

wou's 12th e-Convocation (2021)



CELEBRATING the success of 953
students who graduated amidst the pandemic

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15	In the Lives of Students An accomplished entrepreneur's journey to greater heights with BTEL	<p>EDITOR'S NOTE</p> <p>As we enter a new year, it seems it was not so long ago that we ushered in 2020 – and now even 2021 has flown swiftly by, due to the Covid-19 pandemic situation.</p> <p>Nevertheless, as we journey on, we want to especially share in the joy of and congratulate our graduates who thrived despite the daunting challenges they faced and completed their studies.</p> <p>We also accord recognition and congratulate the top achievers and the best students from the respective Schools. It is said that "graduation is not the conclusion of an achievement but simply the ending of one chapter and the beginning of another chapter". We hope that new opportunities for growth will abound for our graduates as they go forth with newly acquired qualifications and skills.</p> <p>WOU provides a unique opportunity for adult learners, armed with work experience, to pursue tertiary qualifications for career advancement. Our students can obtain a quality education and an accredited degree while juggling work and other commitments. In fact, our online content has been specially developed to guide them through their studies.</p> <p>Throughout 2021, the University also presented many informative webinars to create awareness among students and prospective learners on prevalent challenges and how WOU can better equip them for the world. Especially enlightening was the talk by an alumnus on how his electronics degree helped chart a promising business career and recognition among academic circles (refer to page 16).</p> <p>We invite you to embrace the New Year with hope and let us make our days count.</p> <p><i>"If you are struggling today, remember this: You have survived everything you've gone through up to this point. The best day of your life is still yet to come. There are still people you haven't met, and things you haven't experienced. You can do this." ~ Anonymous</i></p> <p>WOU TRIUMPHS: WOU was announced as the Asia Pacific Regional Champion in the 'CIMA-Prize Winner Award' during a virtual ceremony in December 2021, based on the performance of its Accounting degree graduate in the CIMA exam.</p> <p>Chief Editor: Professor Lily Chan (<i>Chief Executive and Vice Chancellor</i>) Editorial Team: Agnes James, Rasidah Mion, Selvarani Suppiah Photographer: Elaine Tan Xin Yi Copy Editing: Cape Poetics 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</p>
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WORKING COUPLES REJOICE IN FULFILMENT OF DEGREES

It is indeed memorable and satisfying for a married pair to achieve a degree together. Here we relate the unique stories of two working couples who fulfilled their dreams of an academic qualification at WOU last year.

COMPLETING THE RACE TOGETHER TO AN INSPIRING END

For this Ipoh-based couple who are proud to now call themselves degree holders, the most heartfelt reward was in seeing how their success inspired their sons.

"Our two boys were equally proud and excited when we got our final semester results," said **Jaswinder Singh Harban Singh**. "They were going around telling the family and relatives that their parents completed their degrees."

While Jaswinder graduated with the Bachelor of Technology (Hons) degree in Electronics (BTEL), his wife **Samreet Kaur Revindar Singh** earned the Bachelor of Business (Hons) degree in Management (BBMG). They had enrolled in 2008 and 2010 respectively.

▼ Jaswinder and Samreet.



The persistence of the couple, both aged 36, has also inspired other family members, including their sisters and a younger brother, to pursue undergraduate or postgraduate degrees themselves.

Jaswinder and Samreet spurred each other on, yearning to be good role models for their kids. They never gave up, though it took them longer than most to get their degrees.

They chose WOU as it allowed them to undertake learning while continuing their careers. They thought of quitting several times, due to the mental and physical strain of studying and working while looking after their two kids. "We supported and motivated each other to keep going. Our parents helped to take care of the kids when exams were near."

Jaswinder joined Carsem Semiconductor Malaysia as a technician 15 years ago and is now a process engineer. Samreet, a bank teller, has been with CIMB Bank since 2007.

He has had a passion for engineering since primary school and was always keen to become an electronics engineer. He wants to take up an MBA and rise to senior managerial positions, aiming to use his management skills to help his organisation grow.

HEALTHCARE COUPLE'S MOMENTOUS FEAT IN EARNING A MANAGEMENT DEGREE

She is the head of the Physiotherapy Unit at Rajah Charles Brooke Memorial Hospital, Kuching, and he is a senior physiotherapist at the Sarawak General Hospital. They have been married for 19 years.

Angelina Jong Siew Phing, 43, and **Gabriel Ong Hock Hee**, 47, graduated with a Bachelor of Management (Hons) with Psychology (BMPS) after having enrolled in the programme at the same time in 2017.

"We have always enjoyed doing everything together - from our love for outdoor activities, finding new hobbies, gaming and travelling to new places," Jong said.

"When I decided to take up this programme, I realised that my husband would feel left out, especially since I would be busy with assignments and during exam weeks. So I asked him if he would be interested to join me in this quest, and here we are!"

◀ Jong and Ong with their two kids.



They took turns taking care of their two sons who are now aged 5 and 12. The Sarawakian couple often burnt the midnight oil to complete their assignments, after completing their chores and when the kids were asleep. "We however mutually agreed that weekends are for spending with family," said Jong, who has been in healthcare for over 21 years.

She gradually rose in her career after having started as a junior physiotherapist at the Sarawak General Hospital. She is presently the President of the Sarawak Physiotherapy Association.

AIMING EVER HIGHER IN CONSTRUCTION WITH THE MBACM

Two construction professionals who attained the MBA in Construction Management (MBACM) during the recent e-convocation explain the satisfaction and thrill of serving in the industry and how the degree will help to boost their careers.

CONSTRUCTION PROFESSIONAL SEES ENHANCED MARKETABILITY AND EARNING POTENTIAL

In the course of his work as a Project Executive with Genting Malaysia Bhd, **Theshvinder Singh Dhillon** has been heavily involved in construction project management. This prompted him to want to sharpen his knowledge and skills by pursuing the MBACM.

