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## EDITOR'S NOTE

It is no longer viable for businesses to remain static. Digital transformation, a trend accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic, continues to impact our workplaces and lifestyles. Change is inevitable; change is the key. Employers who still fail to update their work environment and procedures will be left out in the cold, risking losses and even cessation of operations.

The future of work requires members of the workforce to continuously upskill and reskill. This has inevitably created a market demand for short-term courses which have the potential to deliver specific knowledge and skills to make workers future-ready.

Keeping pace with the prevalent trend, WOU will begin to offer some micro-credential courses from September 2022. Each can be pursued as a standalone course, or it can be stacked together with other courses for an eventual tertiary qualification (*refer to pages 8 and 9*). Learners may also take any on-demand, skills-centric micro-credentials towards a professional certification.

The University has consistently been mindful of supporting and reaching out to relevant groups, undertaking collaborative efforts to impact and enrich lives. Among others, we co-organised a talk on HIV/AIDS with Pemadam, hosted career-related presentations featuring industry experts, and participated in the state-level Penang's International Women's Day celebration.

In line with the spirit of corporate social responsibility, WOU not only donated refurbished desktop computers to Phor Tay High School but it is also mentoring and training the school's pupils to enhance their digital competency.

Following a courtesy call from the Vice Chancellor of Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), WOU is hopeful and looks forward to collaborating with the APEX university on projects for mutual benefit. Both universities have a physical presence in the Creative Digital District (CD<sup>2</sup>) of George Town, thus opening opportunities for partnerships with industries to create a pipeline of talent for Penang.

As businesses and academic institutions open up following the lengthy pandemic, and as society returns to near normalcy under the endemic phase, success awaits employers and workers who embrace the changes, challenges and opportunities brought on by digital transformation.

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## USM TOP MANAGEMENT VISITS WOU'S DOWNTOWN CAMPUS, EYES FUTURE COLLABORATION

WOU recently welcomed a top-level delegation from Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) to its amazing new downtown campus at China Street Ghaut, located in the heart of the Creative Digital District (CD<sup>2</sup>) of George Town.

The visiting party led by USM Vice Chancellor Prof Dato' Dr Faisal Rafiq Mahamd Adikan on 9 March 2022 paid a courtesy call on Vice Chancellor Prof Dr Lily Chan, engaging in a pleasant and fruitful discussion over various pertinent areas of interest.

Among the eight-member USM team were the deputy vice chancellors – Prof Dr Azlinda Azman (Student Development Affairs and Alumni), Prof Dato' Ir Dr Abdul Rahman Mohamed (Research and Innovation), Prof Dr Md Roslan Hashim (Sustainability and Institutional Development) and Prof Dato' Dr Narimah Samat (Academic and International Affairs).

Accompanying the academic leaders were Senior Assistant Registrar Marziana Mohamed Alias, Senior Deputy Registrar (Academic Division) Ramli Osman and Deputy Registrar (Office of the Vice Chancellor) Mohd Rashid Abdul Rejab.

They found the newly renovated Bangunan Wawasan, which houses WOU's School of Digital Technology (DiGiT),



◀ Prof Chan presents a memento from WOU to Prof Faisal.

as offering a conducive learning space while retaining its heritage elements.

USM and WOU are neighbours in the CD<sup>2</sup> as the former also has a base here. Both are also the only two major universities with main campuses in Penang.

Prof Faisal remarked to Prof Chan that due to the current demand for online learning, there is a need to have "a robust and reliable infrastructure and technology to support the platform", and this is where WOU's strength lies. Both varsity heads look forward to more collaboration in the future for mutual benefit.

## STATE WOMEN'S DAY CELEBRATION SEES CALL TO COUNTER DISCRIMINATION AND STEREOTYPING

A WOU academic was among a few inspiring women leaders who spoke at the International Women's Day celebration (IWD 2022) at Penang City Park on 5 March 2022, joining a collection of voices to highlight the need for gender parity.

School of Business & Administration (SBA) senior lecturer Dr Lalitha Ramasamy called for both men and women to act against gender stereotyping and inequality, while also advocating the safeguarding of women's well-being and interests.

"Everyone deserves to have access to the same opportunities, without being subjected to sexist discrimination," she said. "We are here to find a common ground so that we may help bring new dignity and respect to women and girls. Let's Break the Bias!"

#BreakTheBias is the campaign theme for IWD 2022, in line with the focus on ensuring a more inclusive workplace and society so as to eliminate prejudices based on gender.

Over 100 people attended the state-level event officiated by Penang Deputy Chief Minister 1, Dato' Ir Haji Ahmad Zakiyuddin Abdul Rahman. In his speech, he stressed that women comprise 49% of the voting population in the state,

but still lag behind when it comes to equitable rights in politics and the economy.

"As a responsible government, the State Government will play its role in providing equal access for women and men especially in the political and economic sectors," he said.



Meanwhile, State Executive Councillor for Social Development and Non-Islamic Religious Affairs, Chong Eng, asserted that many women are now holding top positions in organisations and venturing to become entrepreneurs. She cited data from the Department of Statistics Malaysia that 47.5% of the country's undergraduates in 2021 were women.

◀ Dr Lalitha at the state-level launch.



# DBA STUDENTS UNDERTAKE REAL-WORLD RESEARCH TO BENEFIT SOCIETY

Four Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) candidates at WOU explain their motivations and aspirations in fusing academic approaches with observations and findings from their own career sectors. In the process, they create research papers that can be used as guidance towards improving organisational performances for the betterment of industry and the public.



*The medical device industry is highly regulated and sensitive, where the risk, in terms of the product and service provided, is a key aspect to the organisation, users and customers.*

## TACKLING A VITAL BUT OFT-NEGLECTED STUDY OF THE MEDICAL DEVICE INDUSTRY

As a Senior Quality Management Manager, part of **Gurjit Singh Harbans Singh's** job at B Braun Medical Industries is dealing with risk management. The German company is a leading manufacturer of effective solutions for healthcare. Its plant in Penang, established in 1972, is its first manufacturing site in the Asia-Pacific region.

