

## WOU Taking on New Challenges in 2016



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Wawasan Open University (WOU) has certainly come a long way as a private not-for-profit institution of higher learning since its establishment in 2006.

Having established a reputation for delivering quality academic programmes in the open and distance learning (ODL) mode, the University is now expanding its sphere of operations. It is working on marketing its accredited academic programmes and pedagogically well-developed courses as well as ODL learner support services to ODL institutions overseas through various smart partnership arrangements.

"WOU is looking beyond its national boundaries to reach the larger overseas market," said Vice Chancellor Prof Dato' Dr Ho Sinn Chye. "We have been receiving overseas requests for various forms of assistance from established as well as recently established academic institutions and are in fact already in discussion with several of them, exploring the best mode of collaboration cum business arrangement in each case, for example, through joint programme offerings and revenue sharing, licensing of programmes or courseware, and human resource capacity building."

WOU has also taken on a new role and responsibility with its appointment as a Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) assessment centre for Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) this year. APEL provides an 'alternative' entry method to those with no formal qualification to further their education to a higher level.

The process evaluates and validates informal learning by an individual based on working experience. It encourages

an individual to continuously enhance his knowledge which can lead to a respective certification of qualification, thus enabling the successful individuals to obtain better jobs.

"WOU has been at the forefront of APEL development with the MQA since it was introduced by the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) in 2006. WOU holds firm to the belief that the performance of an individual is undoubtedly the sum total of his knowledge and work experience," Prof Ho said.

Another timely development this year is the commencement of co-curricular activities or projects for part-time students, with emphasis on volunteerism and teamwork.

"Through these projects, the students learn the ins and outs of how to organise events, irrespective of whether they are sports tournaments, community outreaches or environmental clean-up campaigns. Such activities provide a good platform for the students to develop soft skills in leadership training, problem-solving, and communication.

"The experience so gained will place them in better stead to meet future workplace challenges," Prof Ho added.

WOU's presence and contributions to society and nation also continue to be felt and appreciated through its support for worthy causes. Among these is the *Relay for Life* Penang, a community-based effort which aims to improve cancer survival, decrease incidences of the ailment and improve quality of life for cancer patients and their caretakers.

## 2 Vice Chancellor's VOICE

As the year draws to a close, let us, as staff and students of WOU, move forward with renewed commitment to further grow the University together.

I am happy to share that the University is well on track, progressing steadily ahead, attaining significant academic milestones as well as meeting the year's financial targets as spelt out in the 10-year Master Plan. This has certainly been a collective effort of all stakeholders of the University. The road ahead however remains daunting in the ensuing year.

I want to record my appreciation to all staff for their dedication in delivering quality service, thus enhancing the image of the University. I wish to thank colleagues at our Regional Centres/Support Centres who have been working hard to serve the students and the varsity community at large.

I want to also express my heartfelt gratitude to the custodians and top management of WOU, i.e. the Chairmen and members of the Board of Directors of Wawasan Education Foundation, WOU Sdn Bhd and Board of Governors of the University for their staunch support and guidance, in shaping the University into what it is today - a trusted provider of quality tertiary education.

WOU has never forgotten its responsibility to society. Through the offer of fee rebates, study grants and merit scholarships, many of our students have benefited over the years. The University also hosted and participated as the academic partner for the upper secondary/college elocution contest, "Youth Speaks for the Nation", which is a platform for leadership development in Malaysian youths.

On the academic front, WOU's appointment as one of the main Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) assessment centres for the Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) reflects well of the trust this government body has placed on WOU.

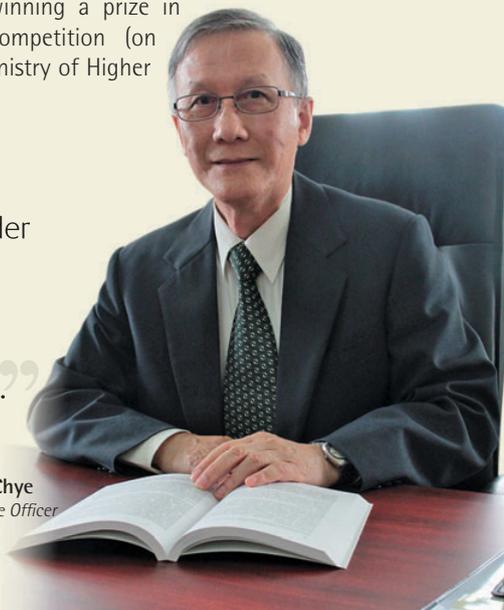
Academic staff participation in the WOU Seminar Series has also gathered momentum in these past months. This is a good platform for our researchers to present their findings and hone their presentation skills.

WOU continues to keep abreast with job market trends. In this regard, the University is introducing the Diploma in Early Childhood Education and increasing its cache of postgraduate programmes with its offering of mainly research based PhD and MPhil programmes in Social Sciences next year.

WOU's reputation as a trusted provider of quality tertiary education is increasingly recognised in Asia. Indeed the University has reached a crossroad where it is now planning to offer its fully accredited academic programmes or well-developed course materials to interested academic institutions overseas.

Last but not least, I wish to congratulate Ms Chua Saw Nee on her promotion to Group Finance Director and our ODL student Michelle Christine Arul for her winning a prize in the national writing competition (on GST) organised by the Ministry of Higher Education.

“WOU's reputation as a trusted provider of quality tertiary education is increasingly recognised in Asia.”



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

## WOU going offshore with programme offerings

WOU is expanding the delivery of its programmes and use of its course materials to learners overseas through collaborations with trusted providers of open distance learning (ODL) in several countries.

The strategic linkages with the overseas academic partners follow a series of visits, meetings and other exchanges to forge agreements and initiate implementation.

WOU signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with International Centre for Academics (ICA), Kathmandu on 20 April 2015 for ICA College of Distance Education and Online Studies to deliver WOU's undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in Nepal through ODL. They will start with two programmes - Bachelor of Business (Hons) in Business Information Systems and Bachelor of Technology (Hons) in Computer Systems and Networks.

The University also inked an agreement with Symbiosis Open Education Society, Pune to offer its undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in India through ODL. The MoU was signed on 16 March 2015 by Principal Director of SOES, Dr Swati Mujumdar, and Vice Chancellor of WOU, Prof Dato' Dr Ho Sinn Chye.