The 29-year-old from Pahang manages construction projects from the beginning until the handover stage, coordinating with stakeholders like architects, consultants, contractors and end users.

He chose MBACM as it complements his academic background and his occupation. WOU's flexible study schedule allowed him to continue working while undertaking his learning.

"MBACM has expanded my knowledge, critical thinking and leadership skills in the construction industry," he said. "I feel it enhances my marketability as a professional along with my earning potential and job opportunities."

Theshvinder earlier earned a Bachelor of Science (Hons) in Architectural Technology from a private university, which led to him joining the development and construction department of Genting Malaysia in December 2015.

He plans to register for his Doctor of Business Administration at WOU next year, since there will be attractive rebates for alumni.

Theshvinder received tremendous support and motivation from his family, particularly his wife Kiranjeet Kaur. "Time management is particularly important, and I was able to make full use of the time I had during the MCO to concentrate on my studies, and managed to complete my programme in a shorter timeframe," he said.

He offers a pearl of wisdom to others: "If you wish to attain a higher level of success in your career, education and experience are equally important. I urge you to never stop developing yourself."



FULFILLING A HEARTFELT VISION TO DEVELOP HIS HOME STATE, SARAWAK

For **Wan Mohamad Mirzan Wan Hanapi**, the MBACM is the culmination of his deep interest for construction and his desire to learn new management tools to prepare for the changing business environment. It has also served to boost his personal development.



Above all, he yearns to use it to help develop his homeland, Sarawak. The 39-year-old has already handled more than 40 rural and urban projects in the state as an Executive Engineer/Project Manager with Land Custody and Development Authority (LCDA), Kuching, a state-owned statutory body, since 2009. He oversees the implementation of various engineering projects.

They include the Integrated Administration Centre (IAC) Mukah, the first model of an integrated complex government office in Sarawak. This is in addition to IAC Sarikei, which is due to be completed by 2024, and IAC Sri Aman which will launch in the middle of this year. Sri Aman, incidentally, is his hometown.

Wan Mohamad Mirzan plans to help LCDA maintain its reputation of successfully completing projects at short notice and on time. "With the skills acquired from MBACM, I feel more confident in handling the complex projects and contributing to the growth of Sarawak," he shared.

"I want to build my portfolio and be recognised as a subject matter expert since I'm now working in the engineering division. The MBACM not only develops my expertise but will also open up career advancement opportunities for a better future."

Wan Mohamad Mirzan is happy with WOU's good online education, flexible schedule, highly qualified educators, quality teaching methodologies, supportive mentors and affordable fees.

For leisure, he loves football, and is a licensed 'D' coach of the Football Association of Malaysia. He sits on the Executive Committee of the Kuching Football Club which plays in the Malaysia Premier League.

ACHIEVERS OF THE CeMBA DEGREE SHARE UPLIFTING INSIGHTS

Three graduates of the Commonwealth Executive Master of Business Administration (CeMBA) at the 2021 e-convocation ceremony look forward to the boost the academic qualification will bring to their careers.



AN ENGINEER'S GREAT LEARNING EXPERIENCE OF THE BUSINESS WORLD

After **Choo Kok Mun** of Penang earned the Bachelor of Technology (Hons) degree in Electronics from WOU, he wanted to strengthen his academic credentials further. However, it was not another science-based degree that he chose.

The senior process engineer at Lumileds Malaysia Sdn Bhd in Bayan Lepas opted for the CeMBA programme. "I felt that a combination of engineering education and management degree would equip me with technical knowledge and managerial skills, which are the keys to climbing the corporate ladder quickly," he said.

Now that he has earned the CeMBA, the 37-year-old has found it to have developed his understanding of business as a whole. "I was interested in CeMBA to boost my knowledge and skills of the business world. I was able to develop a strong professional network during my studies, and this will further accelerate my career."

Choo finds that he can apply what he has learnt, such as operation management, accounting and "particularly critical and analytical skills which are vital in my everyday work as an engineer".

He looks forward to further growing in his real-work environment and contributing to his team. "As I assume more responsibilities and gain experience, I would have the opportunity to advance to managerial or a high administrative position," he said.

Choo joined Lumileds in 2016. Prior to that, he worked as a service engineer with ASM Assembly Equipment (M) Sdn Bhd. He chose WOU because of the flexible timetable and classes that allowed him keep working while studying for his MBA. "Most importantly, the fees were affordable and the degree is accredited by MQA," he explained.

"I have had a great learning experience with WOU, which I will forever cherish. Throughout my years of studies, the lecturers and staff were very approachable and helpful."



ENTREPRENEUR APPLIES VALUABLE SKILLS FROM CeMBA TO HER VENTURE

When **Emizalina Mohd Azme**, 46, decided to resign from her job to take care of her ailing parents and her own health, she opted to pursue her ambition to run her own business. The Selangor lass started providing company secretary services based in Kelana Jaya at the end of 2020.

Her business seeks to help companies comply with standard legal and financial practices, besides overseeing corporate governance standards.

"I took CeMBA to prepare myself and to get equipped with the skills required to thrive in the corporate sector because the world of business is getting very competitive, and also for my own sense of personal accomplishment," she said.

"I was able to gain a better understanding of the inner workings of the corporate world. This offered me a competitive advantage, enabling me to quickly adapt to industry changes and deal with the challenges in the business environment."

Emizalina has been in the company secretary line for some 15 years. She had worked in the past with several management companies to provide corporate services, such as company secretarial, auditing and taxation and accounting services. The experience gave her the foundation she needed to venture out on her own.

As she is new to running a business, the skills and knowledge from her MBA degree are "offering valuable industry insights and helping me grow both professionally and personally".