"The medical device industry is highly regulated and sensitive, where the risk, in terms of the product and service provided, is a key aspect to the organisation, users and customers," said Gurjit, 48, from Butterworth. However, there are currently limited studies on risk management within this industry, particularly in the Malaysian market.

His DBA dissertation is thus titled *Impact of Risk Management in Medical Device Industries in Malaysia*. He aims to help medical device firms, supply chain vendors who provide materials and service to them, and other MNCs, by studying the planning and implementation of risk management in the context of risk reduction.

"I will first share my findings on best practices and recommendations of a risk management-based model with B Braun, then with our supply chains, suppliers, and partners since we outsource production to other medical device industries as well," he said.

Gurjit also took up the DBA programme for self-recognition. He is keen to have the prefix 'Dr' to his name. He also wants to be a role model for his daughters, aged 11 and 17. He aims to illustrate that "learning must be continuous, no matter the age" while gaining knowledge and skills for personal and career growth.

## DEDICATED TO HELPING TECH COMPANIES ACHIEVE BETTER GOVERNANCE

**Matin Ng Chin Liang**, 30, the deputy CEO of a technology firm at the Batu Kawan industrial area in Penang, is a firm believer of good corporate governance. When he was elevated to the position at UWC Bhd in August 2019, he proceeded to enrol in the DBA programme at WOU the very next month, to fulfil his dream of attaining a doctorate.

The focus of his DBA thesis is examining the relationship between corporate governance and technology firms in the nation's emerging markets. Titled *The Relationship of Corporate Governance and Business Performance: a Study of Technology Firms in Emerging Markets - the Malaysian Case*, it entails research that takes into account real-world processes in this field.

"Malaysia has a very active capital market. Corporate governance is becoming highly significant in light of a slew of corporate crises in the country," he said. His research covers factors such as characteristics of a company's board, publicly traded company ownerships, and how these qualities affect the success of the company.

He chose to concentrate on technology firms as they presently experience tremendous growth. Moreover, he has worked in one for some years now. Prior to becoming UWC Bhd's deputy CEO, he was its head of corporate finance for two years.

Ng holds an MSc in Accounting and Finance from University of Exeter, UK. He believes Penang is on the right path to achieving and reclaiming its identity as the 'Silicon Valley of the East'. "Penang was able to secure RM76.8 billion of foreign direct investments in manufacturing last year," he noted with pride. "And that is where my research comes from."



*Malaysia has a very active capital market. Corporate governance is becoming highly significant in light of a slew of corporate crises in the country.*



### DOING HIS PART FOR THE NATION'S MEGA RAIL PROJECT

**Cheng Kim Bong**, a veteran engineer from Selangor, has good reason to be intrigued by the challenges plaguing the construction of the East Coast Rail Link (ECRL) costing over RM50 billion.

Cheng, 70, is the Chief Resident Engineer overseeing one of the sections of the electric railway network project, which is expected to reduce travel time from Gombak in Selangor to Kota Bharu in Kelantan to just four hours.

A graduate of WOU's Commonwealth Executive MBA, Cheng enrolled in the DBA programme in 2019 for self-satisfaction. Aptly, his doctoral thesis is titled *The Relationship of TQM Practices and Project Performance with Risk Management as Moderator: a Study of ECRL Project in Malaysia*. It seeks solutions to barriers in the path of total quality management, and the challenges to implementation, including shortage of skilled workers.

*As I am involved in the rail project, I want to investigate what is causing the problems with implementation, and find solutions.*

"As I am involved in the rail project, I want to investigate what is causing the problems with implementation, and find solutions," he explained. "The findings can contribute to literature in areas like lean management, waste reduction and sustainability, and contribute to industry by reducing rework, enhancing customer satisfaction, increasing competitiveness, preventing accidents, improving safety, and reducing maintenance cost."

"Saving massive re-work, which leads to delays, would benefit the rail project and lead to overall efficiency until completion," he added. The ECRL project commenced in 2017, with the completion deadline of 2024 now extended to December 2026.

Due to family commitments, Cheng had declined a grant to study for a PhD following his First-Class Honours degree in civil engineering in 1980. His current pursuit of a DBA surely compensates for the missed opportunity of the past.

### HELPING START-UPS, VENTURE CAPITALISTS FILL A VITAL MISSING LINK

**Rina Yeoh Siew Lian**, 49, of Penang, believes that if start-up companies incorporate environmental, social and governance (ESG) factors into their business strategies and operations, their investors would be able to build the firms more decently rather than merely trying to rake in profits.

"ESG is unquestionably on the rise, and there are several new research areas and gaps to be addressed," said the co-founder and managing partner of Ficus Venture Capital. "There are aspects that have yet to be incorporated into the existing due diligence checklist of large firms and funds."

"I would like to see if I can propose a framework that the venture capital funds or even start-up companies may use as a guideline," she said. Her thesis is thus titled *The Impact of Board Diversity and CEO Tenure in Influencing Environmental, Social and Governance Disclosure in Malaysia*.

It focuses on the impact of ESG on a venture fund's investment report and whether it affects the investors' portfolio. She said venture capitalists usually invest in development stage companies that have proven their minimum viable product, have gained market momentum, and need capital to expand.

Yeoh holds an MBA in International Business. She also sits on the Board of Directors of the Malaysia External Trade Development Corporation (MATRADE), bringing over 25 years of work experience in the corporate and entrepreneurial sector.

"It is preferable that you are aware of the ESG framework before incorporating it into your company strategy to plan your business accordingly," she said. "From an entrepreneur's standpoint, you must recognise that it is no longer simply about offering low-cost or high-quality products; it is now about the whole story and if you still exist 10 years down the road."



*From an entrepreneur's standpoint, they must recognise that it is no longer simply about offering low-cost or high-quality products; it is now about the whole story and if you still exist 10 years down the road.*

# DEPRESSION CAN BE OVERCOME FOR AN IMPACTFUL LIFE, SAYS PSYCHOLOGIST

Many sufferers of depression hide their condition due to the social stigma associated with it, and so fail to receive timely support and treatment. What they may not realise is that it is not all 'doom and gloom' for them and others who have the same problem.