Yet another tie-up is with National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) for programme licensing and collaboration in research degree programmes. NOUN has identified three WOU programmes for adaptation. They are the Bachelor of Business (Hons) in Construction Management, Bachelor of Management (Hons) with Psychology, and MBA in Manufacturing & Production Management.

Other collaborative efforts in the pipeline include those with Open University of Botswana and President's University Indonesia.



Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic-ODL) Prof Madhulika Kaushik with Prof Stanley Naribo Ngoa of NOUN who visited WOU in May.

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# Diploma to help country produce qualified preschool teachers

A new diploma programme specifically for teachers of preschools and childcare centres is geared to be introduced in July 2016 to meet surging demand for such a qualification.

The Diploma in Early Childhood Education (ECE) will be offered through WOU's School of Education, Languages and Communications (SELC) on a part-time basis to allow the teachers to pursue the programme while maintaining their careers.

This comes on the heels of a requirement by the Ministry of Education for preschool teachers to have minimum diploma qualification by 2020. The move is outlined in the Malaysian Education Blueprint launched in 2013.

Ministry figures show that preschool enrolment is on the rise in Malaysia. Some 92% of children aged 4 and 5 are expected to be enrolled in 2015 compared to 72.4% in 2010 to 90.7% in 2014. Due to all these factors it is estimated that about 30,000 new teachers will be needed by 2020.

The Dean of SELC, Prof Santhiram Raman, noted that according to the 2013 census, there are approximately 2.5 million children aged 4 years and below in Malaysia. "This is a huge market," he said.

"Early childhood is recognised as a critical period in the life of a person. Early Childhood Education can make a significant

contribution to the physical, psychomotor, cognitive, social emotional and spiritual development of the child."

He added that WOU's programme is offered in English but there are elective modules to train the teachers to teach young children their mother tongue, be it Bahasa Malaysia, Mandarin or Tamil. The core courses include pedagogy, child guidance, psychology of child development, literacy, numeracy, art and craft, creative expression and curriculum planning.

"We hope to attract the untrained private preschool teachers where approximately 68% of the workforce has no formal qualifications," he said.

The diploma programme, approved by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA), comprises 90 credits and can be completed in three years. Students will have to undergo a semester-long Teaching Practicum for practical experience of teaching in a nursery and a preschool. WOU aims to get input from ECE bodies and leading ECE providers in developing the programme.



*Prof Santhiram.*

# New postgraduate degrees in Social Sciences



WOU is introducing two new postgraduate degree programmes in Social Sciences - the Master of Philosophy (MPhil) and the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) - for the upcoming January 2016 semester.

They can be taken either through part-time or full-time study under the School of Business & Administration (SBA) and School of Foundation & Liberal Studies (SFLS).

Dean of SBA, Prof N V Narasimham, said: "Both programmes are designed to produce qualified personnel who can carry out research in social sciences and industrial research, as well as to enable students to gain academic insight into the subject matter and communicate their research findings in peer-reviewed publications."

Each candidate is required to submit a thesis and sit for an oral examination at the end of the study period.

The research areas covered are:

- Political Science; Media Studies; Malaysian Studies; Ethnic Minorities & Human Rights; Ethnic Relations; Identity Politics
- Media Studies & Communications; Women Studies; Sociology & Anthropology
- Marketing Management; Services Marketing; Consumer Behaviour;

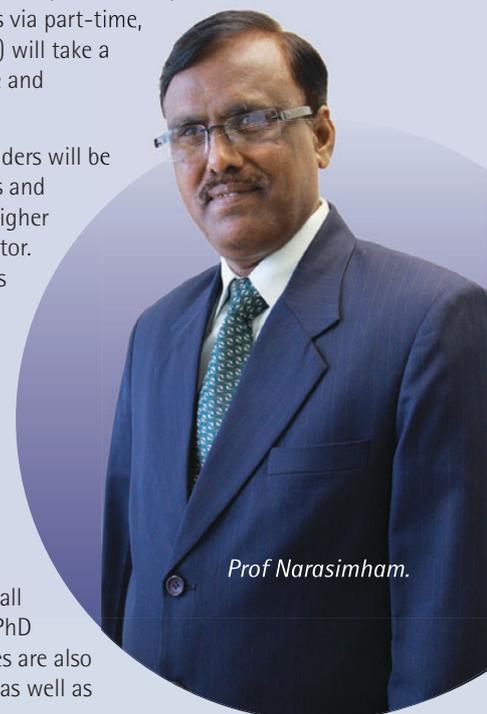
Leadership in Higher Education; Entrepreneurship and Small Business; OER and ICT application in higher education

- Human Resource Development; Human Resource Management; Organisational Behaviour; Industrial Relations; Employment Law (Malaysia); Vedanta (in Management/Leadership)
- Accounting; Taxation; Auditing; Qualitative Research
- Quality Management; Supplier Management

The minimum period for the MPhil (Level 7 MQF) is 12 months via full-time study and 24 months via part-time, whereas the PhD (Level 8 MQF) will take a minimum 24 months full-time and 36 months part-time.

These postgraduate degree holders will be qualified to work as academics and researchers in institutions of higher learning and the industrial sector. They can also assume positions at tertiary institutions or corporate training centres.

WOU already offers nine postgraduate programmes, including the Commonwealth Executive MBA, MBA in Construction Management, MBA in Manufacturing and Production Management, and Master of Education. They are all provided via part-time study. PhD and MPhil in Arts & Humanities are also already on offer via part-time as well as full-time study.



*Prof Narasimham.*

## Work and life experiences: entry into University through APEL



*Dr Andy Liew conducted in-house training on APEL.*

Adult applicants for undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in WOU will soon have their relevant work and life experiences formally taken into consideration in the evaluation process for admission. In support of lifelong learning, the Ministry of Higher Education and the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) has approved the Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) as an instrument to assess the preparedness of candidates to pursue tertiary studies. The University will admit potential candidates for entry into its January 2016 intake for open distance learning part-time study using APEL.

APEL assesses and gives recognition to prior formal, non-formal and informal learning. Many adult learners would have picked up certain knowledge, skills and competencies from their experiences which can be assessed for entry.

The move follows the Ministry's request for all universities that have adopted Open Entry System in Malaysia to migrate to APEL. WOU was given extension to fully implement APEL in January 2016 to give it adequate time to establish the related system, train staff and set up necessary infrastructure and human resources.