She summed up: "Despite Covid-19 disrupting my normal way of life, I was grateful to be a WOU student because I was trained to be self-sufficient through distance learning without the need to rely on face-to-face learning. My studies were therefore not adversely affected, and I could complete without difficulty."

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HELICOPTER ENGINEER FLIES HIGH IN LIFE, CAREER AND CeMBA

Civil engineer **Winston Patrick Sayo** worked with Bristow Helicopters Limited in Nigeria for 11 years before returning home to Sarawak. During that period he gained vast experience in terms of his career and how he viewed life.

"We should not take anything for granted and must work to earn things instead of thinking we deserve them," he reflected. It was perhaps this credo that spurred him to pursue further studies, leading to his recent graduation with the Commonwealth Executive MBA (CeMBA) degree.

Sayo found that CeMBA best suited his personal development, and its cost, study duration, teaching methodology and flexibility were appealing. He then enrolled in 2015 and has since come to prefer online learning. "There is discipline and etiquette that we should abide by," he said. "The pandemic has enabled us to experience online studies more and forced us to leapfrog in terms of technology advancements."

During his stint in Nigeria, he gradually scaled the ranks to become the Chief Engineer. He oversaw spare parts and tools requirement for maintenance, ensuring smooth operations and on-time service delivery to clients.

The 51-year-old from Kuching now works as an Engineering Manager for Sazma Aviation Sdn Bhd based in Kota Kinabalu. He joined the company, a subsidiary of Sabah Air Aviation Sdn Bhd, in April 2015. It provides transportation services for the oil and gas industry in Sabah waters.

Sayo is motivated to challenge himself to accomplish his goals as "nothing is impossible if you put our mind and heart into it" and yearns to inspire others as well on personal development.

"I have managed to apply the elements of the various course modules that I took at WOU to achieve the best result at work, modifying as needed to suit my situation and the fluidity of the industry that I am in," he added. "After all, life is a learning process."



ASPIRING TO KEEP MOVING WITH SKILLS ACQUISITION AND THE MBAMPM

Albert Einstein once said, "Life is like riding a bicycle. To keep your balance, you must keep moving." Among those who take inspiration from the wisdom behind these words is **Heally Anak Naji** from Sarawak.

The 45-year-old graduated with the MBA in Manufacturing and Production Management (MBAMPM) degree at WOU's 12th e-convocation ceremony. "I believe that if I want to work in an industry that is constantly evolving and allows me to always create, I need to better prepare myself," he said. "This Master's degree is the best way for me to consolidate my knowledge."

He explained that the degree programme has provided him with the knowledge and skills needed to tackle real-life situations in any production and manufacturing work environment. "The modern manufacturing sector is an exciting high-tech field for people like me who are motivated and innovative," he stressed.

"For the present and future, manufacturers are always looking for highly-qualified professionals to fill their job vacancies, especially skilled, imaginative, efficient and technical employees to manage the workflow and help advance the company."

Prior to this, Heally had earned a Bachelor of Technology (Hons) in Electronics (BTEL) from WOU. It saw him being promoted to become a higher-grade technician in December 2017 at HGST/Western Digital in Sarawak where he works. He then continued at WOU with his MBAMPM.

"The learning system at WOU is the best and most flexible where work-life balance is not affected," he reflected. "While still studying, I was able to focus on work and hobbies, and have a lot of time to be with my family and friends."

BECOMING EQUIPPED FOR THE JOB WITH A DEGREE

Two open distance learning (ODL) students speak about accomplishing their long-cherished dream of a bachelor's degree while being busy with work and family.



NURSE WITH HUMANITARIAN DRIVE GRADUATES IN PSYCHOLOGY

Driven by an ambition to help those who are destitute and suffering, humanitarian activist **Venisri Shanmugavelu** has long desired to know more about human psychology.

The 30-year-old, who joined an NGO to work with marginalised communities, refugees and asylum seekers in Penang, fulfilled her yearning when she graduated with the Bachelor of Arts (Hons) degree in Psychology (BAPS) from WOU. "The programme has enhanced my personal growth and career progression. It has empowered me to seize a leadership role in managing a team when I ventured into the humanitarian medical setting," she said.

In May 2020, as the Covid-19 pandemic heightened, Venisri joined Doctors Without Borders (Médecins Sans Frontières) as a patient support supervisor. She managed nine community caseworkers from refugee communities, handling interpretation and facilitation of patients into government hospitals.

She was promoted to become a Humanitarian Affairs Officer in August 2021. She advocates for basic humanitarian needs, including access to quality healthcare, while engaging with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for protection to improve the wellbeing and human rights situation of refugees and asylum-seekers in Peninsular Malaysia's northern region. She also wants to help them to become more aware of fundamental human rights and the law.

Her next step is to strive for a Master's degree in Social Sciences to further equip herself with skills to help resolve the current social predicaments.

Venisri had previously served as a nurse for eight years with Penang Adventist Hospital. "I enrolled in WOU in September 2015 due to its flexible study schedule and affordable off-campus platform that perfectly fitted my hectic job," she said.

She owed her excellent academic results to discipline and proper time management, while curtailing her social media activity. "Do not compete with others but instead compete with yourself to improve and succeed," she advised.



ACCOUNTING DEGREE OPENS PATH FOR ASPIRATION TO BE AN AUDITOR

When **Malini Ng Mei Yen** was working with Citibank Sales & Outsourcing Services (CSOS) in Johor Bahru, she found that she wanted to further explore accounting as she liked the challenge of dealing with numbers.

She thus graduated from the Bachelor of Business (Hons) in Accounting (BBAC) programme, after joining WOU through the Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL). Having achieved the degree qualification she now wants to follow through with her ambition to become an auditor.

