

TOP CLASS

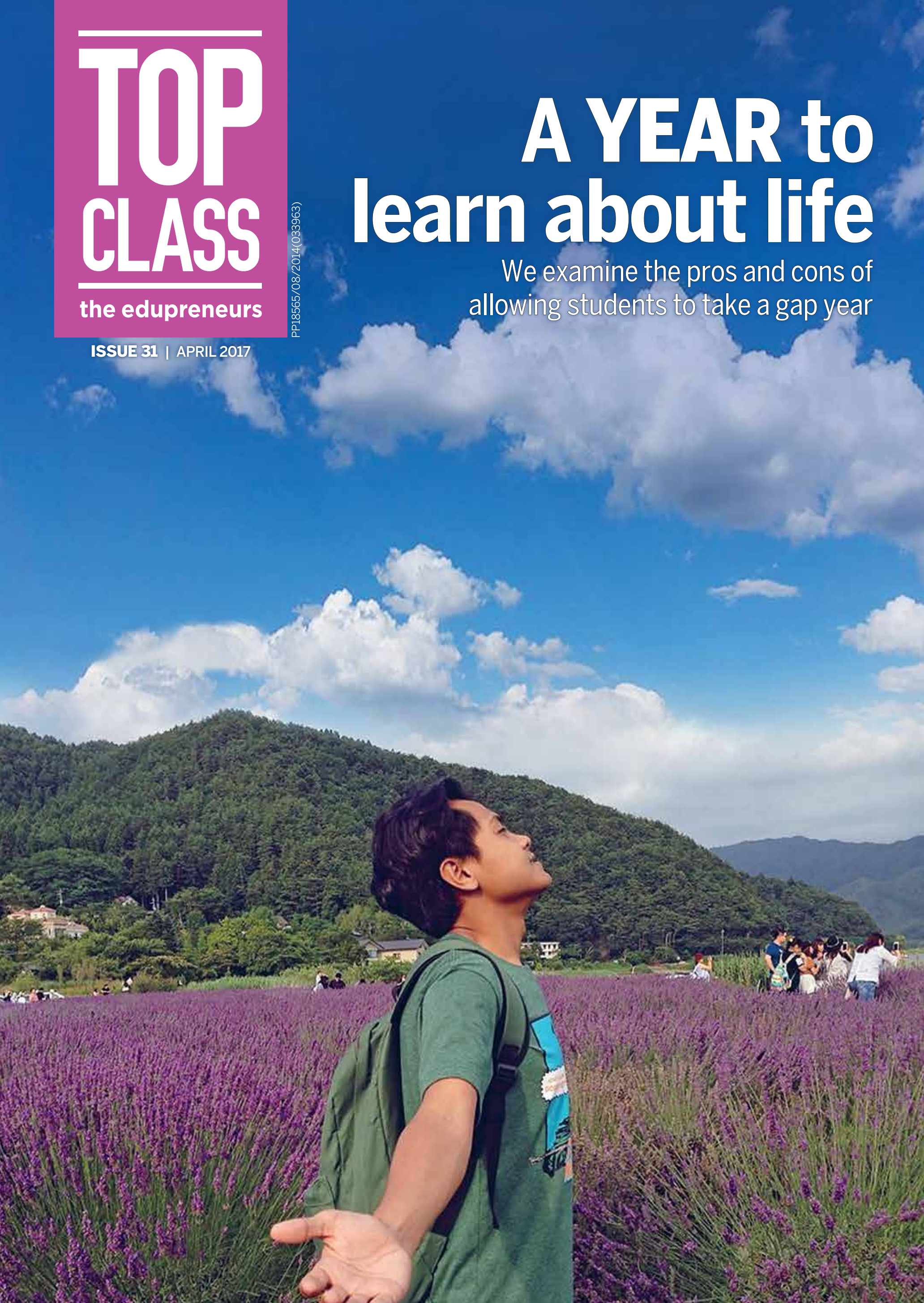
the edupreneurs

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A YEAR to learn about life

We examine the pros and cons of
allowing students to take a gap year



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TAKING
A YEAR
OUT

THE practice of taking a gap year is, for most Malaysian parents and students, unfamiliar territory. Many don't even realise that they have the option to take a year off from their studies but others may see it as an excuse for an extended vacation. There is some merit to the latter view.