For the past four years, the University has been appointed as *Rakan Universiti* by MQA to conduct the Aptitude Test for APEL. Recently the University has been invited by MQA to apply to be a national APEL assessment centre. A day-long workshop was conducted by WOU Director of Quality Assurance and External Relations, Dr Andy Liew, at the main campus on 4 August 2015 to train directors of all the Regional Centres on admission through APEL.

WOU was directly involved in the development of the "APEL Handbook for Learners for the purposes of admission for undergraduate and postgraduate programmes". The University is now also one of the panel members for the development of "APEL Guidelines for the Award of Credit [APEL (C)]". Dr Andy sits in the MQA panel for both these APEL initiatives and he is currently serving as the Chair in the APEL (C) panel.

Those applying for undergraduate-level programmes under APEL are subjected to appropriate assessments such as an aptitude test and portfolio submission. Postgraduate applicants undergo these and an additional interview session to ensure they have the required knowledge, practical skills and other related competencies.

Students entering a Master's degree programme must be at least 30 years old with a STPM or diploma qualification or equivalent. Those undertaking a Bachelor's degree need not have a formal qualification but must be at least 21 years of age and possess relevant work experience.



*Dr Andy (seated, 3rd from right) representing WOU in panel of assessors for MQA programme accreditation exercise.*

## ODL students take on co-curricular activities



*Students help out at Grace Community Services, Petaling Jaya.*

A co-curricular component has been introduced for part-time students pursuing undergraduate degree programmes in the open distance learning (ODL) mode from the July 2015 semester onwards.

The move comes on the heels of the Higher Education Ministry's new requirement for all undergraduate degree programmes to have Mata Pelajaran Umum (MPU, General Studies). The ministry and Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) have made it compulsory for ODL students to undertake this as part of their course work.

Called MPU3412/02 Co-Curriculum, it is being offered to ODL students through WOU's School of Foundation and Liberal Studies (SFLS). Its dean Dr S Nagarajan said the course delivery mechanism has been adjusted to enable working adults to carry out the co-curricular activities via ODL mode.

A total of 465 students signed up for the first offering of the course. Students form groups of 10 to 14 members each to carry out the

activities. Performances are assessed by supervising tutors based on the students' participation in the tutorial classes and the final report presentations of activities.

There is a broad variety of co-curricular activities to choose from, including sports where students learn to play and organise games such as volleyball and table tennis.

They may also opt to organise or participate in community service projects and talks or workshops that enable them to hone their leadership, teamwork, communication and creative skills. Dr Nagarajan said the activities are meant to enrich the learners' experiences and broaden their perspectives beyond themselves to look at what's happening in their society, state and nation.

Activities undertaken thus far included organising fund-raising for charity homes; talks on issues like healthy lifestyles, self-defence and finance; a junior badminton tournament; a blood donation drive; a charity musical and a beach clean-up. Students at the Kuala Lumpur Regional Centre even cleaned cages and fed animals in Zoo Negara.

For each activity, the groups have to submit a project proposal outlining the topic/theme of their work, the objectives, timelines, target group, along with the expected results, resources required and budget.



*Recycling project at the main campus.*

# Open yourself to “intangible learning experience”, students told

While academic results are important, for a truly wholesome learning experience one should also take full advantage of the dynamics of ideas, peers and the environment at a university. This was part of the advice and motivation relayed to new students who attended the Orientation at the main campus on 25 September 2015.

“Grades are important but it is also important to derive that intangible learning experience,” said Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic-OCL) Prof Mohandas Menon in his welcoming address.

“Learn to talk and discuss inside and outside the classroom,” he stressed. He also advised the students to acquire required soft skills for the job market and competency in English for effective communication.

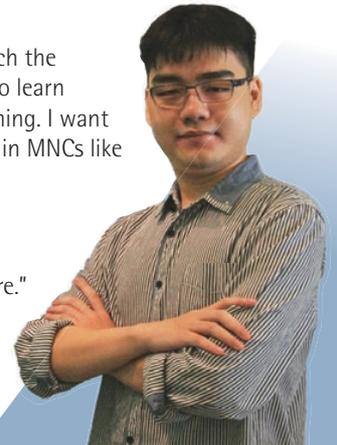
The freshmen took a students’ pledge led by Moses Gerard, 26, who is enrolled in the Bachelor of Business (Hons) in Accounting programme.

This is the third year that WOU is operating on-campus learning. The University now has six degree programmes, including the newly introduced Bachelor of Technology (Hons) in Computer Systems and Networks.

Among the pioneer batch for this programme is Teoh Hung Siang, 21, from Simpang Ampat, Penang, who holds a Diploma in Information Technology & Communication (Application Development) from a private college. Like most students, he receives the 20% rebate on total tuition fees and a RM100 monthly living expense throughout the duration of study.

“What attracted me to WOU is not so much the rebate but the subjects,” he said. “I hope to learn computer skills, like coding and programming. I want to become a software engineer, and work in MNCs like Intel or Flextronics. That is my target!”

“My friends, my teacher and my lecturer recommended this University,” he added. “They said I would get a lot of support here.”



Student Teoh Hung Siang.

## NGO rebate recipients aspire towards academic and career excellence

These four youngsters, who enrolled at WOU in the September 2015 intake, received a special rebate of about 50% on total tuition fees as members of selected non-governmental organisations (NGOs).



### Nagamah Gopi, 21

She is pursuing Bachelor of Business (Hons) in Banking & Finance, and lives with her sister, a sales supervisor, since their parents passed away.

Taking a keen interest in the field of finance, she particularly wants to learn more about banking systems. “I would like to become a financial officer and earn a good income so that I can take care of my sister,” she said.

Nagamah, who did her STPM at Penang Free School, first heard about WOU’s full-time programme at an education fair. “The fee is much cheaper than other colleges, and with the NGO promotion, my sister can bear the cost,” she said.



### Pushpasri Kannayah, 23

She enrolled in the Bachelor of Business (Hons) in Logistics and Supply Chain Management programme. Her father is a civil servant in the veterinary sector, while her mother is a production operator.

“I want to work in the logistics sector, in either shipping or airline,” she said. “I love meeting new people and travelling, and there is good income in this line.”

Like Nagamah, she qualified for the rebate through the Penang Hindu Endowment Board. A holder of Diploma in Business Studies (Accounting), she plans to pursue a Master in Logistics later.