Victims of depression can include professionals like doctors, lawyers and teachers. But just as personalities like Abraham Lincoln and Winston Churchill, people can battle depression to lead successful and impactful lives.

This was highlighted by counselling psychologist Wong Siew Lee during her online public talk on *Getting to Know Depression: Helping Yourself and Those You Care For* on 19 March 2022. The event was organised by WOU's School of Education, Humanities & Social Sciences (SEHS).

Depression, Wong explained, is caused by external pressures such as losing a loved one, job loss, divorce, and other traumatic events (e.g. car crash, robbery). There are also internal factors like biochemical imbalance in the brain and genetics (e.g. family history of mental illness).

Elaborating on the matter, Wong said that depression involves multiple symptoms that continue for more than two weeks. They are:

- Not caring about anything anymore
- Being uncharacteristically sad, irritable, short-tempered, critical or moody
- Losing interest in work, hobbies and other pleasurable activities
- Talking about feeling "helpless" or "hopeless"
- Having a bleak or negative outlook on life
- Frequently complaining of aches and pains
- Feeling tired and drained all the time
- Withdrawing from friends, family and social activities
- Sleeping less or oversleeping
- Eating more or less than usual, and gaining or losing weight
- Being indecisive, forgetful, disorganised and 'out of it'
- Drinking in excess, or abusing drugs like prescription sleeping pills and painkillers

Wong stressed that people do not realise depression is a "very treatable illness that can be managed". The treatments include lifestyle changes, psychological therapy/counselling, and medications like depressants prescribed by psychiatrists. "Talking to qualified professionals can help change their negative thinking



▲ Timely assistance for those with depression is critical, said Wong.

pattern and improve their coping skill so that they are better equipped to deal with life stresses," she explained.

Wong also said that being a compassionate listener to depressed individuals is more important than giving advice. "We become their outlet, helping them contain their negative thoughts," she added. "Get them to talk, and listen without judgement. Keep expressing care, no matter how many times they push you away."

If you think a person is having suicidal thoughts, raise the concern with her and help her seek professional support immediately. "Remember suicidal thoughts are only temporary," she said. "But take any suicidal tendencies seriously. Let them know you care and that the way they feel now will change."

Wong also cautioned that a person at immediate risk of suicide should not be left alone. Initiative should be taken to inform the next of kin, provide support, remove dangerous objects, and encourage the person to get extra help (such as from Befrienders).

Here are eight self-help tips to become calm and help recover from depression: have a pet; perform regular physical exercise; get enough sunlight and fresh air; explore your creativity (e.g. cooking, gardening); keep friends and family in your life; make time for mindful relaxation (e.g. breathing exercise); become involved in the local community; and enhance your emotional intelligence (e.g. write a mood journal to vent negative emotions).

# CAREER ADVANTAGES WITH THE EVOLUTION OF CONTACTLESS FINANCIAL SERVICES

A fast-growing industry with promising career opportunities, financial technology (fintech) plays an indispensable role in helping financial institutions to better serve consumers and improve user experience.

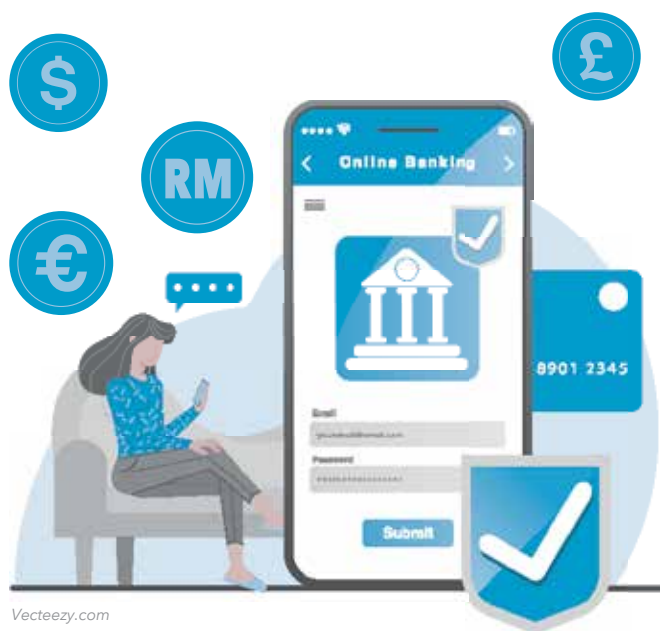
With fintech, consumers interact directly with the technology. They are able to access the financial services anywhere, anytime, and in any electronic device, said William Lim, the Founder & CEO of TriAset, which provides solutions to financial institutions and large corporates.

He gave examples of where fintech is being applied - internet banking, trading platforms, internet insurance, e-wallet, buy-now-pay-later schemes, and the robo-advisor (automated investment management advisor).

"Fintech is very huge, and these are only a few samples," he said in his talk titled *A Career in Tech for Finance and FinTech: a Must Consideration in Today's Economy* at the WOU main campus on 23 February 2022. The event, organised by the School of Digital Technology (DiGiT), was attended mostly by WOU students. Also present was the School's senior lecturer Dr Lee Heng Wei.

Lim explained that fintech is a financial services innovation in which technology is used to create new financial services, delivered through digital technology.

"Fintech involves the front-end financial solutions which you, as a consumer, can access yourself (e.g. internet banking) and are able to see what is going on," he said. "The back-end technology and processes, which consumers are unable to see, is Tech for Finance."



Vecteezy.com



"Fintech would not be as effective if it were not for Tech for Finance, which is the engine that drives the processes and provides information to fintech."

In Tech for Finance, technology is used in digitising traditional financial services, and consumers do not have direct interaction with technology as "everything is done behind the scenes", he said.

Using an analogy, he equated the car engine to Tech for Finance and the dashboard to fintech. The engine is hidden and supplies information to the dashboard, but without the engine the car cannot move.