Our children start formal schooling at a later age than their peers in most developed countries so by the time they are in foreign universities, their course mates are usually a year or two younger. Taking an additional year out before they graduate would mean they start working at an even older age than they would have, which could theoretically make them less employable.

Since taking a gap year usually involves a lot of travelling, parents will also have to fork out extra money to cover the expenses their children incur, so in cost terms it could be the equivalent of paying for an extra year at university with none of the tangible benefits.

On the other hand, there is a lot of evidence to show that students who take a gap year join the workforce as more well-rounded individuals. Their experience living overseas, travelling and working for a year gives them insights that can't be found in textbooks and classrooms and usually make them better decision makers who are able to work with minimal supervision later in life.

Of course, there are always exceptions. A student could just as easily waste the gap year by taking an extended holiday and return to university none the wiser but now a full-year behind his former course mates. Worse still, there is always a readjustment period to contend with so for those who aren't strong students in the first place, taking a year away from their books may not be the best course of action.

Perhaps the decision on whether or not to take a gap year should be made jointly by the student, his parents and the university so that all parties are made aware of the pros and cons. It's not something that will benefit everyone but for the few who are industrious and studious at the same time, a year of self-discovery could shape the rest of their lives.

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Employability in a data-driven world

Inti and industry partners address gaps in IT industry

| Text by KEVIN WONG | ecwong@hckmedia.com

INTI International University & Colleges (Inti) recently hosted a panel discussion with industry partners from IBM Corporation, Malaysia Digital Economy Corporation (MDEC), and JobStreet in addressing the employment gaps and opportunities in the age of data analytics. The country's rapid expansion of regional IT hubs in recent years has engendered an acute demand for talents in key positions. It has been a pressing issue considering Malaysia's goal to raise 2,000 data scientists and 16,000 data professional by the year 2020. Today, there are only 300 data scientists in the country consisting of both local and foreign talents.

Malaysia's rapid expansion of regional IT hubs in recent years has engendered an acute demand for talent in key positions. This is especially pressing considering Malaysia's goal to raise 2,000 data scientists and 16,000 data professionals by 2020. Currently, there are only 300 data scientists in Malaysia – both local and foreign. MDEC enterprise development vice president, Gopi Ganesalingam said that developing the digital economy was a journey and there and many moving parts and talent is definitely a critical enabler for a thriving and robust digital economy.

"We need to cultivate digital making interests and skillsets that are relevant, forward looking, and 'state-of-the-art', so as to have our students be competent in the digital economy market place, where some of the highest paying and 'newest and the latest jobs' are found in the world. He added that there were no boundaries for digital economy as it's accessible to anyone who has an internet connection



(From L-R) Amy Hirst, Director, Gopi Ganesalingam, Simon Si and Timothy Johnson

and producing the right talent was critical.

"It is with this intention that this year that Computer Science, which is crucial for computational thinking, was introduced to 10,000 public schools, starting from standard 1, Form 1 and Form 4. We also urge private institutions of higher learning to have their technology modules to be aligned with the industry requirements," he said.

Meanwhile, IBM Corporation power z system and storage WW technical training director Amy Hirst said that IBM's chief executive officer Ginni Rommetty has spoken about the value of "New Collar Jobs" and these are going to be in the IT space.

"This is because information and data – both structure and unstructured – are the newest commodities professionals need to harness in their enterprises. As a result, developing IT skills is critical for graduates to enter the workforce," she said.

Inti marketing, products and partnerships senior vice president Timothy Johnson shared in order to create these new roles, there is a need to draw a connection between employers and educational institutions.

"There is a greater need for companies to work with students to show them how skills can be applied in the real world. As an example, the IBM Innovation Centre for Education (ICE) program which Inti has integrated into its business and Computing & IT verticals serve to equip our students with cutting-edge skills that will prepare them to not only bridge the gap in IT expertise but to helm the field," he said.

Jobstreet regional communication head Simon Si added that one of the trends showing today was that industries and consumers were adopting new technologies today faster than ever before.

"These technological drivers of change have given rise to job creations and it is important that all stakeholders work together to prepare students for jobs of the future. This has also led to a higher average salary for fresh grads with IT qualifications. When there is a scarcity in supply in a high demand situation, it is natural for us to see better remuneration offered to meet that demand," he said.