### Annie Khor Khai Ching, 20

She is studying Banking and Finance. An only child, her father works as a building construction worker while her mother is a homemaker.

“I like mathematics and calculations, and so I hope to join the finance or banking sector when I graduate,” she said. “I aim to learn as much as I can, and do well in my studies.”

She did her STPM at St George’s Girls School. A friend recommended WOU, the only private university in Penang, due to its successful open distance learning tertiary programmes.



### Christine Tan Ee Wen, 20

She signed up for the Bachelor of Business (Hons) in Management programme. She was a schoolmate of Annie, and both are members of YMCA.

The younger of two children, her father works as a sales manager and her mother as a homemaker. She intends to undertake a career as a wedding planner.

She found out online about the rebate offered by WOU. She is thankful for the rebate as it “helps students like us to continue with higher education”.

# Youth Speaks for the Nation makes comeback

After being dormant for six years, Malaysia's famous student elocution contest, Youth Speaks for the Nation, was recently revived with the support of Wawasan Open University as the academic partner.

The finals of Youth Speaks for the Nation 2015 was held at the main campus in Penang on 27 September 2015 with the theme titled *Social Media, Use or Abuse?* The event organised by Junior Chamber International (JCI) Penang saw 13 participants from secondary schools and one college pitting their oral skills against one another.

The youngsters spoke on various issues surrounding social media, displaying depth in thought and eloquence in articulation. They deliberated over the advantages such as the easy connectivity, the convenience of online transactions and the access to information facilitating projects and assignments. They also delved on drawbacks like cyber cheating, cyber bullying, stalking, social media addiction, improper spelling and flawed grammar.

Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon, WOU Pro-Chancellor and Patron of JCI Penang, presented the prizes, and in his speech paid tribute to late WOU Chancellor and former Chief Minister Tun Dr Lim Chong Eu who had founded JCI Penang.

In particular, Dr Koh singled out participant Chelsea Cindion Dominic of SMK Seri Balik Pulau for her persistence and dedication that led her to survive bone cancer although given only three months by doctors in 2011. "You may be up against great odds, but as long as you have faith, commitment, and more importantly, you are willing to learn, you are willing to survive and thrive, you will make a difference," Dr Koh said.



Dr Koh congratulates the three winners. At the back row (centre) is Chelsea.

Champion Denise Chin May Xin, a Fourth Former from SMJK Jit Sin, walked away with the Tun Dr Lim Chong Eu Challenge Trophy and RM800 cash prize. First runner-up Daniel Tan Wei Ian, a Form Five student at SMJK Chung Ling Butterworth, won RM500 while second runner-up Mariessa Ann Selvaraj, a Sixth Former at SMK Datuk Onn Butterworth, received RM200.

The panel of judges comprised Dr S Nagarajan, Dean of WOU's School of Foundation & Liberal Studies, British Council Penang director Peggy Lim and representatives from Toastmasters International and the State Education Department.

Dr Koh also reflected on his university teaching days before he became active in politics. "In order to teach, I have to always think how best to communicate, how best to make my students understand what I want to say," he said.

"It needs a lot of preparation to make sure the ideas are conveyed. The catchword is 'prepare', 'prepare', and 'prepare'! Prepare in terms of the content, and you have to prepare in terms of the pronunciation and enunciation. You have to check almost every word that you are not sure of. And more importantly, you have to think about how best to convey it to the audience."

## Milestone for WOU with new Group Finance Director function

The financial management of Wawasan Open University enters a significant new phase with the formation of a new Group Finance Director position for WOU Sdn Bhd (WOUSB). The new role sets the pace for a vital consolidation of the Group's financial policies and accounting practices, including its tax planning and funding.

WOU's Director of Finance, Chua Saw Nee, has been handed the all-important task in assuming the expanded function of WOUSB Group Finance Director effective 21 August 2015. Her appointment - while continuing to serve in her current post at WOU - was confirmed by the Board of Directors of WOUSB at a meeting in August.

Chua's main duties are to oversee all financial aspects of WOUSB and its subsidiaries. She is now responsible for the flow of financial information to the Chief Executives and the Boards of Directors of companies in the Group (i.e. WOU and DISTED College) as well as to the Board of Governors of WOU.

In a noteworthy move, she will also be leading the integration of the finance departments of WOU and DISTED. "This is a huge milestone of my career," Chua remarked. "I look forward to the challenge of juggling two demanding roles, serving the financial interest of the Group and that of the University."



She expressed appreciation for the support and guidance from the Board of Directors, Board of Governors, WOU's senior management and finance team, as well as the staff "who have all helped to groom me into what I am today". "It has been a continuing learning process for me, and I shall continue to learn from everyone as I undertake my new role," she said.

Chua has over twenty years of experience in finance and accounting. She joined WOU as Senior Accountant in August 2008, and was promoted to Senior Manager and Head of Finance in January 2010, and subsequently to Director of Finance in January 2012.

She holds a Bachelor of Accounting degree from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia and is a qualified Chartered Accountant, with membership in the Malaysian Institute of Accountants. Prior to joining WOU, she worked as Finance Manager at Hewlett-Packard and Agilent Technologies in Penang.

# Critical role of Regional Centres in student recruitment and learning support

While WOU is renowned for providing remarkable learning opportunities to Malaysians, its frontline and public face that make the real difference are in its Regional Centres (RCs). The University is able to spread its local grassroots presence through the five RCs located in Penang, Ipoh, Kuala Lumpur, Johor Bahru, and Kuching, and three Regional Support Centres in Bandar Utama, Klang and Subang.

The RCs are important first points of contact for prospective students and offer a range of support services, including academic counselling, tutorial classes, study areas, computer labs, video-conferencing facilities and wireless Internet service.

The centres' staff members attend to public enquiries and reach out to the community through open days, road shows and education fairs. They guide and motivate students to excel in classes, assignments and exams, while ensuring students do not feel isolated during long periods of independent study. This issue focuses on the contributions of three RCs operating in Kuching, Ipoh and Johor Bahru.

## On standby to guide and support in Kuching

Staff at the Kuching Regional Centre also spend a great deal of time in guiding students on learning relevant systems and retrieving information. "My staff members are always on standby to support students especially during the assignment submission period," said the centre's director Jimmy Chai who leads four other team members at the centre.

"We try to help the students to use online resources and encourage the respective schools and course coordinators to monitor the tutors so that our students get the best learning support, including from WOU's learning management system (LMS)," he added.

