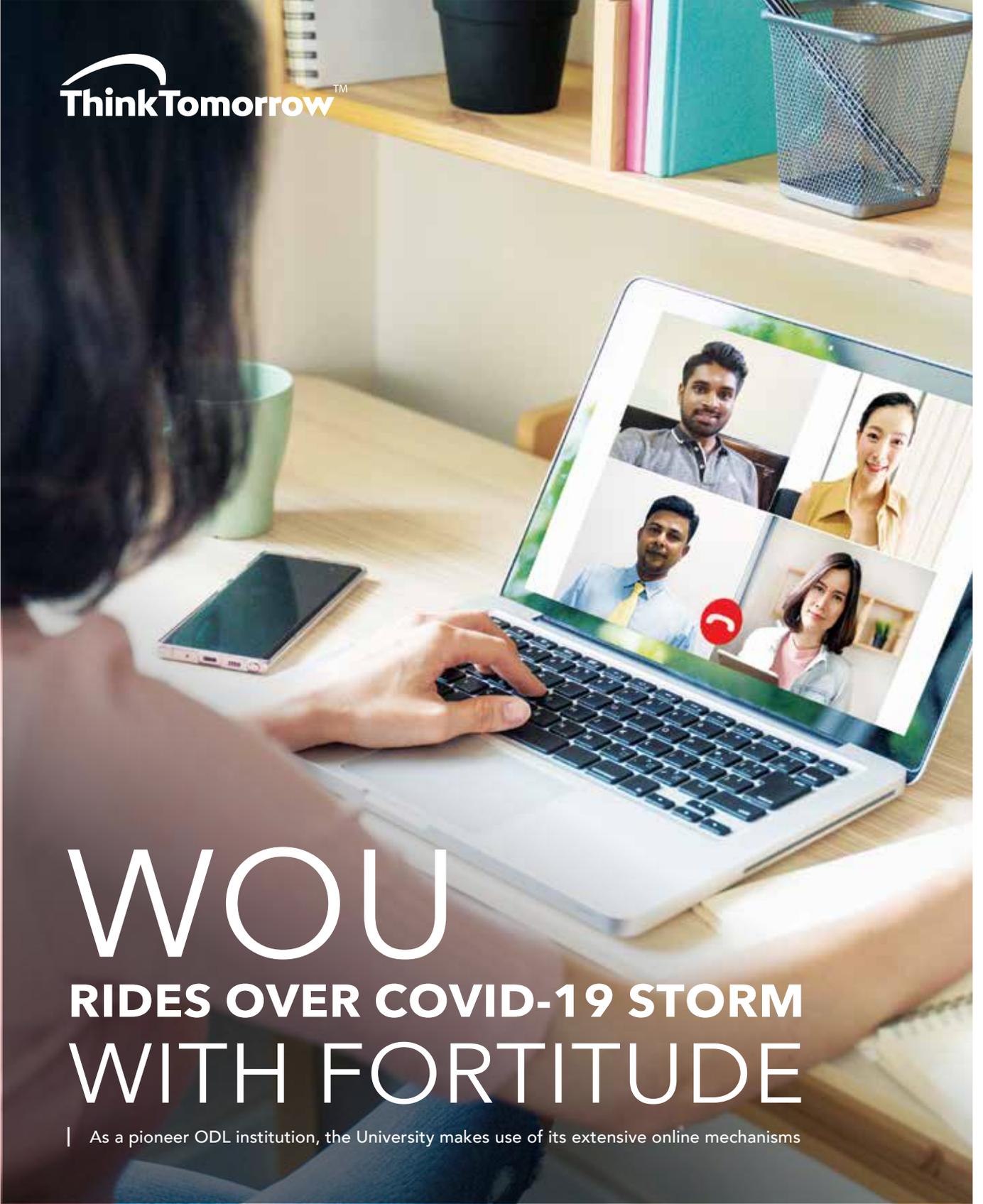


**ThinkTomorrow**TM



WOU

RIDES OVER COVID-19 STORM WITH FORTITUDE

| As a pioneer ODL institution, the University makes use of its extensive online mechanisms

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Millions of people around the world faced a new reality of living, working and studying during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic due to lockdowns and movement controls. The critical period brought to the fore the truth that nations, communities and individuals all depend on one another for mutual survival and well-being.

The abbreviation WFH, for "work from home", became the *in* thing, spurring a mass transition to online learning. The tools of digital transformation turned out to be lifelines as people scrambled to be Wi-Fi-connected so that they can continue to study and/or work remotely.

With that, the benefits of open distance learning (ODL) and the various virtual learning platforms were never more apparent than during the enforced "stay home" order.

And Wawasan Open University (WOU) - one of the pioneer ODL institutions of higher learning in the country - was ready to meet the challenge when the unprecedented situation arose. We already had in place several online mechanisms to support the teaching and learning of our students, without compromising on quality.

The axiom "united we stand, divided we fall" rang true more than ever. Supported by interactive technological tools, the WOU fraternity pooled resources and talents to deliver the best learning for students.

The "frontliners" of WOU who stepped up to the plate to ensure that students could pursue their studies with minimal disruptions must be commended. They notably include the top management, academics, academic support staff and tutors.

The delivery of higher education is slowly but surely changing as a growing number of institutions transition to online teaching and learning. WOU takes pride in providing a versatile education that will give learners the freedom to explore their potential, during good times and bad times.