Inti fashion students were given the opportunity to showcase their talents

Rocking it out

Inti rocks out to celebrate the launch of its new South Block in Subang Jaya

| Text by FAISAL SHAH | faisalshah@hckmedia.com

RIVETING performances, artistic showdown and a weekend of fun activities were the highlights at the recently concluded #INTIFRESH carnival held to commemorate the launch of INTI International College Subang's new and trendy South Block.

Starting off with an appreciation for the arts, Art Battle Malaysia organized by Ruby Subramaniam, was a breathtaking experience for audiences who watched 11 artists go head on in a 30-minute art battle to which audiences voted for their favourite pieces of artwork at the end. The speed painting battle which has run internationally in US, Canada and Brazil was brought to Malaysia to create better exposure for local artists. Featuring an international line up of artists all the way from Iran and India including local Malaysian superstars, the exhilarating showdown showcased various styles of painting, different levels of artistic skills and deeply emotionally-connected art pieces that came to life on a blank white canvas within a span of 30 minutes.

What would seem like an impossible feat for most people, looked like a walk in the park for the first round of 11 artists who were then shortlisted to six semi-finalists and eventually down to two finalists. Each round saw the artists rigorously

and meticulously creating inspiring pieces to win the crowd over not just by look and feel but also through the techniques applied.

Eventual winner Anna Sabrina from Malaysia received the majority vote on the final round for her beautiful and colourful interpretation of a person's mind being blown. Sabrina, who had previously joined Art Battle Canada in 2015, was pleased to come back and join the Malaysian leg and was ecstatic to be named the champion of Art Battle Malaysia 2017. Apart from the intensity of the battle, there were some intense moments in the purchase of the artwork which were created that day. Some of the artwork were auctioned off immediately and bought by audience members who were captivated by the artists' works.

Progressing into the evening, #INTIFRESH ended on a high note with a music festival. Held timely as an avenue for college students and SPM leavers who had just received their results to have a fun night out with friends after the stresses of exams and results, the music festival saw over 500 participants singing and dancing along to the music of some of today's recognized Malaysian artists.

The acts included local legends and international award winning hip-hop group, K-Town Clan; AIM (Anugerah Industry Music) nominee, Back2Basix and singer/songwriter and rising star, Talitha Tan. The evening also featured a stylistic varied fashion runway showcase of clothing designs by INTI's Diploma in Fashion Design graduates and current Semester 2 and 3 Diploma in fashion design students.

The newly redeveloped South Block, offers a fresh, cosmopolitan learning environment to suit its dynamic student population. Leveraging innovative and creative designs within its classrooms and throughout its five collective blocks, the new South Block offers an enhanced teaching and learning setting that emphasises openness and collaborative learning.

Celebrating artistic values

Garden International holds its latest edition of ArtLive

| Text by FAISAL SHAH | faisalshah@hckmedia.com



Primary students learn necktie art during ArtLive

GARDEN International School (GIS) celebrated art once again through its annual art themed event, ArtLive. The event aims to provide the school community with the opportunity to be involved in the excitement and passion of art alongside professional creative people.

This year, GIS was delighted to work with local artists and professionals to organise workshops and talks for students and parents over the course of two weeks in school. Among the collaborators were ArtSeni Gallery founder Phillip Wong; silkscreen artists Sanan Anuar and Nawar Ismail; ceramicist Cheah Yeow Seng; editor-in-chief of Cutout Magazine Vivian Toh; fashion designer Nikita Dowlani; light painting photographer Sean Liew; production designer Tommy Mansur; architect Woon Teen Kee; watercolour calligrapher Sharon Tan; urban sketcher Ch'ng Kiah Kean; creative director of Prestige magazine Ibnu Aswan and international speaker Danny Li from the Savannah College of Arts and Design in Hong Kong.

"Our idea is to enlighten the community in the creative industries and the myriad of rewarding creative professions in the contemporary world," said the Secondary Head of Art, Ross Padgett.

During the ArtLive event primary students were involved in a number of projects with the artists, such as making pottery, canvas necktie art, silkscreen printing on recycled T-shirts, cardboard construction masks and a theatre setting of "Willie Wonka and the Chocolate Factory". Secondary students also benefited from the various talks about entrepreneurship in creative industries and art workshops such as watercolour calligraphy and a weekend trip to Kuala Lumpur City Centre and Thean Hou temple for urban sketching.