"We also conduct extra sessions, if needed, on managing the learning systems, Turnitin, online submissions, and online library resources."



## Spreading the wings of care across Perak

Making the University's presence felt regionally is a vital objective at the Ipoh Regional Centre in Perak. "We have to spread our wings and cast our net wider by having numerous outstation roadshows and corporate visits to Manjung, Teluk Intan, Taiping, Kampar and so on," said its director Ching Huey Ling.

"We try to provide pastoral care and communicate with those newly registered students to inform about orientation, and follow up on tutorial classes and assignments," she added. "We make sure they are familiar with how to access the student portal, and encourage them to mingle and form study groups."

The staff at the centre are also focused on providing guidance to senior students on their study progression path. "We advise them in their planning as courses are not offered every semester," she said.

## Regular follow-up and counselling in Johor

At the Johor Bahru Regional Centre (JBRC) director Dr Ng Peng Long and his seven colleagues aim to instil in students a sense of connection with the University. This is particularly so that they are encouraged to continue until graduation, in the face of the current challenging economic scenario.

"Some prospective students have chosen to delay registration of their study to a later date," he said. "Also, some existing students opt to take fewer courses or defer their study to a later semester."

"We therefore conduct call-up exercises every semester to encourage our existing students to continue their studies and advise them to re-enrol early. Through this exercise, we stay in touch with all our existing students and provide counselling and help particularly in areas related to academic continuity and financial options."

Also, through WOU's Valued Partnership Programme, the centre manages to get many referrals from students who recommend to their work colleagues to pursue higher learning at the University, he added.



# WOU SEMINAR SERIES

## Study on tablet usage in an ODL environment

While it is common for students nowadays to use a tablet in open distance learning (ODL), it was unclear, until recently, in exactly what regards such a gadget is most frequently utilised.

A WOU research has now shown that tablets are more popularly used, among other things, for self-learning than for group study or peer-to-peer interaction.

Twenty ODL students aged from 21 to 60 years participated in the study conducted by the School of Education, Communications and Languages (SELC) from July to November 2014. They were taught the features and functions of a tablet before each was given one unit in which the usage experiences were recorded.

The research was led by Dean Prof Santhiram Raman, with Prof Phalachandra Bhandigadi, Associate Prof Dr Goh Lay Huah and Dr S Vighnarajah forming the rest of the team. It was financed by a grant from WOU's Institute for Research and Innovation (IRI).

The study explored the effectiveness of tablet use in the ODL environment in terms of learning, communication and social interactions. It was found that all the participants used the tablet for individual learning, such as for reading course materials, interacting in the learning management system (LMS) forum, tutorial preparation, assignment, exam revision and Internet search.

Few used the tablet for presentations, group discussions, or for communication with peers and others. It was also revealed that the students



Dr Goh presents her findings.

used the tablet most frequently at home, followed by at the WOU regional centres and their workplaces. Very few used it in social settings.

The participants were students of the Bachelor of Arts (Hons) in English Studies and Post-Graduate Diploma in Education programmes under the SELC.

Dr Goh elucidated on the research in her talk on *The Tablet—A Learner's Gadget: A Case Study on Tablet Effectiveness in Enhancing ODL in WOU* at the main campus on 2 July 2015.

She also presented the research findings at the Second International Conference on Open and Flexible Education (ICOFE 2015) at The Open University of Hong Kong (OUHK) on July 16 and 17. Her paper received an "Award of Merit" in the Best Practices of Flexible Learning Award Competition.

## Distance learning's role in producing Malaysian accountants

Did you know that if not for distance learning (DL), Malaysia would have far fewer accounting practitioners today?

According to Dr Loo Choo Hong, senior lecturer at WOU's School of Business & Administration, distance learning - by post, face-to-face tuition or open distance learning (ODL) - is responsible for training a large portion of the over 30,000 members of the Malaysian Institute of Accountants (MIA).

Indeed, distance learning has played a prominent role in the development and provision of accountancy courses in Malaysia, thereby supplying talented manpower to the local accounting profession. Dr Loo said this in his talk on *The Evolution of Distance Learning and its contribution to the Accounting Profession in Malaysia: A Historical Perspective* held at the main campus on 24 July 2015.

"To bring university to the masses with affordable cost, in the 2000s, ODL was introduced for home-grown local degrees," he recounted, noting that WOU admitted its first batch of accounting degree students through ODL in 2007.

Tracing the evolution of accountant training in Malaysia since Independence in 1957, Dr Loo noted that initially the study of accounting in the UK was only accessible for the privileged few who could afford the related expenses. This was later followed by the emergence of distance learning by post and establishment of local tuition centres, both of which used DL materials sourced from the UK. Next came the trend where learners attended accounting tuition in



Dr Loo explains the evolution of Accounting in Malaysia.

government and private colleges in Malaysia, with face-to-face teaching by instructors employing UK materials, towards the attainment of a diploma.

The subsequent wave was in accounting professionals being trained through twinning programmes in Malaysia using foreign DL materials. "Students take a foreign degree at a Malaysian college and complete the final year in the UK or where the mother university originated, through twinning," he said.

He noted that the latest wave of accountancy degree holders came from branch campuses of foreign universities set up in Malaysia since 1998.

Dr Loo also spoke on Accounting at the International Conference on Accounting Studies (ICAS) in Johor Bahru, organised by Universiti Utara Malaysia, from 17-20 August 2015.

# Ramayana offers pearls of wisdom on leadership, says don

The ancient epic of the Ramayana is well known as one of the great literary and philosophical classics of the world. But not many people may know that it also presents an excellent model for leadership at different levels of an organisation, society and country.

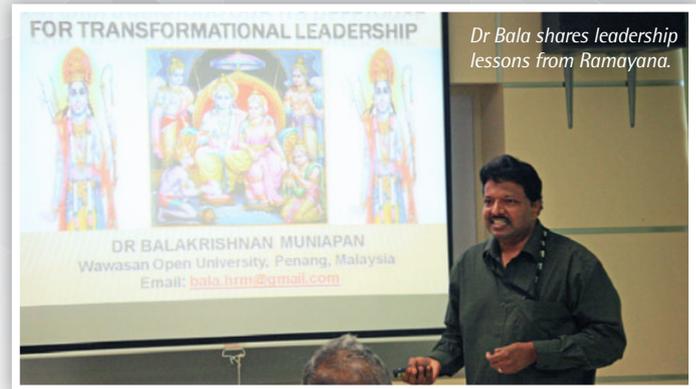
In particular, reveals Dr Balakrishnan Muniapan, senior lecturer at WOU's School of Business and Administration, the revered character of Prince Rama in the epic exemplifies the principles of transformational leadership which can benefit any organisation.