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KDN Permit: PP 14958/11/2012 (031535)

Published by

Wawasan Open University [DU013(P)]
Wholly owned by Wawasan Open University Sdn Bhd
[200501018250 (700364-W)]

Printed by

Cheong Seng Chan Sdn Bhd
Plot 10, Lorong Industrial Ringan Satu,
Juru Light Industrial Estate, 14100 Juru, Penang

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TO WOU STUDENTS

WOU seeks to help adult learners and working professionals elevate themselves, in their jobs as well as overall careers, with higher academic qualifications. The University extends various forms of financial assistance to its part-time, open distance learning (ODL) and full-time, on-campus learning (OCL) students. They include the following:

A. WOU-LYL Scholarship Award for OCL study

The University is offering partial (up to RM10,000) and full (up to RM30,000) scholarships to new Malaysian students admitted to WOU's full-time Bachelor's degree programmes. The scholarships are for students who have financial needs and exhibit a strong determination to achieve academic excellence during their three years of study at WOU.

To qualify for the scholarship, applicants must fulfil the following criteria:

- Basic family income of RM8,000 or less per month
- CGPA of 3.00 and above for STPM/Foundation/Matriculation/Diploma

Any extra-curricular activities, accomplishments or job/project recognitions will be of added advantage in the selection for the scholarship.

B. Scholarship and Other Incentives for ODL study

- WOU-LYL Scholarship Award: The partial (up to RM10,000) and full (up to RM30,000) scholarships for any Bachelor's degree programmes at WOU are for new Malaysian students with a personal basic income of RM4,500 or less, or family basic income of RM8,000 or less, per month. To qualify, students must have at least a CGPA of 2.80 for partial scholarship and CGPA of 3.00 for full scholarship for STPM/Foundation/Matriculation/Diploma.
- The one-off RM500 Bursary Award will motivate new students to kickstart their first semester of studies at WOU. Application is open to new Malaysian students who enrol in an undergraduate programme, with a personal basic income of RM4,500 or less, or family basic income of RM8,000 or less, per month.
- Instalment payment plans on tuition fees.
- Lifelong Learners (LLL)/Orang Kurang Upaya (OKU) Rebate of 50% on tuition fees for new and returning students of undergraduate programmes only. The LLL discount is for those aged 60 years and above and the OKU discount for those certified as physically disabled.

UNIQUE POSTCARD CONTEST ON WOU'S 'CLASSROOM'

WOU students and alumni are recently given a chance to showcase their creativity and ingenuity when the University organised a 'Post-a-Postcard' contest with the theme 'My World. My Classroom.'

The competition held in May this year aims to highlight the flexibility and convenience of the open distance learning (ODL) mode of study at WOU. Winners will receive WOU Connect Bonuses which feature tuition fee rebates for any programme of study.

Contestants are required to capture photographs of themselves in the act of studying against the backdrop of a learning environment (idyllic or outrageous) of their own choice. They will need to select the best shot and digitally caption it with their accompanying narration of not more than 25 words.



Each must create a "postcard" with the digital stamp pasted on it that is downloaded from the WOU corporate website. The contestants then need to post their postcards on their Instagram and Facebook pages while tagging WOU's Instagram and Facebook accounts with the hashtag #WOUFUNCHALLENGE.

The WOU Connect Bonuses consist of tuition fee rebates through a grand prize of RM500, as well as a RM300 second prize, a RM200 third prize and 10 consolation prizes of RM100 each. Special prizes of an additional rebate of RM200 each are offered to the 10 contestants who garnered the highest number of combined "likes" for their postings on WOU's Facebook and Instagram pages.

WOU alumni who emerge as winners are entitled to claim their bonuses upon re-enrolment for studies at WOU.

WOU HARNESSSES TECHNOLOGY TO NURTURE 'FUTURE-READY' TALENTS

In line with its new tagline 'Think Tomorrow', WOU is preparing to produce "future-ready" graduates to face the challenges of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (IR 4.0). Chief Executive and Vice Chancellor Prof Lily Chan said the University aims to capitalise on e-learning and mobile technologies to keep in sync with the fast-changing occupational and educational landscape.



◀ Prof Chan calls for collaboration between WOU and the state government.

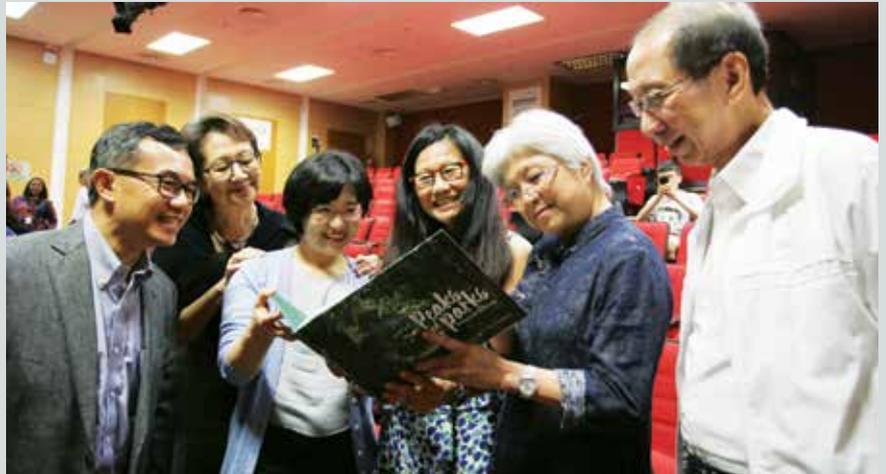
"E-Learning is a powerful tool that can help tailor curriculum to ensure students have easier access to knowledge and the needs of industry," she said in her opening remarks during the public talk on *Reimagining Tomorrow: The Digital Transformation of Education* on 13 February 2020.

She said the talk featuring child literacy advocate Lee Soo-Inn was organised to initiate dialogue on the transformation of universities and education in light of the digital transformation affecting the world. Underscoring the benefits of this trend, she stressed that the mobile learning technologies employed by WOU provide students full-time access to educational tools.