"My aunty, a student of WOU, recommended the University, and I found everyone - the support staff, the tutors and the course leads - to be extremely helpful," she said. "The degree will facilitate my advancement in the field of finance. I will soon follow my spouse to Singapore and aim to carve a career there, rising to become an auditor."

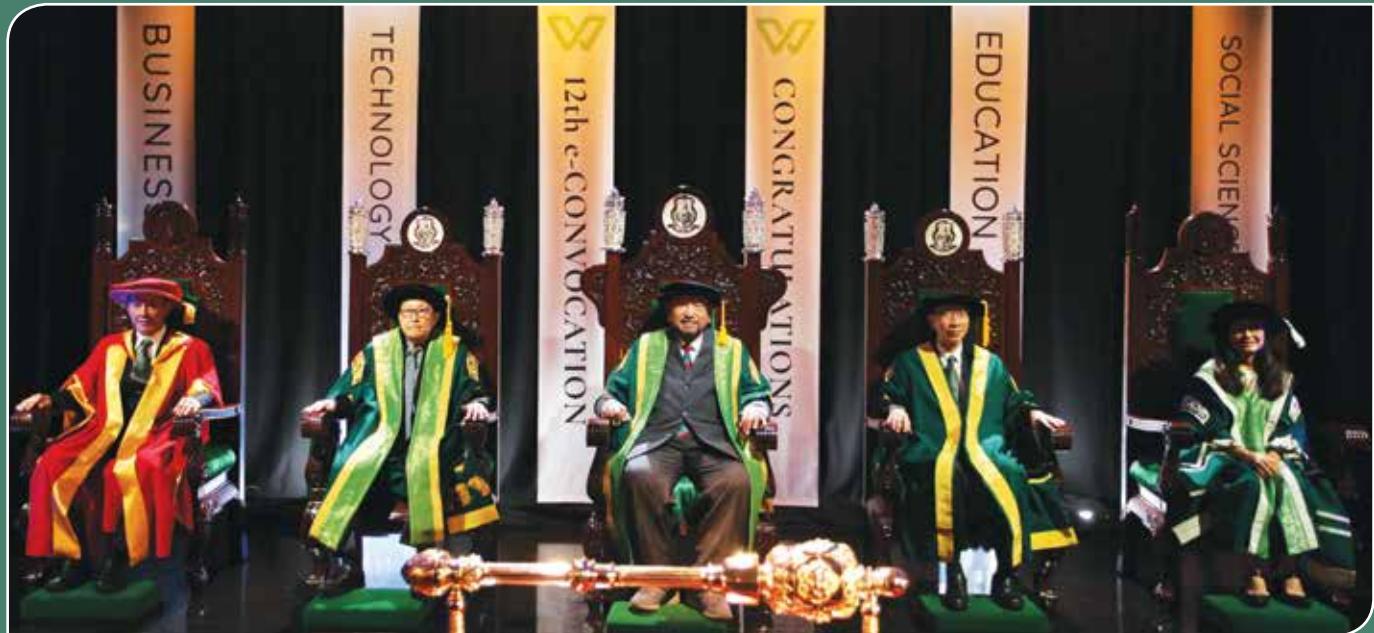
Ng, 37, was a Customer Instruction Officer with CSOS which provided administrative support to Citibank Singapore. "I handled company-based money transfer and business transactions, locally and internationally," she said.

She is presently a freelance tuition teacher, conducting lessons for primary school children around her area in JB. As a member of Parti Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia, she received a tuition fee rebate under an incentive scheme offered by WOU to organisations.

"My husband was very supportive and motivated me to complete my degree, while our two daughters were very understanding when I had to study," she said. "I planned my schedule to balance time for my studies, helping my daughters with their homework, and family time."

"I feel self-discipline plays an important role. It was rather difficult during the MCO (movement control order) as my husband was in Singapore, but I managed to complete the degree with the support of family and friends. I was determined to get my degree for self-improvement."

ZEST, AGILITY AND RESILIENCE: THE VALUES OF THE FUTURE WORKFORCE



▲ From right: Prof Chan, WOU Board of Governors Chairman Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon, Tunku Tan Sri Imran, Pro-Chancellor Dato' Dr Lim Thuang Seng, and WOU Sdn Bhd Chairman Dato' Seri Stephen Yeap.

If universities are to produce talents that can truly cope with emerging technologies in the post-pandemic era, they must ensure learners are equipped with an adaptable and resilient mindset, while being inculcated with a lifelong learning culture.

WOU Chancellor Tunku Tan Sri Imran Tuanku Ja'afar asserted this during his address at the 12th e-convocation ceremony on 27 November 2021, when reminding that the future workplace favours employees who are agile, resilient and lifelong learners.

"I believe WOU exemplifies the qualities of what a university of the future is all about, with its social mission to produce holistic talents for industry and to build tomorrow's leaders," he stressed.

"The University ensures that its graduates have functional hard skills and soft skills, have an entrepreneurial mindset, are able to work in multicultural teams, are civic-minded, and exemplify noble values. These are what make WOU graduates future-proof."

He said a lack of employee skillsets is a significant barrier to digitalisation among businesses.

He cited the World Economic Forum's *Future of Jobs Report 2020* which pointed to cloud computing, big data and e-commerce as top technologies most likely to be adopted by companies, and that new skillsets are needed to apply these technologies.

He thus urged universities to "innovate and invest, and collaborate with industry to create a future-proof curriculum and produce graduates who mirror the skills of the professional world". He said the curriculum must embed 21st century skills, such as technology literacy, information and communication, creativity and innovation, problem-solving and critical thinking.

Tunku Imran conferred diplomas and degrees virtually to a total of 953 graduates, the highest number to date. Out of this, 776 were from undergraduate programmes and 177 from postgraduate programmes. The age range was 21 to 67 years old, and they comprised 61% females and 39% males.