"Transformational leadership is a process that motivates followers by appealing to higher ideals and values," Dr Balakrishnan said, quoting scholars. "Transformational leaders are able to define and articulate a vision and mission for their organisation, and their leadership style can transform their followers towards higher performance."

He said this in his talk on *Valmiki Ramayana and its Relevance for Transformational Leadership* held at the main campus on 19 August 2015.

Dr Balakrishnan presented comparisons between transformational leadership and transactional leadership which stresses on rewards and fulfilling the current needs of followers. "In transformational leadership, a leader's source of power is 'character, competence', and change occurs in the follower's attitude, values, with the focus being on development," he said.

"A transformational approach is likely to be more effective in overcoming barriers to change in organisations than a transactional style that concentrates on technical problem-solving and which neglects people and organisation issues," he added.



Dr Balakrishnan suggested that one looks beyond the perspective of Ramayana as a religious text to examine the epic in the context of leadership. Ramayana, which details the life, character and journey of Rama, provides an 'inside-out' approach, extolling leader development or self-leadership, he said.

"An important component of leadership is integrity, able to keep your word, walk the talk," he explained.

The characteristics of transformational leaders, as exhibited by Rama, he added, are of being change agents; courageous; believing in people; value-driven; lifelong learners; able to deal with complexity, ambiguity and uncertainty; and visionaries.

Dr Balakrishnan was also a speaker at the International Ramayana Conference on the theme of 'Heal the World through Ramayana' held in Mauritius from 22 to 24 August 2015.

# Corporate Diversification: a bane or boon?

Much has been said about the corporate strategy to diversify in the modern business world. But how far is such a move actually beneficial to a firm or conglomerate?

Did you know that businesses in developed markets are moving away from diversification and towards a more focused business model of intense specialisation? This is in contrast to those in developing countries that are moving towards forming large conglomerates or diversification.

The issue was expounded by WOU's School of Business and Administration (SBA) senior lecturer Jason Lee Kian Tek who pointed out that conglomerates have become so diversified in the U.S. that the trend has been found to destroy firm value.

"Conglomerates in the West are breaking up while conglomerates in the emerging markets are growing sizeably in recent years," he said in a talk on *The Influence of Informal Governance Institutions on the Relationship between Diversification and Firm Value: The Malaysian Evidence* at the main campus on 23 September 2015. The presentation was based on a study of public listed firms in the main board of Bursa Malaysia from 2001 to 2012 and company annual reports over four years.

Lee cited several reasons for firms to wish to diversify. They include wanting to grow one's business, to more fully utilise existing resources and capabilities, to escape unattractive industry environments and to make use of surplus cash flows.

Among the benefits is that if one industry is not performing well, the firm would have another industry which is doing better to earn from. "Also, larger size translates to higher market power," he said. "And



different businesses bring different cash flows, so this creates internal banks to transfer money from one to another."

However, there is a downside. "If the benefit of diversification outweighs cost, then there is firm value creation. If the opposite happens, it destroys firm value," Lee explained.

"Diversified firms with business group affiliation, particularly the larger groups and government's substantial ownership are able to mitigate the discounted value of diversification," he said. However, diversified firms with high ownership concentration and foreign-controlled ownership, or with political connection, have no moderating effect, he cautioned.

Lee also gave a presentation on the subject at the Asian Academy of Management International Conference held in Universiti Sains Malaysia from 2-4 October 2015.

## Courses held fully online break new ground in interactive learning



The School of Science and Technology (SST) has successfully introduced a new paradigm for conducting its courses by holding two of them in a fully online mode during the July 2015 semester.

The courses are supported by Highly-Interactive Internet-based Tutorial Support (HIITS) which is tutor-facilitated, but not necessarily in real-time. It allows for interactive communication between students and tutor at their own convenience, time, place and pace.

The HIITS approach was conducted for the *Computational Logic* course that had eight students and the *Introduction to Electronic Commerce* course with four students. The system is ideal for classes with not more than twenty students.

Each course has a total of ten hour-long discussion sessions in a semester, with real-time video or audio communication via Skype or web conference platform WizIQ. The communications are recorded, enabling students to view the videos anytime and anywhere.

Other forms of exchanges between the tutors and learners involve e-mails, threaded discussions, chat groups, bulletin boards and file attachments. These can be complemented by media such as WhatsApp, WeChat and the learning management system (LMS) called *WawasanLearn*.

Dean of SST, Dr Wendy Bong Chin Wei, said statistics obtained from *WawasanLearn* showed there have been up to almost 100 postings and viewings from students and tutor every week, even for a course with only four students. "This statistic does not include communication through instant messaging via WhatsApp or other media," she said. "We had two very experienced and good external tutors conducting the online tutorials."

Marks are allocated for participation in the LMS. Students are therefore motivated to offer viewpoints on postings and participate in academic discussions with their tutor or course mates.

"In HIITS, you will find the tutors and students actively posting topics on the LMS to encourage peer discussion and regularly initiating discussions via WhatsApp to engage the students," added Dr Bong.

## Workshop underscores vital role of tutors

"Be a guide by the side rather than a sage on the stage." This was among the pearls of wisdom received by participants at a recent tutor-training workshop held to improve teaching competency and the support rendered to part-time students.

The advice by WOU Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic-ODL) Prof Madhulika Kaushik summed up the thrust of teaching in WOU. In her session on the *Role of Tutors in ODL: Issues and Concerns*, she reminded tutors to guide learners through all learning dimensions of a course and help deal with issues affecting their progress.

The half-day workshop at the main campus in Penang on 5 July 2015 was attended by 59 new and senior tutors. Tutors from Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh, Johor Bahru and Kuching followed the four sessions via video-conferencing.

Generally, the tutors were impressed on the key role they play in students' successes, and how they must engage, motivate and keep students on the right track. The workshop reinforced the tutor's role and functions, examined related issues like tutor-marked assignments (TMAs) and relayed the importance of providing online support and adequate guidance to promote student retention.