"When you go to the bank to open a savings account, you approach the teller, who keys in your details. This information is channelled to the bank's back office where they have access to software application technology or solutions to process as needed, and print out your statement," he elaborated.

There are now many technology companies that provide database management and solutions to banks, which enable the institutions to process the information that they have, for better customer service.

Lim, an accountant by education, said that students keen on a career in technology may come from any educational background as long as they have the drive, interest and passion for technology.

Among the career options in technology are data analyst, cyber security professional, software application programmer, financial engineer, software architect, business analyst, frontend developer, backend developer and database administrator.



# WOU OFFERS MICRO-CREDENTIALS FOR PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

## WHAT ARE MICRO-CREDENTIALS?

As industrial trends and technologies evolve in the 21st century, the knowledge and skills needed for work are continually transforming. Micro-credentials, or short duration courses on specific subjects, offer a flexible learning pathway for acquiring or updating competencies to match the changing needs of industry, society and nation.

They deliver specialised skills, particularly for learners who prefer not to pursue full-fledged degrees or want to supplement their conventional university qualification with skills-centric courses to add to their professional portfolio.

Students can stack up credits from various micro-credentials towards a diploma or degree.

## BENEFITS OF WOU'S MICRO-CREDENTIALS

- **Continual professional development** – gain from

upskilling and reskilling to cope with changing job market demands.

- **Stand out in the crowd** – achieve improved employability and better career advancement opportunities.
- **Impressive record of workplace-relevant competencies** – possess verified and validated proficiency in specific skills and abilities.
- **Stackable** – amass credits from different micro-credentials to transfer to an accredited WOU programme, or use the competencies acquired to gain professional certification.
- **Flexible learning pathway** – enjoy courses that are delivered via online or hybrid learning, and which are easily customised to fit individual and industry needs.

## MICRO-CREDENTIALS FOR WORK COMPETENCY

Pursuing micro-credentials helps you to update your skills and stay competitive. Below are stackable WOU micro-credential courses being offered in the next few months:

### SCHOOL OF SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

#### 1. CAD and BIM in Construction

Learn the applications of Computer-Aided Design and Building Information Modelling, e.g. visualise 3-D objects/structures, and prepare or modify mechanical, electrical, and civil and structural engineering drawings in construction projects.

#### 2. Circuit Theory I

Recognise and analyse the various aspects of DC electrical circuits.

#### 3. Analogue Electronics

Insights into the basic properties and applications of the operational amplifier and power amplifiers, which are important for designing electronic circuits.

#### 4. Manufacturing Technology

Understand manufacturing processes, current environmental and safety issues, and the use of automation in assembly processes, quality assurance, testing and inspection.

### SCHOOL OF BUSINESS & ADMINISTRATION

#### 1. Principles of Management

Basic concepts and what are the roles, functions and behaviours of managers in a modern-day business organisation.

#### 2. Fundamentals of Marketing

Basic concepts of marketing and what are its functions and roles in an organisation, as well as product, pricing, distribution and promotion.

#### 3. Introduction to Information Systems

Learn about information systems in organisations, and the need for good information in decision-making.

#### 4. Entrepreneurship Development

Understand the principles and concepts of entrepreneurship, and the systematic methods for getting business ideas. Look into the preparation of business plan, leading you to develop entrepreneurial skills.

#### 5. Principles and Practice of Management

Basic management concepts, and the roles, functions and behaviours required of managers in a modern-day business organisation.

#### 6. Principles of Marketing

Learn the fundamental concepts of marketing and the associated functions and roles in an organisation, including insights into product, pricing, distribution and promotion.

#### 7. Financial Management

Foundation of financial concepts, tools, theories and practices. You learn the basic computation methods commonly used in financial management.

#### 8. Basic Accounting

Grasp the essential concepts and principles of accounting, and how to prepare books of accounts and financial statements, and do financial reporting.





## SCHOOL OF EDUCATION, HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES

### 1. Introduction to Pedagogy in Early Childhood Education

Learn to develop effective pedagogical practices for childhood education, and strategies to plan effective teaching and learning for young learners. E.g. how to identify lesson objectives and learning outcomes; select and develop appropriate learning activities and assessment tools; and evaluate effectiveness of the teaching.

### 2. Development and Play in Early Childhood Education

Delve into the important role of play in early childhood education and its relationship to children's learning and development, such as how play helps young children with cognitive development, social-emotional competence, physical development and health.

### 3. Technology in Early Childhood Education

Discover the importance of technology in early childhood education, and how to use appropriate technology to plan activities for children's development.

### 4. Creative Expressions through Music, Movement and Drama

Learn to develop pedagogical skills to stimulate children's creativity through dance, movement and drama, and to plan, organise and implement activities for children of different age groups and those with special needs.

### 5. Management and Administration in Early Childhood Education

Helpful to manage and administer early childhood programmes and centres. Know how to professionally and efficiently run the centres, and pick up communication, critical thinking, entrepreneurship and leadership/managerial skills.

### 6. Introduction to Psychology

Learn about human perception, cognition, learning, emotion, motivation, personality and behaviour, and the complexities of human relationships in personal, social, and vocational settings, as well as how to improve your mental health and productivity.

### 7. History and Systems of Psychology

Study the development of modern psychology and how psychology became a scientific field. Examine the influence of Western philosophy, theology, and historical revolution in scientific thinking.

### 8. Cognitive Psychology

Understand this issue with topics like brain anatomy, perception, attention, visual imagery, and knowledge representation. Discover the relationship between brain function and motor control, in relation to problem-solving, decision-making, reasoning and language formation.

### 9. Psychology of Adult Development

Insights into adult development, including the physical changes, health, social interactions, family, education work, retirement, death and dying.

### 10. Principles of Social Research

Learn to conduct scientific studies in social sciences e.g. identify research problems and questions, literature review, research methods, data analysis and present research findings.

### 11. Counselling Theory and Practice

Find out how counselling can help people handle problems, the different approaches for individual and group counselling, and the ethical issues involved.