The University hopes to collaborate with the Penang State Government in the transformation process to prepare students for future workplaces, Prof Chan added. "We want to work closely with the state and its agencies in coming up with an e-learning framework on the collaborative use of the Internet, new media and the broad potential of distance learning," she remarked.

PREPARE STUDENTS TO MEET IR 4.0 DEMANDS, SAYS EXCO

▼ Lee with (from right) Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon, YB Chong Eng and Prof Lily Chan.



Open distance learning providers have been urged to brace themselves for "significant and exciting opportunities" as more people take on learning while working so as to re-skill themselves to meet the demands of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (IR 4.0).

Penang State Executive Councillor YB Chong Eng called on educational institutions to revise and revamp their curriculum, syllabus and content if they want to produce "future-proof" workers and contribute to the nation's talent pool.

The in-demand workers of the future, she said, would be Internet savvy and equipped to cope with emerging technologies like cloud computing, Internet of Things, and Artificial Intelligence (AI). They would also possess soft skills vital in the 21st century like creativity, critical thinking, collaboration and problem-solving, and retain values such as ethics, integrity and hard work, she added.

YB Chong, who chairs the state government's Women and Family Development, Gender Inclusiveness and Non-Islamic Religious Affairs portfolios, said this in her officiating address at the public talk on 13 February 2020. She stressed that the digital transformation of education is important because rapid global technological advancements have impacted the workplace, with various types of work replaced by automation and AIs.

"Universities are therefore obliged to transform if they want to fulfil their role in producing workers with the right knowledge, the right skills, the right mindset and the right humanistic values to ensure the nation's continued growth and prosperity," she said.

YB Chong cited a World Economic Forum (WEF) report that 133 million new jobs will be created in the next two years to meet the demands of IR 4.0. They include technology-related careers like Data Analysts and Scientists, Software and Applications Developers, and E-commerce and Social Media Specialists, as well as roles that need interpersonal skills linked to sales, human resources, care and education. "Our educational institutions play a critical role in preparing the future generations - students from primary to university levels - with in-demand future-proof skills as they enter the job market," she stressed.

She called on businesses, industries and the government to proactively transform in line with IR 4.0 and create a demand for the skilled workers.



▲ The crowd at the event.



▶ Lee speaks on the digital transformation of education.

ACCLAIMED CHILD LITERACY INNOVATOR ON LEARNING APPS FOR CHILDREN

The recipient of the prestigious 2019 Global Learning XPRIZE, an award for child literacy projects funded by celebrated American technopreneur Elon Musk, visited WOU recently to share her experiences and passion in developing educational apps for young children.

Lee Soo-Inn is the CEO and co-founder of Enuma, an educational technology company devoted to designing accessible games and applications to empower children to learn independently. Enuma won the the XPRIZE competition for its Kitkit School app which has proven to be extremely helpful for children at remote settlements in developing countries with scarce resources. Lee used gamification in the app to better engage and motivate children to learn.

It began when Lee gave birth to a son with learning difficulties in 2008. This motivated her to develop an educational software for children affected by similar conditions.

Lee had previously worked as an online gaming app designer in South Korea upon graduating. She then moved to the US where she founded Enuma with her husband in 2012. The company is headquartered in San Francisco with offices in Seoul and Beijing. Their first product, TodoMath, designed to teach numeracy skills, won awards and acclaim worldwide.

"What we learnt from the gaming industry, we apply that same standard of high quality to our app," she said in her public talk titled *Reimagining Tomorrow: The Digital Transformation of Education* at the WOU main campus on 13 February 2020.

The tablet-based Kitkit School features a comprehensive curriculum that spans from early childhood to early elementary periods. The app has a library of books for kids to visit and read, as well as colouring tools to encourage creativity and self-expression. After 15 months of field-testing the app in Tanzania, they observed that "children can

learn basic reading, writing and math with a tablet software on their own," Lee said.

Lee now dreams of "full inclusion" to bring this early childhood education app to all corners of the world, especially for the benefit of children in communities that are poor and inaccessible. She quoted a UNESCO report which stated that "250 million children cannot read or write" and "681 million children and adolescents in the world fail to learn minimum literacy and math skills".

During the question & answer session, Lee clarified that the learning app is intended for android devices and designed to work without Internet connectivity.

Asked about the challenges she faced, she pointed to the high investment cost for Kitkit. Millions of dollars were spent to develop a workable app.

Her focus now is on building partnerships to localise and customise the software to deliver education to various countries. She pointed out that she currently has her own team of 65 people, working with some 100 "contractors" all over the world. They include local teachers, illustrators, instructors and translators who are needed to build good programmes for different language learners.

Over 120 people attended the talk jointly organised by WOU, The HEAD Foundation (THF) and the Asian Women's Leadership Project Malaysia. Penang State Executive Councillor for Women & Family Development, Gender Inclusiveness & Non-Islamic Religious Affairs YB Chong Eng, and WOU Board of Governors Chairman Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon graced the event.

Also present were WOU Chief Executive and Vice Chancellor Prof Dr Lily Chan, THF's Director of Development CD Liang, and representatives from various educational institutions.



BECOME A QUALIFIED PRESCHOOL TEACHER WITH WOU

WOU's Diploma in Early Childhood Education (DECE) is a credential recognised by the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) that enables kindergarten and preschool teachers to be qualified to conduct professional teaching. Here are some helpful answers to common questions on the programme.

Q1: What is Early Childhood Education and why is it important?

Early Childhood Education (ECE) refers to services provided to children from birth to 8 years to facilitate their wholesome growth and development in safe, healthy and conducive surroundings. This is important as these early years are the period when children's brains develop at a rapid rate. Research has shown that good quality early childhood education programmes can reduce long-term risks of crime, delinquency, deviant behaviour and psychological problems, while also promoting positive academic and career outcomes.

Q2: Who should pursue DECE?

