

WOU Bursary Award offers lifeline to outstanding student

After Lau Sheue Wen passed her STPM examinations with flying colours, scoring four As, the lass from Sungai Petani, Kedah, was concerned about having to pursue her dream for quality tertiary education far away from home.

She was however gratified when an application to WOU led to her achievement being recognised with the WOU Bursary Award in the form of a 100% tuition fee rebate for full-time study at the University.

Lau, who did her STPM studies at SMK Khir Johari in Sungai Petani, is thankful for the financial support that relieves the burden on her family. "I am able to pursue my study dream and a career in business management," she said. She enrolled for the full-time Bachelor of Business (Hons) in Management programme at the Penang campus for the February 2015 intake.

She has a younger brother still in school in Sungai Petani where her father works as a carpenter while her mother is a full-time homemaker. With limited higher education options in her hometown, she decided on WOU

due to the substantial financial aid offered and the close proximity of Penang. Moreover she finds the scenic seafront campus to be "clean, the environment peaceful and comfortable".

"I browsed through the website to check on the programmes available at the University," she said. "I also consulted my relatives and friends about WOU. I received positive feedback from my parents as well."

Besides the 100% rebate, Lau was "happy and surprised" to discover that the University offers RM100 in monthly study allowances – or total RM3,000 – to all full-time students throughout their three years of study at WOU.

"During my search of higher education institutions in Penang and Kedah, I found that WOU is the only university that offers monthly study allowances," she said. "The allowance will help to pay part of my transportation expenses from Sungai Petani to the WOU campus."



Upholding goals no matter how busy

Though extremely busy with his profession and a new family, Julian Khoo Kok Siang still finds time to share his knowledge with students as a part-time tutor of WOU.

The 33-year-old, who has worked as a supply chain and strategic procurement professional with a multinational company in Penang for the last 10 years, is attached to WOU's Penang Regional Centre since July 2008.

He conducts tutorials for the *Microeconomics* course for business degree students, and for *Public Systems Management* and *Policy Analysis and Implementation* courses for the Commonwealth Executive Master of Public Administration (CeMPA) programme.

On his role as tutor, Julian, who himself graduated with a CeMPA degree from WOU in 2012, remarked: "There is nothing as rewarding as seeing my students years later with the perseverance to make their dreams come true."

His advice to students is to "always remember that education is a lifelong process that will in some ways enhance your life". He added, "When you start your journey in WOU, get into a schedule and keep it consistent to achieve your goal."

Married last year, Julian is now father to a 3-month-old baby. He admits to leading a hectic and busy life, particularly since he has to often travel outstation for work. "But no matter how busy our lives, I always believe that everything is possible if you have a strong determination and courage, because without courage you will not be able to set your personal goal and priority."

Julian credits his parents as the inspiration behind his every success. "I decided to become a part-time tutor as I have a very strong passion to teach and believe sharing my knowledge can empower everyone. My parents inspired me the most but unfortunately they passed away last year," he said.

When not working, Julian likes to "go for a short vacation to find some inner peace and tranquility to release my stress and unwind".

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