## Gain professional recognition with on-demand micro-credentials

WOU can readily customise course content to suit the various industries according to client demand. The University also offers on-demand micro-credentials – paving the path to a professional certification – in such disciplines as technology, manufacturing, business administration, psychology and early childhood education.

For enquiries, contact: [microcredential.registry@wou.edu.my](mailto:microcredential.registry@wou.edu.my)

# THE CHALLENGE OF TALENT CREATION FOR EMERGING JOBS AND GLOBAL MARKETS

A recent Coursera webinar on 'Building the Talent Pipeline for 2022 and Beyond' saw panellists deliberating over how technological changes are transforming both the nature of jobs and the hiring of right talents for the workplace.

We feature two stalwarts from the higher education and technology consulting sectors who shared their insights on this delicate issue that affects workers and industries worldwide today.

## IMPORTANCE OF BEING EQUIPPED WITH DIGITAL AND HUMAN SKILLS



The process of learning through online platforms must help students to pick up digital skills and undertake continuous learning in the future. Prof Dr Lily Chan, Chief Executive and Vice Chancellor of WOU, stressed that this is particularly so as fully online learning or hybrid learning has become the norm in the last two years.

She stressed on how critical it is for universities to equip learners with both digital and interpersonal skills, including communication and writing. "Even if you have digital skills, if you cannot communicate or write well, you are already losing out," she said.

All universities in Malaysia, she noted, offer foundation courses that impart important skills, like those on decision-making and workplace communication skills available at WOU.

"As a university, besides the conventional degree, we have to complement it with short courses, such as micro-credentials, which must be continuously updated, towards building life skills," she said. She pointed out that by the time a learner graduates with a degree, the workplace would have evolved.

Prof Chan also highlighted that peer-to-peer learning can help significantly in building human skills. At WOU, students who are mostly working adults learn from one another during discussions and tutorials. She added that talent can be nurtured in local regions, and companies can then access them from across the world. She foresees this to be the trend for building the talent pipeline beyond 2022.

## MAKE LEARNING COMPELLING AND NURTURE RIGHT TALENTS

Every business needs to have a learning culture and a learning ecosystem to allow the workforce to continually upgrade. According to Ritu Chakrabarti, Global Head of Learning and Development at Mindtree in Bangalore, India, skills can become outdated and hence continuous learning is critical.

There are two major challenges that industries face in this regard. "We can have lots of online courses; but how do you motivate people to remain curious and learn?" she said. "The worker must identify a reason for acquiring a particular skill, such as to perform a job function, help customers, or solve a problem."

"From the business standpoint, there are challenges to measuring the business impact of learning," she added. "However it is critical for industries to invest in the learning of technological and human skills." She stressed that both digital and soft skills are important for scaling up a business.



Pointing out that the demand-supply gap is increasing, she highlighted how important it is for an industry to identify the right candidate with the right skills. "We believe in hiring for attitude and training for skills," said Chakrabarti, whose organisation, Mindtree, is a global technology consulting and IT services company. She said employers prefer workers who can engage in continuous learning or have a "learning agility". With people now joining online classes, there is a huge global talent pool, but getting the right talent remains a challenge for industry.

Mindtree collaborates with academia to build future skills. Chakrabarti shared that they could do better in two spaces: creating industry "touch points" by bringing in industry leaders to talk about real case studies and creating a compelling story to make topics interesting for students.

# MEANINGFUL CLIENT RELATIONSHIP A FOUNDATION OF SUCCESSFUL SALES

Sales development industry pioneer and bestselling author Dave Kurlan once said: "Good salespeople are not born; they are trained."

To entrepreneur Richard Gavriel it means that everyone may be born to be a salesperson – but to be a successful salesperson is quite something else. It is important that individuals be trained to become fluent and eloquent in sales, he stressed.

In a similar vein, it is essential for salespeople to also have a "motivated mindset", which is the driving force and rationale behind everything they do. Sales professionals must recognise that it is normal to face objections, for these do not necessarily imply that the client rejects them as a person.

Speaking during a virtual talk titled *Mask Up Your Sales*, Gavriel said that understanding what is important for your clientele and delivering on your promise is the key to selling, and you can achieve this by developing relationships with your customers.

Gavriel is the founder of Richard Gavriel Speaker Management Pte Ltd (RGSM) in Singapore, which manages a pool of speakers and trainers. The talk was organised by WOU's School of Business & Administration (SBA) on 23 April 2022.

He highlighted the significance of relationship-building, referring to the global concept of 'people buy people first, products second'. He cited Salesforce, a leading global customer relationship management service provider, which concluded that 51% of top sales professionals concentrate their efforts on creating relationships.

"Customers will purchase a product or service from a salesperson with whom they have developed a relationship of trust," he said.

## FOSTERING TRUST, RAPPORT, AND CONNECTION WITH CLIENTS

In his presentation, Gavriel cited five approaches for building strong relationships with clients. First is "riding the same wave". It is critical for salespersons to be on the same page as their clients to develop a trusting relationship. "You need to build a sense of commonality while selling. Choose a shared interest, for example food, and communicate to connect in order to create trust and familiarity," he suggested.

Second is to "commemorate major milestones with clients", like celebrating with them their achievements.



▲ Richard Gavriel.

He clarified that salespeople are not obligated to do this for every client, but to instead choose their A-list and B-list clients for this practice.

Third is "small conversations and rapport-building", such as a coffee session in a casual setting with some business discussion, which are crucial for establishing a relationship before sales. He shared that giving clients gifts of flowers, cookies, cakes and so forth, enhances the relationship, particularly when it is a pleasant surprise. "At the end of the day, it is not how much you spend but how you make your clients feel," he said.

Next is to have a "psychology of excellence" by being constant in your service and serving your clients with a spirit of excellence. "Always provide your all to your consumers and maintain a high level of service," Gavriel advised.

Lastly, you need to "create great connections" with your clientele as sincerity opens doors. "Clients can sense when a salesperson is sincere while communicating. As long as you put your clientele first, they can feel it," he stressed.

WOU offers the Bachelor of Business (Hons) in Sales and Marketing (BBSM) programme through both the open distance learning (ODL) and on-campus learning (OCL) modes.