Childhood teachers need the necessary knowledge, skills and dispositions to be effective educators. These competencies are targeted in the DECE. This is why the Diploma is the minimum qualification mandated by the MOHE for all kindergarten teachers starting in 2020. The Ministry stipulates that existing teachers who do not have this qualification should strive to obtain the credential as soon as possible.

Q3: Can you highlight some of the courses under DECE?

The courses include:

- Psychology of Child Development
- Play and Development
- Nature and Environmental Awareness
- Health, Safety, Hygiene and Nutrition
- Law and Social Policies in ECE
- Management and Administration in ECE
- Partnering with Families and Community in ECE
- Observation and Assessment
- Creative Expression through Music, Movement and Drama
- Young Children with Special Needs

The courses cover basic theories, concepts and knowledge that educators need to have. They also learn how to set up an ECE centre and the related rules and regulations. Furthermore, there is the unique offering of electives in pedagogy of vernacular

language learning, specifically Malay, Mandarin or Tamil language pedagogies, to cater to vernacular ECE centres.

The courses adhere to the National Standards-based Preschool Curriculum (KSPK) and Permata Negara curriculum. The programme concludes with a semester-long Teaching Practicum that comprises practicum in both nursery and kindergarten settings.

Q4: Explain the skills learners will develop from this programme.

Learners will develop caring skills for children aged 4 to 6 years (kindergarten/preschool), and those below 4 years (nursery/childcare facilities). They learn how to plan and implement learning activities that are fun, engaging, interactive, child-centred and developmentally appropriate.

Other skills learnt are: providing a learning environment that considers children's safety and health; starting and managing an ECE centre; building relationships with parents and families; and developing professionalism and ethical practices.

Q5: What is the education pathway for students taking up DECE?

Graduates of DECE with required work experience can pursue our Master of Education programme. Those who do not have can enrol in our Bachelor's degree programmes, which include the Bachelor of Education (Hons) in Primary Education (BEPE) and the Bachelor of Arts (Hons) in English Studies (BAES), or in relevant programmes at other higher education institutions.

Q6: What are the career options/prospects for graduates of DECE?

Teacher/Carer in ECE centres (nursery, kindergarten, preschool); Owner/Principal/Director of ECE centres; Teacher's Aide in National Preschools; Facilitator in Government-sponsored and/or NGO-based organisations offering child-based services.

POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC REFORMS FOR PEACE AND HARMONY



A prominent socio-economic expert cautioned that the nation should not depend on economic markets alone to achieve shared and sustainable prosperity as the matter involves political well-being as well.

Datuk Dr Denison Jayasooria, an associate research fellow at the Institute of Ethnic Studies, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, emphasised that we must have good governance as well as checks and balances. "An economic reform must correspond with political reform," he said.

"None of the economic changes will be achievable without a strong democracy to offset the political power of concentrated wealth, the political elite and business elite," he added. "Achieving a fairer society requires greater equality of income and wealth, and greater equality in educational opportunities."

Dr Jayasooria also heads the Secretariat of Malaysia's All-Party Parliamentary Group on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and co-chairs the Malaysian CSO-SDG Alliance.

Speaking at a public talk on *Peace among Communities and Nations in Asia*, held under the WOU Speaker Series at the main campus on 13 March 2020, he also cautioned of greed, selfishness, exploitation and dishonesty among corrupt political and corporate leaders being impediments to national progress.

Dr Jayasooria cited five threats to peace and harmony, namely: market forces and economic inequality; religious intolerance and violence; dehumanising marginalised people; political ideologies; and shrinking democratic space.

He explained that market forces create economic inequality, leading to ethnic and religious conflicts. "But at the heart of it is a conflict over capital, markets, resources and the inequalities created," he said, stressing that Asia has high levels of inequality and poverty.

Elaborating on the dehumanising of the marginalised, he said people are made to feel inferior due to their ethnicity,

religion, gender or age, leading to sexual harassment and discrimination.

On the threat of political ideologies, he referred to growing right wing movements where one group is pitted against another. "It is often the politicians who fuel this when they focus the problems on race and religion," he said.

He touched on shrinking democracy and the demand for greater democratic space in many countries in Asia. "With democratic space, people have a voice, leaders are held accountable, the media provides checks and balances, and there are independent institutions or governments to check corruption, abuse of power, and give voice to the powerless," he said.

Dr Jayasooria also highlighted four case studies of community-based projects - Thai street vendors in Bangkok, Dalit youths in India, villagers in Yogyakarta and an indigenous community in Kudat, Sabah - to illustrate alternative business models to generate wealth.

He explained the projects' relevance to the United Nations' SDG Goal 16 on Peace. "We look at peace and harmony from the aspect of preventing conflict and promoting mutual understanding, but often at the root of conflicts are economic considerations," he said.

"If we don't address the business questions, then you have a problem. If there is no peace and security, you cannot carry out economic activities. And without sustainable development, there can be no peace."

Responding to a question on how to solve racial and religious issues, Dr Jayasooria stressed the need for the education system and families to teach people to treat one another as equals to halt prejudices. Over 150 people, including on-campus learning students of WOU, attended the talk organised by the School of Humanities & Social Sciences (SHSS).



WOU RIDES OVER COVID-19 STORM WITH FORTITUDE

When the Covid-19 pandemic hit the world, Wawasan Open University was at the forefront in meeting the unprecedented challenge faced by the higher education sector in Malaysia.

As a pioneer Open Distance Learning (ODL) institution, WOU was able to easily provide fully online mode of learning for the period of the Movement Control Order (MCO) and beyond. After all, its administrative, academic and operational matters were already online to a large extent.

Being an adept provider of versatile education, it extended the fully online learning to all students until 30 June 2020, with their safety and health uppermost in mind. This means that the University is not conducting any face-to-face instruction until then.