"ArtLive is aligned with our learning culture, creating opportunities for our students to develop their creative and thinking skills, opening up their minds to why art is relevant and important in real life," adds Ross.

How to Survive College

Inti launches video to educate SPM school leavers about life in college

| Text by KEVIN WONG | ecwong@hckmedia.com

IN a recent collaboration, Inti University and College and JinnyBoyTV have launched a video for SPM leavers on how to survive college. The video, shot mainly in Inti Subang's newly launched South Block was to educate secondary school leavers on the reality of college life.

YouTube sensation duo JinnyBoyTV, Jin Lim and Reuben Kang said for many, college life was about independence and the ability to make one's own decision but for some it could get pretty stressful.

"This is because many of us are told to have a prefixed idea of what we want to become before entering college

and it can put a lot of stress on us. The truth is college is where we usually will understand who we are and what we want to become."

The video explores the typical look and behaviour of college students and is packed with humour by portraying popular stereotype of college students such as 'The Slacker', the 'Mui Mui Zai', the 'Break Free Girl' and the 'college hipsters'. The ending eventually reveals how the characters go on to have great careers after pursuing a course in their area of interest from Southern New Hampshire University and IBM Innovation Centre for Education at INTI.

Inti International University and College marketing, products and partnership senior vice president Timothy Johnson said the university always believes in giving students the space to understand their capabilities and assisting them to become the best they can be.

"Gone are the days where students are expected to come in with a ready-made career goal when they enrol in college," he said.



JinnyBoyTV co founder Jin Lim

The video, "How to Survive College (College Student Starter Pack)" is published on JinnyBoyTV's YouTube channel and has gotten more than 230,000 views since it was uploaded.

Investing in auto industry

Ford donates vehicles and equipment to Montfort Boys Town

| Text by FAISAL SHAH | faisalshah@hckmedia.com

FORD Motor Company, together with its local partner Sime Darby Auto Connexion (SDAC) has named Montfort Boys Town in Selangor as the latest recipient of its Ford Conservation and Environmental Grants Programme in Malaysia. The companies sourced two vehicles – a Ford Kuga and Ford Mondeo – and purchased training equipment for use by the students to gain practical knowledge and skills and assisting them towards becoming successful automotive technicians.

Montfort Boys Town provides practical vocational training to underprivileged youths to help them acquire the right skills to enter the workforce and live a successful life. The school currently offers Sijil Kemahiran Malaysia (SKM), Automotive After Sales and Service training, level one (SKM 1) and two (SKM 2). The vehicles and equipment donated by Ford will allow them to introduce a SKM 3 programme.

"Ford is proud to support the Montfort Boys Town and help further build on the learning opportunities and practical training and experience they can provide to their students," said Bagus Susanto, managing director, Asia Pacific Emerging Markets, Ford Motor Company.

"Ford Conservation and Environmental Grants Programme is part of our continued investment in the social and economic development of our country. We hope our contribution will help the students gain the necessary skills and knowledge to enter the workforce and propel their future careers," added Syed Ahmad Muzri Syed Faiz, managing director, Sime Darby Auto Connexion.



Thanks to a donation by Ford the Montfort Boys Town can now expand their vocational offerings

FEATURE

Four time CHAMPIONS

UiTM emerge as winners at Shell Eco-marathon Asia for the fourth consecutive year