*Customers will purchase a product or service from a salesperson with whom they have developed a relationship of trust.*



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## REVVING UP NATIONS, COMPANIES AND WORKERS FOR THE DIGITAL ECONOMY



▲ Mikey Chow.

*Due to the increased use of robotics and artificial intelligence, more professional roles – such as robotic engineers, solution designers and innovation professionals – will emerge.*

The digital economy in ASEAN is expected to grow to US\$200 billion by 2025, providing impetus for companies to transform in order to compete in the global market. It will also require workers to equip themselves with future-ready skills.

In light of this, every country should have a roadmap for industries, particularly for the small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), to transform their businesses using digital technology, if they are to survive.

In asserting this, entrepreneur Mikey Chow, founder and director of Metrobiz Pte Ltd, Singapore, highlighted that digital technologies change the way we live, work, consume and create. Society will see heightened use of digital products (e.g. data, sensors), digital services, and digital platforms (e.g. Grab, Carousell).

Chow was speaking at a recent online talk on *Career in Today's Digital Economy*, organised by WOU's School of Digital Technology (DiGiT) and Penang Regional Centre (PGRC).

Due to the increased use of robotics and artificial intelligence, more professional roles – such as robotic engineers, solution designers and innovation professionals – will emerge.

Chow categorised the future-ready skills as those dealing with digital technology, data analytics, digital innovation and digital communication. He said the future workforce must have digital literacy and the new skills to fit new careers and new job roles in the digital economy.

The digital economy thus provides opportunities for companies to acquire and upgrade their digital capabilities, gain competitiveness in the market, and achieve digital transformation. The rise in digital commerce will cause businesses and jobs to be redefined and reconfigured, and lead to enterprises having to compete globally, he added.

## ACHIEVE YOUR WEB DEVELOPER DREAM WITH A WOU DEGREE

Web development is an important operation in any business today in view of the massive growth of the Internet and the extensive use of digital devices.

Besides being imperative for creating good websites and relevant web pages, it is also useful for branding, "to promote the products or services," stressed programme manager

Jeyashree Rajkumar from Lithan Academy, Singapore.



▲ Jeyashree Rajkumar. (Facebook pic)

In addition, it is vital for digital marketing "to attract user traffic to generate leads".

"Web development creates a content hub for sharing information with others. You sell your product or service, and provide online support to the people," she asserted. Jeyashree was speaking during a virtual presentation on how to become a web developer, organised by WOU's School of Digital Technology (DiGiT) on 2 April 2022.

She said the rapid growth of the Internet has increased market demand for web developers. She explained that the job scope of the web developer encompasses designing, developing, deploying and maintaining websites. It also entails web design, web programming, database management and web hosting.

Jeyashree listed the five steps needed for full stack web development, namely front-end development, back-end development, databases, DevOps (combines software development and IT operations), and mobile app development.

She highlighted the components of the web development process: Hyper Text Markup Language (HTML) for layout and content structure; JavaScript, a programming language, for executing advanced features on web pages; and Cascading Style Sheets (CSS) that define how elements are rendered on digital, print and other media.

"These three components are the fundamentals to building a website. If you aspire to be a web developer, your journey starts here."

WOU offers the Bachelor in Software Engineering (Honours) (Application Development) [BDSE] programme for those interested in a career in web development and related technologies.



# WOU DONATES COMPUTERS TO PHOR TAY HIGH SCHOOL, TO START MENTORING PUPILS

WOU has donated 10 refurbished desktop computers to Phor Tay High School to enhance their reach to online materials and promote the use of digital technology.

The University will also mentor the students towards improving their knowledge and skills in the digital world through training by staff members, with two workshops already held so far on programming and coding. WOU's own tertiary learners from the School of Digital Technology (DiGiT) will guide the Phor Tay pupils on projects.

The handover of the computers took place at the school premises in Sungai Dua, Penang, on 29 April 2022. WOU Chief Executive and Vice Chancellor Prof Dr Lily Chan represented the University. On hand to receive the computers was the school's principal, Lim Geaik Hong.

Among those present were Phor Tay School Board vice-president Dato' Dr Tan Tat Wai, WOU School of Business & Administration Dean Prakash V Arumugam, and the school's Parents-Teachers Association vice-chairman Choo Chee Heong, as well as teachers and students.

In her opening remarks, Prof Chan stressed that the donation was part of WOU's corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiative "to reach out and support the learning community in Penang".

"We at WOU are indeed privileged to have this partnership with Phor Tay, facilitated by Dato' Dr Tan, in helping to improve your students' access to online resources. We hope this gesture will inspire your students on the enlightened path of discovering lifelong learning."

She remarked that besides donating hardware, WOU wants to also collaborate on projects and mentor the school students towards digital literacy. "Through the School of Digital Technology, WOU offers degree programmes in software engineering and digital business, and hence, our DiGiT students can work with Phor Tay on projects," she said.

Prof Chan highlighted that "computing technology is now an integral part of the teaching and learning process". At WOU, students can learn programming, web development, automation, robotics, and other digital competencies. Upon graduation, they get hired as web designers, software engineers, computer programmers, and also take positions in other in-demand IT jobs.

"WOU's goal is to produce engineering and digital talents, and help promote Penang as a technological and cultural



▲ Symbolic handover of computers to Phor Tay.



▼ Prof Chan interacting with the students.

hub. We therefore also focus on continual education to upskill and reskill employees for the future of work," she asserted.

She encouraged the Phor Tay students to make good use of the computers. "Find new ways of thinking that will shape not only your future, but that of the world as well. Think big. Embrace the culture of lifelong learning, as it is through this that you will find new opportunities to make your dreams come true."

Meanwhile Lim, in expressing her gratitude to WOU, remarked that the donation will "help improve the students' access to virtual learning and enhance their digital literacy".

"This donation has come at the right time because these PCs will be used to replace the old desktops in the library. Students can now easily access the Internet to do their projects, especially those who do not have connectivity at home. This will definitely lighten the burden of parents who cannot afford a computer for their children."