- For students in on-campus learning (OCL) mode, all face-to-face lectures were replaced with online lectures beginning March 26.
- For students in ODL mode, all face-to-face tutorials were replaced with online tutorials beginning March 21.
- All online lectures/tutorials for both ODL and OCL students will continue until 30 June.

TOPMOST FACILITY AND CARE FOR STUDENTS

To allay stress among learners, WOU regularly sent out notifications to its students about the teaching and learning facilities provided via its online mechanisms. It will always do what it does best – deliver quality higher education on technology-based platforms.

WOU has vast experience in delivering flexible and accessible ODL through its extensive virtual platforms, allowing students to study from the comfort of their homes or anywhere, at any time. They are able to continue learning with minimal disruption, even while in isolation.

Open distance learning is fast catching on as an emerging trend globally. This is spurred by increasing demand for graduates to be upskilled, and for workers to remain employable and marketable.

Chief Executive & Vice Chancellor Prof Lily Chan had assured in a press statement in April that the University's full online learning mode would be extended until the end of June.

"We will make use of our established ODL virtual learning platforms, student support facilities and other online conveniences to facilitate the teaching and learning of our students without compromising on quality," she said.

"We wish to also protect our students against Covid-19 by keeping their physical interactions and movements to a bare minimum," she added.

Prof Chan emphasised how WOU's versatile digital learning

ecosystem helps students stay connected with their tutors, classes and content, no matter where they are and at their own pace.

VIRTUAL LEARNING PLATFORMS

Students have been able to take significant advantage of WOU's extensive network of ODL learning and support facilities. The lectures and tutorials are implemented online as per the students' scheduled lecture/tutorial slots.

They have also had free access to the Learning Management System (LMS) on how to engage in these online sessions. The lectures and tutorials are conducted through platforms such as Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Skype, LMS and WhatsApp.

ORIENTATION/SEMESTER COMMENCEMENT SCHEDULES

WOU has been consistently monitoring the Covid-19 situation and actively taking measures to ensure its community is minimally impacted, especially in terms of teaching and learning.

Due to this, the orientation for the new ODL students in the March 2020 intake was postponed and subsequently held online on 4 April 2020.

The University similarly postponed the commencement of OCL studies for the Bachelor's degree programme for the May 2020 semester to May 18. Students were allowed to re-enrol for courses until 17 May 2020 by submitting re-enrolment forms online.

EXAMINATIONS AND ASSIGNMENTS

Due to the MCO extension, the University replaced all forthcoming proctored examinations for students in the OCL and ODL modes with alternative assessments in the form of online quizzes and assignments.

OCL students were given access to the individual online quiz for the February 2020 semester in their LMS over two days at the end of April. Their assignment was also made available on the LMS for submission in a two-week time frame.

For students on the ODL mode, all forthcoming proctored examinations for the January 2020 semester were similarly replaced with alternative assessments. The full list of courses along with the alternative assessments (online quiz/assignment) and revised dates were announced on the Student Portal and LMS by 27 April 2020.

The same was done for the OCL Diploma in Business Management (DBMG) students for the May 2020 semester, while following the guidelines of the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA). Their forthcoming proctored examinations (including supplementary examinations) for the January 2020 semester - scheduled originally for 1-16 June 2020 - were replaced with alternative assessments of online quiz and assignments.

The percentages contributed by the alternative assessments are the same as the originally scheduled proctored examinations.

LIBRARY SERVICES

Students were given access to WOU's extensive online resources through the library website. They could also renew library books online.

REACHING OUT TO STUDENTS

WOU kept its students regularly updated on important developing news and latest government directives, as well as on its learning support. This was done via emails and notifications posted on the University's website, student portal and LMS, and via its Facebook and Instagram pages.

Students were able to get in touch with their tutors through the online tutor forum, SMS, WhatsApp and telephone. They also continued to have access to such learner support facilities as the LMS, Student Portal, e-library, MyEnrolment, Student e-Forms system, etc.

To ensure optimal learning for students, WOU even carried out a student digital access survey for feedback on their Internet connectivity. Students were also notified about WOU's support for upgrades in Internet connectivity and the purchase of laptops to facilitate their learning.

The University also made available the contact details of the student relations staff who were available 24/7 for anyone needing help or having queries.



DEDICATED TUTORS PROVIDE EXCELLENT LEARNING DURING PANDEMIC

At a time of anxiety, they kept teaching steadily and resolutely. They provided content and wholehearted support. And they listened to their students patiently and devotedly.

When the Movement Control Order (MCO) came into force on 18 March 2020, and even long after its initial phase was over, the academics and academic support staff of WOU came out of their comfort zones to embrace the various learning technologies and applications, in order to deliver quality higher education.

A special mention must undoubtedly go to the tutors. They dedicated their time and resources fully in the teaching and learning of their students, enabling them to continue their studies via open distance learning (ODL) with minimal disruption.

Chief Executive & Vice Chancellor Prof Lily Chan underscored this in expressing her appreciation for the extraordinary efforts undertaken by the tutors. "Tough times demand tough, determined people. I want to say

what an inspiration the tutors have been to the students. They employed various learning tools, including Microsoft Teams, Zoom, etc. They stepped up to the fore to deliver their best to the students."

She noted that besides their role as tutors, many had family and other work obligations, and so their "hard work, creativity, innovation, commitment, encouragement, motivation and follow-ups had been invaluable towards the success of the students".

During the MCO and beyond, the University ensured that the students remained connected and continued with their studies, without compromising on quality. "We had gone completely online, with no physical contact whatsoever," Prof Chan said, adding, "The online tutorials and lectures were fine-tuned to help our students succeed in their studies."