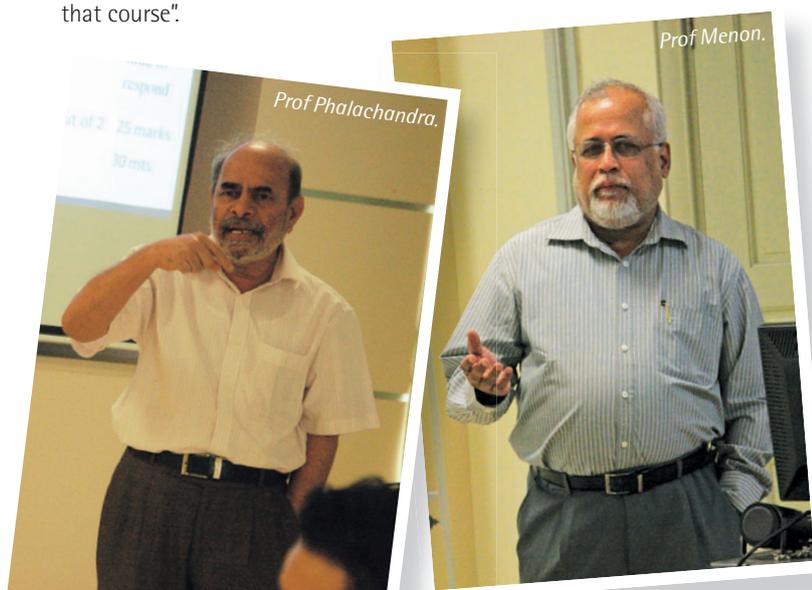
Prakash Arumugam, Deputy Dean of the School of Business & Administration, highlighted the characteristics of a good tutor as they prepare and facilitate tutorials. He said tutors should have good knowledge of course content, get to know the students, discuss the TMAs in class, foster enquiry and critical thinking, and follow suggested tutorial activities. "Be a friend. Be empathetic!" he stressed.

Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic-OCL) Prof Mohandas Menon and Prof Phalachandra Bhandigadi from the School of Education, Languages and Communications led the tutors on various aspects of TMAs, including preparation and submission by students, and marking by tutors.

The tutors had hands-on activities on browsing through tutor comments of sample TMAs, with the advice to always keep their comments positive, clear and constructive.

In the last session, Jasmine Emmanuel, Deputy Dean of the School of Foundation & Liberal Studies, encouraged tutors to effectively follow-up on students through telephone calls, emails, online forum, and other channels, adding that this would help student retention.

One tutor summed up well when he said, "I understand now how important providing high quality feedback is for student retention in that course".



# Yeap family shows appreciation to WOU and DISTED staff

Wawasan Open University is today emblematically associated with its resplendent main campus along Penang's 'Millionaires' Row' of Jalan Sultan Ahmad Shah (formerly named Northam Road).

Indeed, the majestic white colonial mansion known as Homestead, together with the sleek glassy high-rise Albukhary building behind, instantly draw attention with their imposing architecture, where the classical coexists with the modern.

This prestigious landmark, as well as the University's success in providing high-quality tertiary education to Malaysians, is due in no small measure to the altruism of the Yeap family who contributed to WOU's establishment in 2006. Indeed, the scion of the family, Dato' Seri Stephen Yeap – grandson of the late philanthropist tycoon Yeap Chor Ee – donated the family's Homestead mansion to WOU.

It was therefore meaningfully apt that this same premise recently became the setting for Dato' Seri Stephen, along with his wife Datin Seri Irene Yeap and family, to host a celebratory dinner for all the staff of WOU and DISTED College. Over 300 people attended the event on 7 August 2015 which was graced by guest-of-honour Lim Guan Eng, the Chief Minister of Penang.

The Penang Philharmonic Orchestra (PPO) was on hand to entertain with a splendid performance. Guests enjoyed fine-dining at the Homestead while staff feasted on a luxurious buffet dinner at the Albukhary building.

Among those who attended were Tun Mohamed Dzaiddin Abdullah, Chancellor of WOU; Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon, Pro-Chancellor of WOU and Chairman of Wawasan Education Foundation (WEF); Tan Sri Emeritus Prof Gajaraj Dhanarajan, Chairman of WOU's Board of Governors; Prof Dato' Dr Ho Sinn Chye, Vice Chancellor of WOU; Dr Seah Soo Aun, President of DISTED; and corporate luminaries.



Staff of WOU and DISTED having fun.



Dato' Seri Stephen Yeap and Datin Seri Irene greet WOU staff.

Both WOU and DISTED come under the aegis of WOU Sdn Bhd (WOUSB), which is funded by WEF.

In his welcoming remarks, Dato' Seri Stephen thanked the pioneers and benefactors of the two institutions. "WOU is the brainchild of the late Tun Dr Lim Keng Yaik and I supported his vision to set up an open distance learning university as it fits in with the vision of my late grandfather, Towkay Yeap Chor Ee," he said. "Quite a number of corporate leaders have made generous donations to WEF."

He paid tribute to the late Chancellors of WOU, Tun Dr Lim Chong Eu and Tun Dr Lim Keng Yaik, and expressed his appreciation to Prof Dhanarajan, who was the founding Vice Chancellor of WOU.

Dato' Seri Stephen is the Chairman of WOUSB as well as Deputy Chairman of WEF. Incidentally, Datin Seri Irene is the chairperson of PPO, the state's orchestra.

# Lemang, tradition and common bonds at Hari Raya do

The WOU main campus recently became a special scene for the making of *lemang*, a Malay delicacy, and other traditional items during a Hari Raya Aidilfitri celebration held there.

It was all done in the spirit of camaraderie and merriment as staff of WOU came together for the occasion on 31 July 2015, many decked in traditional *baju kurung*. Everyone was greeted with "Salam Aidilfitri" gift packets of sweets at the festively decorated Homestead Hall.

Tan Sri Emeritus Prof Gajaraj Dhanarajan, Chairman of WOU's Board of Governors, Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic-ODL) Prof Madhulika Kaushik, and Chief Administrative Officer Yeong Sik Kheong "launched" the celebration by placing glutinous rice inside hollow bamboo sticks to make the *lemang*, which is a delicacy eaten with other fare like *rendang* or *serunding*. According to tradition, glutinous rice, coconut milk and salt are placed inside the bamboo sticks lined with banana leaves and then cooked for 3 or 4 hours.