She also requested that more academic speakers from WOU share their insights on the different fields, particularly on STEM, with the school's students.

# UNDERSTANDING AND TEACHING CHILDREN WITH LEARNING DISABILITY IN MATHEMATICS



◀ Dr Fu explained the steps to identify dyscalculia.

**Did you know that a study in 2017 revealed that 6% of the population were suffering from dyscalculia, irrespective of gender?**

Dyscalculia is not as well-known as dyslexia. People affected with this learning disability tend to struggle with mathematics at various levels, affecting tasks in their daily lives.

Researchers believe dyscalculia is caused by genes, brain differences or even environmental factors, said Sandakan District Education Office remedial officer Dr Fu Sai Hoe.

"There are various characteristics of dyscalculia that may vary among individuals, including number sense, slow responses, reasoning, memory, visual spatial and estimation," he explained during a virtual talk titled *An Introduction to Dyscalculia: Supporting Young Learners with Learning Difficulties in Maths* on 19 March 2022.

The event was organised by WOU's School of Education, Humanities & Social Sciences (SEHS). Among the estimated 100 attendees was the dean of SEHS, Assoc Prof Dr Thomas Chow Voon Foo.

A variety of teaching aids must be employed on those with dyscalculia. These include pre-number skills (using shapes, dominos/dice), number recognition (using number cards), and counting (using counter/counting sticks).

"There are several teaching tactics that can be used in conjunction with content knowledge to teach students," Dr Fu said. Students can participate in group work like storytelling, simulation, classroom discussion, student debate and gallery walks.

Peer interactions such as the think-pair-share (TPS) strategy, learning cells, class games and debates can also help the students. "Teachers can also encourage students to engage in individual activities such as brainstorming, writing a one-minute paper, and taking a think break," he added.

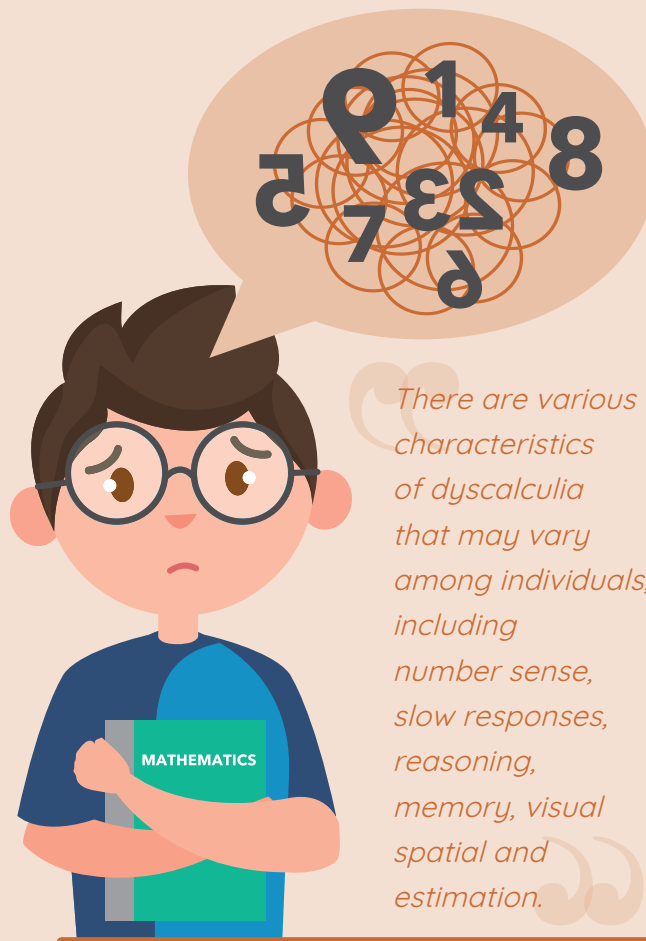
He also shared a few activities that educators can use to teach language, social skills and other subjects, but added

that they must be paired with mathematics content when teaching mathematics. These include structured play (incorporated into the lesson plan with step-by-step guide for students to understand the learning material), messy play (using handpainting to count the number of fingers), and free play (play anything and then reflect on it).

Dyscalculia can be identified in three steps, beginning with early detection using a Dyscalculia Checklist or Dyscalculia Assessment. The second step is where the Dyscalculia Screener is used for individuals aged six to 14 and the DyscalculiUM for teenagers and adults. A person with a tendency for dyscalculia can only be classified after the screening procedure.

The last step that must be taken to confirm a diagnosis is the comprehensive diagnosis assessment. Parents would then need to send their child to a child development specialist.

WOU offers a 90-credit Diploma in Early Childhood Education (DECE) programme with a course on 'Young Children with Special Needs' through open distance learning (ODL) for preschool and kindergarten teachers.



# SOCIAL POLICY AND EDUCATION NEEDED TOWARDS SUPPORTING PEOPLE WITH HIV/AIDS



▲ Prof Ismail of CASP. (Malaysian AIDS Council pic.)

Inadequate knowledge and awareness of HIV/AIDS poses an obstacle to preventing the spread of the disease in the community. This shortcoming is also linked to the negative perceptions that people generally harbour towards those living with HIV.

In view of this, the founder and chairperson of Community AIDS Service Penang (CASP), Prof Dr

Ismail Baba, strongly recommends that a social policy be enacted, with a focus on eradicating the stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV/AIDS. It must, among others, tackle issues like businesses refusing to hire eligible candidates because they are HIV-positive.

Speaking at a virtual talk on *HIV/AIDS: Trends, Risks and Prevention on 1 April 2022*, Prof Ismail also urged parents to play an important role in HIV/AIDS education by exposing their children to the issue. "The country must establish a social policy where HIV/AIDS and sex education are taught in schools," he said.

Attended by about 100 people, the informative talk was jointly organised by WOU's Centre for Foundation Studies (CFS) and the Drug Prevention Association of Malaysia (Pemadam).

Prof Ismail spoke on the emotional distress of individuals living with HIV. "They go through denial, anger, bargaining, and finally acceptance," he said. Counselling is especially important as many remain in denial for years because of their limited understanding of the virus.