The majority of the graduates were from the open distance learning (ODL) mode, except for 98 undergraduates from the full-time, on-campus learning (OCL) programmes. The occupations represented by the graduates included lecturers, teachers, engineers, managers, HR staff, technicians, sales and marketing personnel, accounting executives, secretaries, clerks and IT professionals.

The programmes which produced the highest number of graduates in 2021 were the Accounting degree (BBAC), followed by the Commonwealth Executive MBA (CeMBA), the Management degree (BBMG), and the Diploma in Early Childhood Education (DECE).

With the latest batch of graduates from 2021, the University's alumni base has now increased to an impressive 6,132

A few of the happy ODL grads from the recent convocation.



▲ Mohd Firdaus Mohd Noor (BBFI)



▲ Ng Seaw Ying (MEd)



▲ Poh Boon Kuan (BAPS)



▲ Uthaya Malar Vadivelu (BAPS)



▲ Yeong Leng Chow (BBAC)

A VERSATILE EDUCATION THAT KEEPS PACE

WOU Chief Executive and Vice Chancellor Prof Dr Lily Chan, in her speech, stressed the University's strong standing in open distance learning (ODL). "With WOU, we ensure we have good pedagogies, good curriculum designs, good programme structures and a good delivery system," she said.

She stressed that online learning is not merely replicating face-to-face lectures or tutorials onto a virtual platform. "Our students take responsibility for their learning, and they are supported by study guides, the learning management system, student portal and regular face-to-face tutorials which are often held at the regional centres or learning centres close to their homes."

"The programme leads or tutors regularly engage with the students through channels like the online forum, Microsoft Teams, Zoom, email and messaging apps," Prof Chan added. She noted that the WOU learners' studies were mostly uninterrupted during the pandemic as they are distance

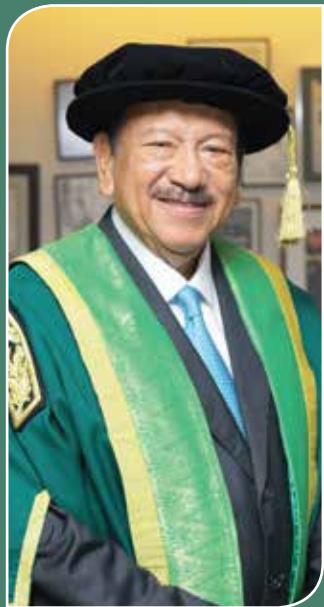
learners who are "well acquainted with self-learning methods, able to carry on relatively unscathed compared to students of traditional universities".

She also highlighted the University's tagline 'Think Tomorrow' that reflects its focus on providing students with a versatile education which keeps pace with ongoing global technological advancements.

She remarked, "WOU updates course contents, adopts new learning platforms and integrates knowledge from different disciplines to develop an education curriculum that prepares students for the future of work."

Prof Chan elaborated that the methodologies and approaches used at WOU to impart knowledge "are the keys to producing students with a zest for lifelong learning", and this is especially important in the current digital era.

She concluded: "WOU is committed to its mission of building lifelong learners, a future-ready workforce and a talent pool for the nation."



▲ Tunku Tan Sri Imran Tuanku Ja'afar.



▲ Prof Dr Lily Chan.



TOP ACHIEVERS

AT 12TH E-CONVOCATION CEREMONY IN 2021

Two open distance learning (ODL) students jointly emerged as the top graduates from the ODL undergraduate programmes to win the Chancellor's Gold Medal award.



JOURNALIST'S JUBILANT BALANCING OF CAREER, PARENTHOOD, AND STUDY

Opalyn Mok Pui Foong, 44, a Senior Correspondent for Malay Mail based in Penang, has for long loved literature, and wanted to undertake studies in the field. She found the perfect option to marry the challenge of English language that she faces as a news reporter and her fondness for literature.

Mok graduated with a Bachelor of Arts (Hons) degree in English Studies (BAES) which gave her the opportunity to gain added mastery over language and literature. She has worked as a journalist in several media and publications firms, including The Sun, The Star, and the Malaysian Insider, over the last two decades.

"Time management is key to juggling a full-time job, family and studies. Family support is also important to keep me going."

"My line of job requires experience, knowledge and skills, which I acquired while on the job over the years," she said. "This degree provided me with more knowledge about linguistics, the English language and English literature." She added that she may look at furthering her studies later when she has the means and "perhaps go into academia after retirement".

She said the tight deadlines to submit articles in her line of work "have honed my skills to be fast, always remain sharp and be prepared to crank out articles while on the go". This acquired skill has helped her to cope with assignment deadlines and exam preparations, and to study smart.

"Time management is key to juggling a full-time job, family and studies. Family support is also important to keep me going. Also, I always take time out to recoup and refresh so that I am always ready to absorb and learn new things."

ACCOUNTANT WITH A GOLD MEDAL EYES DELECTABLE BAKERY BUSINESS

Se Hui Feng, 30, has been in the accounting and finance line for the last 10 years since obtaining her CIMA Certificate in Business Accounting. She could not have imagined when she began her career that she would not only graduate with a degree, Bachelor of Business (Hons) in Accounting (BBAC), but also garner the top student award at a leading university.

As a Senior Accountant at Southern Accounting Services based in Johor Bahru, which she joined in 2011, she helps clients in preparing financial reports and income tax returns. While she finds what she has learnt at WOU contributing to her personal growth, the degree has also opened opportunities for advancement in her profession.

"I am able to apply the knowledge as well as the communication and problem-solving skills gained from the programme to my work," she said, stressing that she is more confident now in dealing with clients.

Se is passionate about baking and aspires to turn her hobby into a career. She is planning to learn new skills from online baking classes and start a bakery business in the future.

She credited her academic success to being able to manage her time well. She spent at least an hour on revision after each tutorial class, squeezing time for assignments whenever possible, and making her own study notes when revising for exams.