Indeed, it was due in no small part to the resilience and ingenuity of the tutors that WOU was able to implement appropriate online mechanisms to facilitate the teaching and learning of all students.

Here are some comments by four students who attended weekend online tutorials during the MCO:



HAIRUDEEN BIN MUHSIN

Learning Skills for University Studies, Penang

I find that the online tutorial is very much similar to our face-to-face class tutorial. We still can interact with the tutor and the other students quite effectively. The material was presented in an informative manner during the online tutorial. One of the main advantages is that we are able to sit in our homes and follow the lessons without the need to travel.



KHON KAH EE

Technology-Integrated Education Course, Johor Bahru

We could see the tutor's facial expression because she was using video call. And we could also see everything on her screen clearly, shown through Skype. Thank you, Tutor.



REBECCA URAI AYON

Family and Society Course, and Malaysian Studies Course, Miri

I am grateful for technology. It assisted us in our communication, being away from one another but yet just as close as a

click away on our computer keypad. We could stay in touch with our studies and assignments, as we were guided during our online Zoom tutorials. It allowed me to stay on track as the content was effectively and clearly delivered by our tutor. I do not mind online meetings as we can attend class wherever we are as long as there is Internet.



ANANDA KARTHIGAYEN PALANIAPPAN

Learning Skills for University Studies Course, Penang

It was very helpful actually. We can have this once a month even after this Movement Control Order period is over, because it gathers everyone and clears everyone's doubts on the assignments as well. Can we have it again this week if everyone agrees?



WOU AND ICCHP ASIA PROVIDE PSYCHOLOGICAL AID DURING PANDEMIC

In an effort to support frontliners and others serving tirelessly during the Covid-19 pandemic, WOU worked with the International College of Clinical Hypnotherapy Practitioners (ICCHP) Asia to provide free psychological first aid to those needing help during this difficult time.

ICCHP Asia assigned a team of 16 professionals, including six psychiatrists, to offer emotional support over the phone from 1 April to 15 May 2020. Students needing counselling who called the WOU toll-free line were also directed to these experts.

"We partnered with WOU to give support to anyone across the country overcome by stress and anxiety at this time," said ICCHP Asia Regional Director Synthia Surin. "Fear and anxiety about Covid-19 can be overwhelming and cause strong emotions. Coping with stress will make individuals, the people they care about and the whole community stronger."

WOU Chief Executive and Vice Chancellor Prof Lily Chan remarked: "I believe that with our corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiative of emotional support and the various online learning assistance provided, we were able to help our students during this critical period."



Many doctors and healthcare workers, as well as uniformed personnel from the police, army and volunteer corps, were overwhelmed by the magnitude of the crisis. They had to additionally deal with personal and family challenges due to the necessary restraints on movements and proximity to prevent the virus from spreading. Those who experienced deaths in their families and those who survived were also deeply impacted.

Students who underwent remote online learning during the Movement Control Order (MCO) period were affected too. They faced the stress of studying, working and interacting with family members, all in an enclosed home environment. Having access to the counsellors certainly helped during this trying time.

PROTECT YOUR MENTAL HEALTH AMID COVID-19 CRISIS



There are concerns that the movement restrictions which must be practised due to the threat of the Covid-19 virus can give rise to social and psychological problems.

While we lament loss of normality in our lives by having to observe habits like social distancing, staying indoors and curtailing travel, there are various things we can do to cope with the anxiety and stress.

Here are some tips to achieve good mental health during this period:

- Think positively and cultivate thankfulness. This problem too will pass. Shift away from negative thoughts. Mental health therapists recommend keeping a "gratefulness journal" as it helps to reduce stress, improve self-esteem and foster resilience.
- Take breaks from the news with activities to relax or broaden your horizon. Keep updated but not fixated on the news. Unwind by reading, watching sitcoms, listening to music, learning something new, listening to inspiring messages, etc.

- Add physical activity to your routine, like taking the stairs, parking far away to walk more and doing rope-skipping. Physical activity lowers stress levels, helps regulate emotions, and improves sleep and mood.
- Calm your mind. Try meditating and observing mindfulness. These can improve your mental state and make you feel relaxed.
- Eat a good meal, drink lots of water and get proper rest. A nice sleep improves your feelings and health. Avoid substance abuse like alcohol, tobacco or drugs.
- Give support and stay connected. Check on your family and friends often through virtual communication tools (or visits, if permitted) so that everyone feels less isolated or lonely.



EDUCATION 4.0

THE GRAND WAY FORWARD

In recent times we have heard a lot about the Fourth Industrial Revolution (IR 4.0). What we have not heard about enough is how the demands of this new technological era should be met. Enter Education 4.0.

IR 4.0 has ushered a marked increase in the use of Internet-based technology and communication tools across industries, leading to wide-scale changes in jobs and careers.

Due to this, educational institutions have a responsibility to equip learners with the hard skills to take on technology-oriented jobs of the future. They also need to help provide soft skills like creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, collaboration, values and ethics.

Under the 12th Malaysia Plan (2020-2025), the Ministry of Higher Education wants to transform higher education to produce future-ready graduates in response to IR 4.0. Universities must teach students smart technologies, change their approach to learning, and use technology to better improve the students' learning experience.

HERE ARE THREE VITAL ASPECTS OF EDUCATION 4.0:

A. INDUSTRY-DRIVEN CURRICULUM

The curriculum should accommodate more skills related to human knowledge and personal interaction. It should provide greater opportunity for students to obtain real-world skills, such as critical thinking, that are relevant to future job opportunities.

In particular, a future-ready curriculum must incorporate the redesigning of teaching and learning processes. These must include alternative assessments that go beyond tests and cognitive level examinations, to avoid producing exam-focussed graduates with incompatible skills for the new work environment. To maximise the students' learning potential, they must be exposed to emerging technologies.