Text by FAISAL SHAH | faisalshah@hckmedia.com

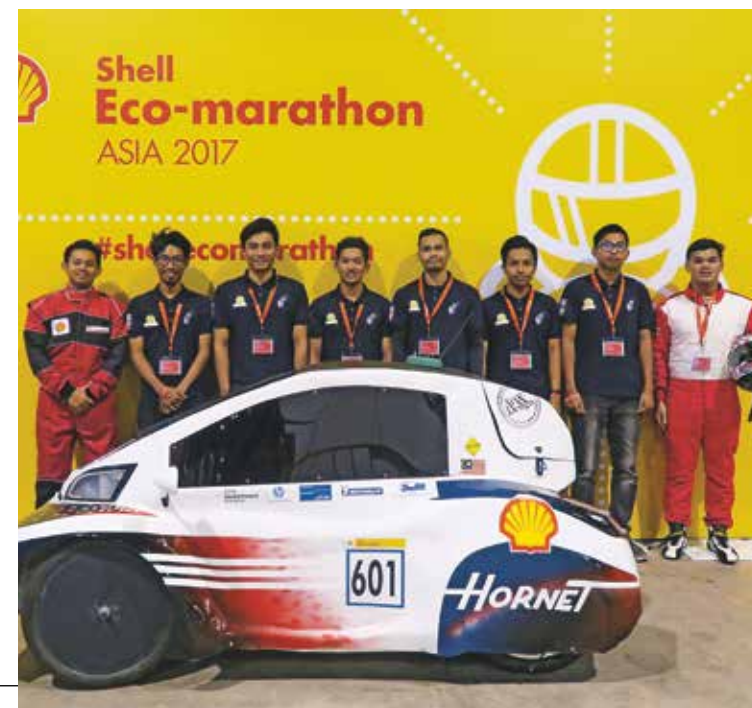
Malaysian university students can be a creative bunch. With the right amount of guidance and motivation they have proven to be world beaters; a fact that was proven yet again when Team UiTM Eco-Sprint from Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) Shah Alam emerged as champions in the Shell Eco-marathon Asia 2017 competition.

It was the fourth consecutive time that a team from UiTM emerged as champions for the event, which was achieved when Eco-Sprint obtained a result of 359.4km/m3 in the Hydrogen category. Adding more glory to Malaysia was the fact that the runners up in the same category were University of Malaya's Eco-Voyager, which managed a reading of 255.7km/m3 and thus earned the country a sweet 1-2 victory.

For those who don't know, the Shell Eco-marathon Asia is an annual competition that challenges teams to design, build and drive the most energy-efficient cars. This year, 123 student teams from 20 countries competed in two categories. These were Prototype - futuristic and highly aerodynamic vehicles, or UrbanConcept - highly economical vehicles that resemble current cars. These categories were further divided into three sub-categories of energy sources the students could select from.

"For eight years now, the regions' brightest minds have come together to design, build and test their energy efficient vehicles at the Shell Eco-marathon. I'm especially proud of our young Malaysian engineers and innovators who have showcased their tenacity and perseverance alongside their technical expertise to address the global need for cleaner energy. Year after year, we see them improving not just their designs, but also their confidence - after all, the competition puts more than their engineering capabilities on display. It also harnesses their soft skills such as team leadership, marketing and communications, and business acumen as well," said Datuk Iain Lo, Shell Malaysia country chairman.

Team UiTM Eco-Sprint manager Amirah Athirah Rohazam said, "This competition has tested us beyond our technical abilities and really pushed us to better our time and project management skills, all



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: The glory of victory

All the cars line up before the start of the competition

Team Eco-Planet and their entry, the Hornet, were the second team from UiTM



of which are useful non-technical proficiencies in our field. I wish more teams will benefit from the competition like we did and hope that future teams representing the country will win again with better results. In addition, I hope competitions like this will help to popularise STEM subjects in Malaysian education institutions, especially amongst aspiring women engineers."

Meanwhile, team UM Eco-Voyager manager S. Inthiran said, "Our team members are all from various engineering departments - some are from mechanical while others are from electrical. To design this car, we came together to produce a more fuel-efficient automobile, integrating our learnings from a diverse skill set and bringing our theoretical knowledge to life.

We also really pushed ourselves to win as this competition put us on an international stage and representing Malaysia beyond our faculties and university was an honour."

The Shell Eco-marathon, which has been running in Europe for more than three decades and in the United States since 2007, made its debut in Asia in 2010 and Malaysia

Guidance and teamwork

In a discipline dominated by men team Eco-Sprint from UiTM is captained by a woman engineering student

AMIRAH Athirah Rohazam is a 25-year-old engineering student and the only woman member of team Eco-Sprint, yet she was also chosen as the team captain. That sounds surprising but Amirah was a member of previous Shell Eco-marathon teams and her experience was part of the reason why she was trusted with such an important role.

"I was a member of the team in 2016 and attended the competition in Manila, but I was still surprised that my team members selected me as the team captain," she says.