She is thankful to her parents, brothers and husband - who took care of their baby boy whenever she was rushing to complete her assignments - for their support throughout her academic journey. "I made myself a study schedule to manage my studies during busy periods at work," she recalled.



"While she finds what she has learnt at WOU contributing to her personal growth, the degree has also opened opportunities for advancement in her profession."

TOP ACHIEVERS

The Tun Dr Lim Chong Eu Memorial Gold Prize and the Tun Dr Lim Keng Yaik Memorial Gold Prize are named after two late stalwarts of the nation. The graduates who were conferred the distinguished prizes in the recent e-Convocation share their visions and study experiences in the midst of adversity to emerge as top students of WOU.



"The CeMBA programme helped me to understand the different sections involved in running a business, such as accounting, HR and management"

TRULY LIVING THE DREAM OF MANAGING HER OWN BUSINESS

Mavis Ong Sze Mun, 28, from Penang, once wanted to start her own business but had little knowledge about how to run one, including the various management aspects that are involved.

That was before. She recently graduated from the Commonwealth Executive MBA (CeMBA) programme. She was also awarded the Tun Dr Lim Chong Eu Memorial Gold Prize for being the top achiever at the Open Distance Learning (ODL) postgraduate-level. The double achievement will certainly boost the operations of the new digital advertising agency that she has since started. The company serves small business owners and other clients to create digital content as well as manage their digital marketing strategies and social media pages.

"Last time I was working under another company with little knowledge about business and other aspects of it," she explained. "The CeMBA programme helped me to understand the different sections involved in running a business, such as accounting, HR and management." Her aspiration is to scale up her company and even start another business, besides pursuing her PhD to further increase her knowledge on areas of interest.

On receiving the most outstanding student award for postgraduate studies, she attributed it to her trait of being curious and thirsty for knowledge. "When I explore a new topic for assignments, I get interested, which leads me to research more to better understand the issue," she shared. "I plan out a timeline and a deadline to finish my tasks."

She found motivation to study despite the pandemic, thanks to the WhatsApp group chats with her classmates to bounce off ideas, and the Microsoft Teams and Zoom interactions with lecturers who gave prompt responses to inquiries.

NAME OF THE GAME IS TO BECOME A SUCCESSFUL PROPRIETARY TRADER

Upon leaving secondary school, **Khoo Li Zhe** already had a clear outlook of what he wanted to study, and it was finance. He went on to obtain a diploma in finance and investment from a private institution before enrolling in the Bachelor of Business (Honours) in Finance (BBFI) programme at WOU.

His effort to gain additional knowledge and credentials that would be beneficial for his future career saw fruition when he not only gained his BBFI degree but also emerged the winner of the Tun Dr Lim Keng Yaik Memorial Gold Prize for being the top graduate at the undergraduate-level for the on-campus learning (OCL) programmes.

Khoo, 23, currently works as a proprietary trader at an investment company in Penang. He wants to gain as much experience and know-how as possible in the field of investment, and become successful in his profession.

Khoo attributed his top academic marks to being focused, paying close attention to lecturers during classes, having discussions on the lessons with coursemates, and balancing his time for study and rest. "A well-planned time management was the key to helping me complete my studies during the difficult times, enabling me to prioritise my daily tasks," he said.

He said he found it quite challenging at first in switching to virtual learning during the pandemic period but was motivated to learn to prepare for his career.



"A well-planned time management was the key to helping me complete my studies..."

TOP OCL GRADUATES GAIN IN EMPLOYABILITY WITH WOU DEGREES

A total of 98 students graduated from various on-campus learning (OCL) programmes in 2021. Two top graduates share their reflections of experiencing internship stints and anticipating bright prospects for their careers.



FINDING HER NICHE IN ENGINEERING THROUGH A FATEFUL INTERNSHIP

A three-month internship at a manufacturing MNC in early 2021 turned out to be a serendipitous step in life for **Jenice Tan Yi Ying** of Penang. She not only determined her professional passion and calling, but also went on to settle for a job as a Test Engineer with Jabil Circuit Sdn Bhd in the Bayan Lepas Free Industrial Zone.

The 22-year-old graduated from the Bachelor of Software Engineering(Hons)programme atthe recente-convocation, emerging as the top OCL student for the School of Science & Technology (SST). "The experience gained through my internship and the knowledge learnt from my programme will surely help me to become a successful engineer," she reflected.

Tan chose to study software engineering due to her affinity for the subject, and because of the prospects of employment in engineering. Her learning at WOU has given her the confidence to step out of her comfort zone to face challenges and solve issues to improve her work performance.

As to balancing studies with her other obligations, she said, "Studying smart and not studying hard is the key to success. Good time management is very important to me. I set the deadlines for every assignment and task so that I could complete all on time."

She is grateful to her family for their support and "for sending me to this prestigious university" to get her degree. She also expressed gratitude to WOU for the opportunity to gain in-depth knowledge on software engineering, as well as her lecturers for their "guidance, advice, patience and support". She is happy to have garnered top marks despite the additional stress brought about by the pandemic.



A PASSION FOR PSYCHOLOGY AND HELPING PEOPLE BEARS REWARDS

Yearning to better understand the human mind and behaviour, **Jayson Lew Chi Kheong**, registered for the Bachelor of Arts (Hons) in Psychology (BAPS) programme. Not only did he graduate with the degree last year, but he also emerged as the best OCL student from the School of Education, Humanities & Social Sciences (SEHS).

Lew, 24, from Penang is currently working as a Relationship Manager at KD Trainer on a part-time basis after completing his internship there. His work involves maintaining a good relationship with clients.