He explained that AIDS is the advanced stage of HIV in which a person's immune system is too weak to fight off other infections, eventually leading to death if not treated. The symptoms of HIV include muscle aches and pains, fever, sore throat and cough, and swollen lymph nodes. These are however indicators of various other illnesses as well.

It is critical to get tested if anyone engages in activities that are high-risk for HIV transmission, he stressed. Individuals become infected with the HIV virus in three ways - unprotected sexual intercourse; transmission from mother

to infant (in the womb, at birth or through breastfeeding); and sharing of drug injection needles/syringes.

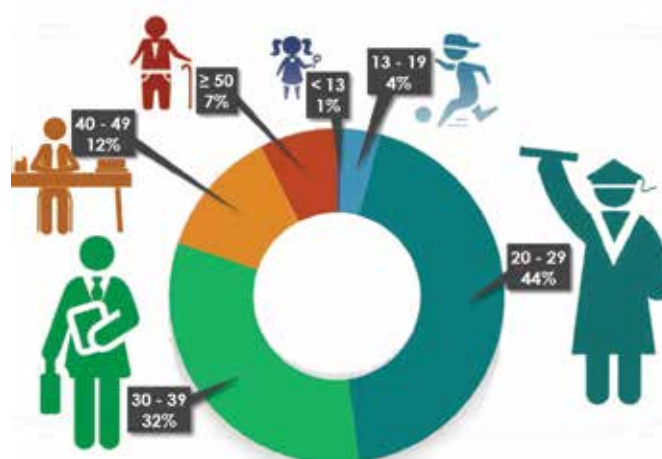
"The virus can also be spread through blood transfusion if the donor is HIV-positive but is unaware, since the window period - the timeframe between contraction of the HIV virus and detection of the infection - can take up to six months," he added.

He also highlighted the various HIV antibody tests, such as the enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay (ELISA), which is followed by the Western Blot test to confirm diagnosis. Along with these are the rapid antibody/antigen test done with a prick on the finger, and the oral fluid self-test - both of which produce results in 30 minutes or less.

Prof Ismail cited a 2016 study by the Ministry of Health titled *HIV & AIDS Epidemic in Malaysia* which found that those aged between 20 and 29 have the highest percentage of reported HIV cases at 40%. This is followed by the 30-39 age bracket at 31%, and 40-49 bracket at 16%.

Mothers with HIV have a 30% probability of giving birth to a HIV-positive infant. In light of this, he encouraged infected pregnant women to take azidothymidine (AZT) to reduce the odds by 8% to 15%.

Responding to a question, he noted that there are more than 50 non-governmental organisations that partner with the Malaysian AIDS Council. The public can refer to the Pemadam website ([pemadam.org.my](http://pemadam.org.my)) if they wish to contact the NGOs for information or to talk to their experts.



▲ Reported HIV Cases by age group in Malaysia for 2020.

Source: *The Global AIDS Monitoring Report 2021*, Ministry of Health, Malaysia.

## INDUSTRY PIONEER AND ACCOMPLISHED TECHNICAL EXPERT RECALLS BTME ADVANTAGE

**Ng Phooi Sang** has over 25 years' experience in the field of physical testing, and is the founder and director of regional industry leader GT Instruments Sdn Bhd.

No one today would think that he had initially lacked skills to perform proper interpretation of test results. But that was before he studied for the Bachelor of Technology (Honours) degree in Mechatronics (BTME) at WOU.

"Before BTME, I was afraid my business would fail," he recalled recently. "I therefore wanted to gain professional qualifications and become a certified engineer, and an approval signatory for test reports, calibration certificates and inspection reports."

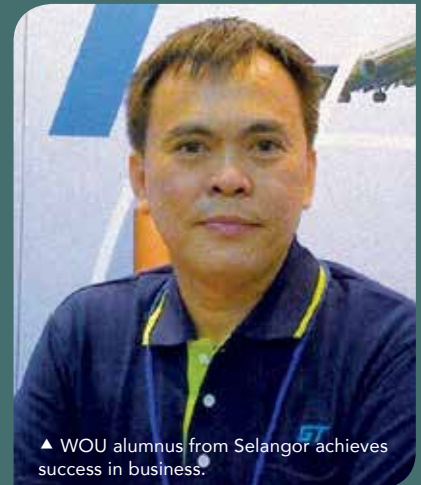
Ng, 55, was able to apply the expertise and knowledge from his degree to accomplish his higher education goals and expand his business. He earned the BTME in 2020 through open distance learning (ODL).

His company now supplies a wide range of material testing equipment in Malaysia and Singapore for industries, including those related to rubber, metal, packaging and plastic. The company also offers total solutions for testing laboratory, plus ISO-accredited testing and calibration services.

Speaking about his ODL journey during an online talk on 26 March 2022, he shared that his ability to interpret test results, thanks to WOU's courses, helped create new business opportunities.

With his real-work experience and BTME knowledge, he gets invited to speak at conferences, seminars and workshops. Ng is a certified signatory for ISO 17025 accreditation, a

*I have the expertise now to tell clients whether their equipment meets accreditation requirements to produce valid results.*



▲ WOU alumnus from Selangor achieves success in business.

certified HRDF trainer and a consultant. He also advises laboratories, such as those at Universiti Sains Malaysia and Universiti Putra Malaysia, on ways to become accredited for testing.

"I have the expertise now to tell clients whether their equipment meets accreditation requirements to produce valid results," he said. According to Ng, there was previously no provider of accredited calibration for the whole of Southeast Asia. His company was the first.

He conducts technical training, internationally and for local agencies like the Fire and Rescue Department (Bomba), Customs Department and Malaysia Civil Defence Force, on how to do proper physical testing for valid results. He also offers R & D advice and support on developing calibration and solutions, and how to comply with regulatory requirements.

Ng is currently pursuing a Master's degree and aspires to attain a PhD. He hopes in future to become an ISO 17025 consultant to fill the noticeable gap in the market.

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