Symbolic launch of the festival.



Gift packets of sweets for everyone.

WOU's Director of Learning and Library Services, Puan Kamsiah Mohd Ali, in her welcoming speech, called on the management to continue sponsoring such gatherings.

Vice Chancellor Prof Dato' Dr Ho Sinn Chye, in his informal address, noted to staff that festivities are occasions in which "we all celebrate the principles that bind us".

"We come from different faiths, beliefs and culture. By having this common bond, we are able to cooperate and work together much better as a WOU community," he said. "What are some of the principles that bind us? We all share a sense of commitment to justice, equality, peace and compassion to one another, especially at this time in our country when so many external forces are trying to separate us."

Staff feasted on rice, dalca, chicken, lamb and pickles, and treated to delicacies like *dodol*, *agar-agar*, chocolate cake and a variety of cookies.

# Award from Putrajaya for research article on GST

In spite of her daytime work commitment and part-time academic pursuit, WOU student Michelle Christine Arul produced a composition that emerged as one of the winners in the GST Article Writing Competition organised by the Ministry of Higher Education.

Encouraged by her parents, the 25-year-old undertook the necessary research and submitted her entry in time even though she was busy revising for her final examinations. She scoured the Internet, newspaper articles and journals for information.

All these despite holding a full-time clerical job while studying for a degree. Michelle, who hails from Rawang, Selangor, is in the fifth semester of her Bachelor of Business (Hons) in Management programme.

She took home the consolation prize at the competition open to Malaysian students from public and private institutions of higher learning in the country. For her effort on the topic *Why Malaysia needs GST?* she received RM400 and a certificate from Deputy Higher Education Minister Datuk Mary Yap during a ceremony in Putrajaya on 16 August 2015.

In arguing the benefits of the Goods and Services Tax (GST), she wrote that it will help Malaysia "to improve the effectiveness, capability and transparency of the current tax administration and management... to diminish corruption, wastage and create transparency on procurement processes... to obtain revenue from the collection of taxes, from both corporate and individual."



Michelle (standing, 6th from right) with winners from various categories.

Her conclusion was that "the implementation of GST in Malaysia is essential as it will prove to be a sustainable revenue source for the government".

The competition was organised by the Ministry together with the Royal Malaysian Customs Department, Ministry of Finance and the National Council of Professors which comes under the Prime Minister's Department.

Michelle, who works at The Star Media Group Bhd, enrolled at WOU through the Kuala Lumpur Regional Centre during the July 2013 intake, after completing her Foundation in Science at another private university. She aims to climb up the corporate ladder in management, and is looking forward to pursuing a Master's degree at a later stage.

## UPCOMING EVENTS STUDENT INFO

### WOU Convocation Ceremony

The University will hold its 6th convocation ceremony as follows:

Date : **28 & 29 November 2015 (Sat & Sun)**

Venue : **WOU main campus**

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In the minds of our readers

The University would like to hear from you. Whether it's a view, a comment or even a question, don't hesitate to drop us a mail at [mediainfo@wou.edu.my](mailto:mediainfo@wou.edu.my)

For more details, visit [wou.edu.my](http://wou.edu.my)

Call Toll-free Careline **1-300-888-968 (WOU)**  **019-474 9323**

**Main Campus**  
**Wawasan Open University**  
 54 Jalan Sultan Ahmad Shah, 10050 Penang, Malaysia.  
 Tel: 04-218 0333 | Fax: 04-226 9323  
 Email: [enquiry@wou.edu.my](mailto:enquiry@wou.edu.my)

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

**Penang Regional Centre**  
 54 Jalan Sultan Ahmad Shah, 10050 Penang, Malaysia.  
 Tel: 04-218 0133/4 | Fax: 04-228 4500  
 Email: [ro\\_pg@wou.edu.my](mailto:ro_pg@wou.edu.my)

**Ipoh Regional Centre**  
 Wisma Gerakan, 80 Persiaran Greenhill, 30450 Ipoh, Perak.  
 Tel: 05-242 6323 / 243 6323 | Fax: 05-254 9323  
 Email: [ro\\_ip@wou.edu.my](mailto:ro_ip@wou.edu.my)

**Kuala Lumpur Regional Centre**  
 Level 3 Menara PGRM, 8 Jalan Pudu Ulu, 56100 Cheras, Kuala Lumpur.  
 Tel: 03-9281 7323 / 9283 8323 | Fax: 03-9284 9323  
 Email: [ro\\_kl@wou.edu.my](mailto:ro_kl@wou.edu.my)  
*(Library Services available Tuesday to Sunday, 10.00am-7.00pm)*

**Bandar Utama Regional Support Centre**  
 L2-6 & 7, Wisma BUB, 11, Lebuhr Bandar Utama, Bandar Utama, 47800 Petaling Jaya, Selangor.  
 Tel: 03-7629 7223 / 7629 7123 | Fax: 03-7629 7023  
 Email: [rso\\_bu@wou.edu.my](mailto:rso_bu@wou.edu.my)

**Klang Regional Support Centre**  
 No. 41(Ground Floor), Jalan Kasuarina 2/KS7, Bandar Botanic Capital, 41200 Klang, Selangor.  
 Tel: 03-3325 2353 / 3325 2373 | Fax: 03-3325 2313  
 Email: [rso\\_klg@wou.edu.my](mailto:rso_klg@wou.edu.my)

**Subang Regional Support Centre**  
 No. 34-1 Ground Floor, Jalan PJS 8/2, Mentari Plaza, Bandar Sunway, 46150 Petaling Jaya, Selangor.  
 Tel: 03-5635 5323/ 5632 5323 | Fax: 03-5635 1323  
 Email: [rso\\_sbg@wou.edu.my](mailto:rso_sbg@wou.edu.my)

**Johor Bahru Regional Centre**  
 17 & 19 Jalan Jaya 2, Taman Jaya, 81300 Skudai, Johor.  
 Tel: 07-556 4323 / 556 6323 | Fax: 07-554 9323  
 Email: [ro\\_jb@wou.edu.my](mailto:ro_jb@wou.edu.my)

**Kuching Regional Centre**  
 14 Westin Avenue, Jalan Tun Jugah, 93350 Kuching, Sarawak.  
 Tel: 082-578 923 | Fax: 082-576 923  
 Email: [ro\\_kc@wou.edu.my](mailto:ro_kc@wou.edu.my)