He had originally enrolled in the open distance learning (ODL) intake for BAPS, but soon switched when WOU also offered it in OCL mode. "This degree has not only enhanced my communication skills but also my perceptive faculties too," he shared. "I learnt to modify my communication according to what the particular situation demands."

He now plans to pursue the Master of Clinical Psychology to live up to his cherished dream. "I was always fascinated in helping people in need. I aim to become a motivational speaker, reaching and inspiring thousands of people."

Lew had declined an offer from a public university to study entrepreneur engineering as he was not as interested in it as psychology. He credited a teacher at his alma mater, St Xavier's Institution, for pointing him in the right direction after his STPM by suggesting WOU.

He wanted to give up during the pandemic, but kept going thanks to the support of family, friends, classmates and lecturers. He was able to excel to become the outstanding graduate for SEHS because he loved the subject. "Learn as much as you can for your academic and personal success," he advised.

WOU DOCTORAL STUDENTS' PROPOSALS GAIN INTERNATIONAL EXPOSURE



◀ Clockwise from top left - Yusnidar, Wong, Cheah, Leong, Prasad, Teh, Kua and Jayakumar.

Eight students from WOU's Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) programme recently shared their preliminary research proposals at the 10th International Qualitative Research Conference.

The WOU participants at the virtual event, organised by the Qualitative Research Association of Malaysia (QRAM) from 20 to 23 October 2021, were:

- **Teh Beng Soo** (HR manager) shared on *An Exploratory Study on Workplace Inclusion Strategy for the Untapped Labour Pool of Ex-Offenders*, to assist the hiring of released prisoners and their reintegration into society.
- **Kap Leong Yee Nam** (senior QA/QC supervisor) on *A Post-Pandemic Phenomenological Study of Managers' Response to Psychological Stress in the Construction Industry*, addressing these challenges.
- **Wong Seow Chee** on *Use of Humour as a Coping Strategy in the Workplace During a Pandemic: a Malaysian Context*, to relieve stress.
- **Prasad Krishnapillai** (telecommunications & IT consultant) on *A Qualitative Behavioural Study*
- **Yvonne Kua Ee Ven** (Johor Electrical Appliances Dealers Association member) on *Business Model Transformation during Covid-19: a Case of Home Appliance Retailers in Johor, Malaysia*, to guide struggling SMEs.
- **Jayakumar Raj** (training academy director) on *A Study on the Effectiveness of Training Need Analysis in Selected Manufacturing Companies in Johor Bahru during a Pandemic Covid-19*, to suggest training programmes in the current situation.
- **Yusnidar Abd Rahman** (business owner) on *Strategic Foresight for Micro Entrepreneurship Growth: a Study on Empowering Marginalised Women in Penang*, to help affected women thrive in micro businesses.
- **Cheah U-Meng** (IT specialist) on *Examining Post-Pandemic Behavioural Change in Managing Team Agility: a Study of Leaders in Multinational Corporations in Malaysia* for better organisational resilience.



WOU'S DR ANBALAGAN WINS EXCELLENCE AWARD AT GLOBAL EVENT

School of Business & Administration (SBA) Assoc Prof Dr Anbalagan Krishnan was accorded the 'Distinguished Service Award in Management Education' at ARISE 2021, a global virtual conference, for his services in higher education. The ARISE (Advancing Research for Innovation, Sustainability and Enhancement) event was organised by Special Minds, India, and Kiwi Miles, New Zealand, from 24 to 26 September 2021.

MALAYSIAN COMPANIES REMINDED TO STEP UP THEIR READINESS FOR IR 4.0

Despite the imperative need to migrate to Industry 4.0 (IR 4.0), none of the companies in Malaysia are ready to do so, revealed an expert involved in helping firms assess their capabilities and preparedness for adopting IR 4.0.

Assoc Prof Ts Dr Khairur Rijal Jamaludin, auditor of the Industry4WRD Readiness Assessment Programme, said that thus far no SMEs are interconnected with cyber physical systems for intelligent automation, horizontal integration and vertical integration for IR 4.0.

"Even the most advanced industries only have automated production using robots," he said. "If our industries do not improve the cyber physical systems, they will be left behind in 2035, the maturity deadline for IR 4.0." He shared that industries in Europe and US have started adopting IR 4.0, while the Japanese already had big data, Internet of Things (IoT) and Artificial Intelligence as far back as 10 years ago.

Industry4WRD policy is a national policy to transform the manufacturing sector and related services within the period from 2018 to 2025. Under Industry4WRD, the government



► Dr Khairur wants SMEs to take concrete steps towards IR 4.0.

provides incentives to help transform the Malaysian manufacturing industry to be "smarter, more systematic and resilient" for migration to IR 4.0.

Dr Khairur was speaking at a webinar titled *Towards Smart Manufacturing in IR 4.0* on 11 November 2021. The event was organised by WOU's School of Science & Technology (SST), the Technological Association of Malaysia's (TAM) Penang branch, the Institution of Engineers (IEM), Malaysia's Penang branch, and the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers' (IEEE) Malaysia section.

He defined IR 4.0 as the "current trend of digitalisation of data and information exchange using advanced technology where everything is connected and collaborated in real-time through a cyber physical system". He said many companies collect lots of data but fail to leverage on what they have.

He highlighted that cyber physical systems for IR 4.0 "are enabling technologies that bring the virtual and physical worlds together to create a truly networked world in which intelligent objects communicate and interact with each other". These technologies are big data analytics, AI, augmented reality, additive manufacturing, cybersecurity, IoT, simulation, system integration, cloud computing, autonomous robots and advanced materials.

Dr Khairur explained further, "The customers, suppliers, design engineers, the shop floor, the vendors are all connected to the product development. Information can be changed, converted in the system in real-time and the outcome is a product that fulfils the customer's needs."