The courses need to be curated such that they feature what the industry needs. Examples of such courses are Data Science, Cloud Computing, Internet of Things (IoT), Artificial Intelligence and Robotic Engineering, along with humanistic courses like Analytical Thinking, Collaboration and Ethics.

B. NEW APPROACH TO TEACHING AND LEARNING

The teaching must inspire personalised, independent and deeper learning by employing useful tools such as personalised data, Massive Open Online Courses, virtual classrooms, remote labs, virtual labs and game-based learning.

There should be an enhanced use of blended, project-based and practice-oriented learning, with activities like



group projects, case studies, and real-world scenario assignments. Instead of acquiring a single set of skills for a specific job role, learners must be able to study a wide set of skills to apply to each scenario.

The assessment and credentialing should be changed to produce future-ready talents. The system must move away from the current examination patterns of memorising and writing down information to assessing students through practical and experiential learning-based projects or field works.

C. REFINED EDUCATION STRUCTURE AND MANAGEMENT

A culture of continuous learning and constant upskilling is paramount for workers to thrive in the IR 4.0 environment. This means institutions must be required to recognise and certify workplace-based learning. University collaborations with the industry must be vigorously promoted to co-develop curricula and make learning experiences more applicable to IR 4.0.

Academic programmes will need to be restructured for more flexible, practice-oriented, competency-based learning, with new systems of accreditation and certification. It should be noted that the Malaysian Qualifications Agency has expanded its accreditation system to allow for micro-credentials and professional certifications.

The application of big data analytics in teaching and learning will help identify and aid at-risk students to prevent failure/attrition.

WOU WELCOMES NEW OCL STUDENTS WITH VALUABLE ADVICE

New students of the on-campus learning (OCL) mode from the February 2020 intake were offered some invaluable advice as they embarked on the eventful journey towards a degree at the University.

Speaking at the students' orientation session at the seaside campus in Penang on 7 February, WOU Chief Operating Officer cum Registrar Yeong Sik Kheong exhorted them to acquire knowledge, cultivate ethical behaviour and learn good communication skills. He also reinforced WOU's tagline, 'Think Tomorrow', inspiring students to prepare for the future.

"Acquire your knowledge. Think about your future employability in the market," Yeong said. "Or if you want to be an entrepreneur, think about how to acquire knowledge to be self-employed, start your own business, start your own venture."

He also wanted them to develop good behaviour while at university such that it becomes their guardrail in life. "Honesty, accountability, responsibility. The University is not just about a getting a degree, but also about building up your behaviour and character."

Stressing on the importance of communication, Yeong told the students to expand their social interactions and build up leadership skills at the University. "You can be very technically competent, but if you are unable to communicate or express yourself, or you live in isolation, that is a drawback."

Earlier, freshman Boonvanraj Jegathesan, 21, from the Bachelor of Business (Hons) in Management programme, led the new students in the oath-taking ceremony.



▲ Yeong sharing his insights with the students.



◀ Cheah speaking to a group of participants.



▲ Trainer (centre) with the participants.

STAFF TRAINING TO RENDER **SHINING** CUSTOMER SERVICE

In any industry, the frontliners of an organisation play an indispensable role in projecting its good image, and earning the confidence and respect of consumers.

In an effort to continue fostering outstanding customer relations with students and interested learners, WOU organised a training programme on Customer Service Excellence for 23 of its Regional Centre staff members on 27 and 28 February 2020. The workshop held at the main campus was conducted by veteran corporate trainer Andrew Cheah from Trainmode, who has amassed some 30 years of experience in consulting and training clients from diverse industries.

Cheah delved into the importance of excellent customer service for business success while cautioning about the cost of having poor customer service. It is vital, he said, to know your customers, their needs and expectations.

He stressed that product or service knowledge as well as good communication skills are needed for excellent customer service. One should also have good listening skills and questioning techniques to obtain useful information from customers.

Other topics covered included delivering timely service; making first good impression and building good rapport with customers; responding appropriately to customers; resolving customers' issues and going the extra mile; and working to calm upset customers while identifying the related causes.

GLOBAL BUKA RESEARCH EFFORT 'OPENS' IN MALAYSIA

An important global research project supported by the European Union (EU) on *Advancing Equity and Access to Higher Education through Open and Distance Learning* has successfully taken off after its first meeting was hosted by WOU in Malaysia.

With funding worth almost a million Euros under the EU's Better Universities and Knowledge for All (BUKA) scheme, the three-year project sees a collaboration between eight institutions. Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic & Educational Technology) Prof Zoraini Wati Abas led the WOU team in partnership with the Tampere University of Applied Sciences of Finland and the others to secure the grant. Each participating university has been allocated a percentage of the grant based on their job tasks and responsibilities.

The other European institution involved is Dublin City University of Ireland. The rest, all from Southeast Asia, are WOU, Open University Malaysia, Universitas Terbuka (Indonesia), Universitas Negeri Padang (Indonesia), University of the Philippines Open University and Mindanao State University-Iligan Institute of Technology (the Philippines).



► Overview of the meeting.

WOU organised the inaugural meeting at Penang Parkroyal Resort from 4 to 6 February 2020. It focussed on working out the research agenda, the project timeline and the collaborative approach among the partner institutions.

Over the next two years the BUKA project will focus on developing two interventions on Inclusive Instructional Design and Learning Analytics. On its part WOU is required to set up a learning studio to conduct studies on these two interventions, with the pilot study expected to commence sometime this year at the main campus in Penang.

WOU Chief Executive and Vice Chancellor Prof Lily Chan presented an overview of the University during the meeting and took the opportunity to mingle with the participants.