He called for industries to be beefed up with know-how to translate loads of data into usable information for real-time solutions. These include identifying the source of a problem (e.g. machine breakdowns), fulfilling customers' needs, predicting for prevention (e.g. wear and tear, inventory control), and knowing what plans to adopt (e.g. marketing intelligence).

HELPING VICTIMS OF ABUSE IN THE 'SHADOW PANDEMIC' AND BEYOND



▲ YB Chong Eng.

There is a serious need to strengthen access to psychological first aid (PFA) for survivors of domestic violence to make them feel safe, calm and hopeful, and also connect them to helpful information and services.

Penang State Executive Councillor for Social Development and Non-Islamic Religious Affairs, YB Chong Eng, said this when officiating at a webinar on *Psychological First Aid for Victims of Domestic Violence* on 5 December 2021.

The event was organised by WOU's Centre for Foundation Studies (CFS), the International College of Clinical Hypnosis Practitioners (ICCHP) Asia, and the Penang Women's Development Corporation (PWDC) under the state's Penang Goes Orange (PGO) 2021 campaign.

Domestic violence has significant and long-term effects on victims and families. It also bears heavy social and economic costs. "The psychological, emotional and social impacts of domestic violence can linger long after the violence has subsided, and even after the victim has left the abusive partner," said YB Chong.

Citing police statistics, she pointed to a 35% increase in domestic violence cases in Penang in the first six months of 2021 compared to the same period the year before.

In particular, she drew attention to the 'Shadow Pandemic' which describes growing violence – including physical, emotional, and sexual abuse – against women and girls globally during the Covid-19 crisis which forced lockdowns and restrictions in many countries.

She also highlighted the effects of domestic violence on the overall health of an economy, both in the short-term and long-term, as revealed by an International Monetary Fund (IMF) research.

The short-term effect is that "women from abusive homes are likely to work fewer hours and be less productive". In the long run, domestic violence can decrease the number of women in the workforce, minimise their acquisition of skills and education, and result in less public investment overall as more resources are channelled to health and judicial services.

WOU is sponsoring ten women leaders to pursue the PFA course in February 2022. Chong urged practitioners from the judiciary and the police force to enrol, so that they can better support the victims.



BEWARE OF ABUSE AT HOME AND WORKPLACE



▲ Synthia Surin.

ICCHP Asia Regional Director Synthia Surin elaborated on the escalation of domestic violence and workplace abuse in Malaysia amidst the pandemic situation.

Explaining that domestic violence is often "excused or denied," she said that abusers use fear, guilt, shame and intimidation to control victims, even taking away their mobile phones. They also use physical violence and gaslighting (emotional manipulation to make victims accept whatever untruths the abusers accuse them of).

Surin said abuse not only happens in the home but also in MNCs, small offices, universities, hospitals, old folks' homes and other organisations. She highlighted three forms of abuse – emotional, physical and sexual.

Some examples of emotional abuse at the workplace are superiors needlessly belittling or putting down subordinates, blaming or isolating them from future projects, making unreasonable work demands, giving no time off for personal needs, and accusing them when anything goes wrong.

She stressed that office bullying is also emotional abuse. This includes sending emails on a person's poor performance not just to one person but to others who need not be informed.

Intimidation at home may entail the husband threatening the victim with harm if she does not obey him, destroying her things, and invading her personal space (e.g. listening in on conversations).

Physical abuse involves slapping, hitting, punching, shoving, biting, kicking, burning, choking or holding one down. Sexual abuse includes unwanted sexual demands, even by a spouse, and unwanted advances by colleagues.

"Support a friend if they are being abused, especially at work," Surin urged. "If you notice a change in behaviour, offer assistance or put them in contact with someone who can help."

AN ACCOMPLISHED ENTREPRENEUR'S JOURNEY TO GREATER HEIGHTS WITH BTEL

After forming his automation company, entrepreneur Ts Kuan Teik Hua found that whenever he tendered for jobs or met prospects he was consistently doubted and even tested for his technical knowledge. Certain companies asked for his resume to determine his qualifications and experience when assessing his bids.

The experience motivated him to enhance his qualifications and prompted him to pursue the Bachelor of Technology (Hons) degree in Electronics (BTEL) at WOU.

When he graduated in 2014, the founder and director of KL Automation Engineering (KLAE) Group of Companies found that the degree gave him fresh "professional recognition and respect". It offered him a fast-track path to become a certified professional technologist (Ts) under the Malaysia Board of Technologists (MBOT).

"I now write academic papers. I am a reviewer for an international journal and a course evaluator for MBOT, assigned when a university seeks our recognition for their course," he said. Indeed, the decision to pursue the electronics degree at WOU has greatly augmented his academic and professional standing while helping him to expand his business and network.

Kuan was sharing about how the WOU degree benefited him during an online talk on 31 October 2021. He also assured the participants that there is no difference between a technology degree and an engineering one in terms of salary scheme and career prospects.

▼ Kuan, a WOU alumni, is a successful industrialist.



"Use the occasion to network with classmates. Being a tutor allows me to look for talented staff among the students for my company,"

He had previously earned two diplomas from Singapore. Following his BTEL, he went on to obtain his Master of Engineering and is now pursuing his PhD in Engineering. He also tutors at WOU and serves as a project supervisor for WOU and UTAR.

With more than 30 years of experience in the oil and gas industry, Kuan had returned to Malaysia in 2004 and founded KL Automation Engineering which now has branch offices in Korea, China, Singapore and Malaysia, as well as sales channels in ASEAN, China and Korea.

Following his years of success, he advises students to network for entrepreneurship and career opportunities. In fact, the study environment at WOU has allowed him to network with his own peers from different industries.

"Use the occasion to network with classmates. Being a tutor allows me to look for talented staff among the students for my company," he said. "When I came back to Malaysia, I only had one company. Now I have nine companies, most of which I started via study networking and chatting informally over coffee."

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