COLLABORATION TO BENEFIT WOU, SAYS PROJECT LEADER

Some 22 academics involved in the BUKA (Better Universities and Knowledge for All) project, hailing from seven partner institutions, visited the WOU main campus on 7 February 2020.

On hand to welcome them was fellow participant and leader of the WOU research team, Deputy Vice Chancellor



▼ Dr Marko Teräs of TAMK introduces his colleagues (from left) Paula, Dr Hanna and Esa.

(Academic & Educational Technology) Prof Zoraini Wati Abas. The guests, along with several WOU academics and academic support staff, were briefed on the research project they are jointly undertaking titled *Advancing Equity and Access to Higher Education through Open and Distance Learning* (ODL) by project leader Dr Marko Teräs.

Dr Teräs, who is with the School of Pedagogical Innovations at Tampere University of Applied Sciences (TAMK), Finland, spoke on the increasing role of ODL in the globally networked world. He also highlighted how WOU can benefit from the project through transfer of technology and capacity-building. Accompanying him were his colleagues from TAMK - project specialist Paula Ranne, Principal Lecturer Dr Hanna Teräs, and Senior Lecturer Esa Kujansuu.

The other international participants included Chancellor Prof Sukarno Tanggol, Vice Chancellor for Planning and Development/Director for International Affairs Prof Gaudencio Jr Petalcorin, and College of Education Dean Dr Amelia Buan from Mindanao State University-Iligan Institute of Technology (MSU-IIT); and Prof Daryono Daryono, Head of Research and Innovation Centre from Universitas Terbuka of Indonesia.

Dublin City University was represented by Prof Mark Brown, Director of National Institute of Digital Learning, and Dr James Brunton, who is its Programme Chair/Director.

FOUR MORE WOU DEGREES GAIN RECOGNITION

The Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) has granted full accreditation to four open distance learning (ODL) and on-campus learning (OCL) programmes at WOU. An official announcement on this was made by the agency on 28 February 2020 following a series of successful full accreditation visits to the main campus by its assessors.

The newly accredited degree programmes are:

- i) Bachelor of Information Technology (Hons) in Networking (BITW) - OCL
- ii) Bachelor of Business (Hons) in Human Resource Management (BBHR) - ODL
- iii) Bachelor of Technology (Hons) in Mechatronics (BTME) - ODL
- iv) Bachelor of Information Systems (Hons) (BIFS) - ODL

The BITW and BBHR are offered by the School of Business & Administration (SBA), while the BTME and BIFS are from the School of Science & Technology (SST).

Sharing the good news, WOU Chief Executive and Vice Chancellor Prof Lily Chan lauded the painstaking preparation

and effort put in by WOU staff from the both the academic and administrative support units. "Well done! It is a good morale booster for all," she said.



▲ More SBA programmes receive full MQA accreditation.

CIMA MULLS POTENTIAL COLLABORATION WITH WOU

The Southeast Asian head of the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants (CIMA) recently led a small top-level regional delegation to WOU to share latest developments and discuss potential collaborations. CIMA is the world's leading and largest professional body of management accountants.

Ginny Lim was accompanied by CIMA Malaysia Country Manager Rushdan Roslan and Coordinator for Business Development Vinn Lim Chee Yeaw. Their call at the main campus on 14 February 2020 was part of CIMA's initiative to visit educational partners to provide latest updates on management accounting.

They held a meeting with WOU Chief Executive and Vice Chancellor Prof Lily Chan and a few academics from the School of Business & Administration (SBA), including Senior Lecturer Dr Loo Choo Hong, to discuss possible cooperation between CIMA and the University.

Significantly, Vinn Lim also met up with WOU's top accounting achievers to counsel on how they can enter the CIMA A-Star programme. This is a fast-track option offered to high achievers from top local universities to allow them

▼ (From left to right) Rushdan, Ginny Lim and Vinn Lim of CIMA with SBA Senior Lecturer Dr Loo Choo Hong.



to sit for only one final examination, which is Strategic Case Study, to become Chartered Global Management Accountant (CGMA) designation holders.

With this privilege extended to WOU, selected final year accounting students and accounting alumni (restricted to within 5 years of graduating) that have achieved a CGPA of 3.5 and above, are eligible for the fast-track route. CIMA will grant these students and graduates a maximum exemption of 15 exams from the total of 16 examinations available.

FROM LEGO BLOCKS TO CUTTING-EDGE SYSTEMS AND DESIGNS

Since primary school, Pathuma Raj Arumugam's ambition was to be an engineer due to his fascination with robotics and automation. "What started off as building blocks and Legos became LEDs and resistors," remembers the 26-year-old who grew up in Chemor. "I like to learn how things work and the processes involved before raw materials become final products."

Pathuma fulfilled much of this dream when he became an Assistant Engineer at Yamaha Electronics Manufacturing in Perak in May 2017. He has diplomas in electrical and electronic engineering from Northumbria University, UK, and a private institution in Penang.

A colleague introduced him to WOU and he enrolled in the Bachelor of Technology (Hons) in Electronics (BTEL) programme in September 2017. He found that he was able to apply what he was learning to his functions at work. "For example, designing and debugging test fixtures for new



◀ With his mum, Pathmani Doraisinggam

products require a certain amount of technical knowledge which I have gained through my work and the subjects under BTEL."

Pathuma is in fact inspired to pursue his studies even further with a master's degree programme either in Electronics or Business Management, to gain deeper knowledge and boost his career opportunities.

He enjoys the open distance learning mode at WOU as it allows him to work and meet his household responsibilities while studying. He is particularly motivated to achieve his goal so that he can give his parents and two brothers what they desire.

"My mum has been crucial to my studies as I can't recall how many times she has motivated, comforted and cheered me on," he said. His mother is such a strong supporter that she even gets a copy of his university schedule every semester to remind him about due dates and lab sessions.



▼ At his workplace.

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