Though naturally shy about her ascension to the role, Amirah leads by example and is always willing to perform every task required. She also displayed strong organisational and management skills according to her team members who all raved about how easy it was to get things done because there was a proper paper trail to review.

Still, the design of their car was done by committee and once a design was selected, the team was broken down into three groups (mechanical, electrical, art and design) that optimised the skills of the students involved. There are also some cultural references involved as a batik motif was also chosen to decorate the exterior of the car.

"We chose a batik design because we wanted to showcase the uniqueness of Malaysian batik. Just like how our designs are different from Indonesian and Brunei batik, our team and our car is unique too and we hope to succeed in showcasing our uniqueness at the Shell Eco-marathon," says Amirah.

As university students, the support of faculty professors and lecturers were vital to the team.

"We have a lot of great support from various faculty members at UiTM. They assist not just in terms of offering their opinions and technical skills but they have also helped us to raise the funds we needed to see this project through. They also have a lot of experience from previous entries, so they help ensure we don't make the same mistakes with our car," she adds.

As the results have shown, Team Eco-Sprint and UiTM had a very successful Shell Eco-marathon 2017 bringing yet more glory to the university and its students. Winning four years in a row doesn't happen by accident so other universities who want to taste glory in the competition should perhaps follow the example being set by them. That and don't be afraid to have a woman that leads the team.



Team Eco-Sprint and their car the Chantek

was the first country in this region to host the competition. In every region, similar rules apply in which, all vehicles must pass a set of technical tests before they are allowed onto the competition circuit to see how far they can get on the least amount of fuel, and potentially achieve the highest mileage in the competition.

Celebrating the best of energy and mobility, the competition saw student teams from the Asia Pacific and the Middle East regions showcase their self-built vehicles at the eighth edition of the competition that was featured as part of the Make the Future Singapore festivals for

the first time. The festival is part of a global initiative with events in Asia, America and Europe. The Asia event has the widest geographical reach with 20 countries participating, accounting for more than 60% of the world's population.

This year, the competition took on an additional element of excitement with the inaugural Drivers' World Championship (DWC) Asia, an exciting race format in which the best teams in the region will compete for their place in the Drivers' World Championship Grand Final in London in on May 28, 2017. Two teams from Indonesia and one from the Philippines will represent Asia to face-off against the best three teams from both the Americas and Europe to be crowned overall Grand Final champions and earn a special experience at the home of Scuderia Ferrari. ■

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COVER STORY

A year to GAIN or LOSE?

Students in eight public universities can now take a gap year but what does that entail? | Text by FRANCIS YIP HON CHENG



A sense of adventure and independence are among the experiences students can gain



Many Malaysians prefer travelling to their Eastern neighbours for a gap year

When the Minister of Higher Education, Datuk Seri Idris Jusoh announced the introduction of a Gap Year 2017 programme in eight public universities for the first time recently, there were many mixed reactions from the public. Although the gap year programme is an option, some argued that the gap year may prolong their process of graduating while some gave it the thumbs up.

But what exactly is gap year?

Gap years originally started in the United Kingdom in the 1970's as a way to fill the seven or eight-month gap between taking A-level exams and the beginning of university. So typically, students take a gap year after graduating from high school and before attending college. But in some nations it's something that can also be taken while in the midst of pursuing a degree in university.

In Malaysia, the gap year has been practised by some private learning institutions but for public universities, it is not a common practice. Most are short term (either a few weeks or a semester) and are considered as a foreign student exchange programme, or credit transfer to universities abroad rather than actually taking time out from university.

Personal growth or waste of time?

It is often said that a gap year helps deepen practical, professional and personal awareness. Students get to travel, do volunteer work, learn a new language and experience activities for personal growth.

Chloe Lui Ching Yui, a Canadian pre-university student at Taylor's University College spent her gap year staying with her host family in Rosario, Argentina under the American Field Service (AFS) organisation.

"I learned to speak Spanish and be independent as well as gained a lot of respect for people of other races. I am quite lucky that my Argentinian host family treated me like their own daughter. Seeing the close-knit relationship among the family members allowed me to reflect on my relationship with my parents. Before my gap year, I used to argue a lot with my mum but now, I don't," she says.

When asked if she experienced any culture shock Lui adds, "Argentines love to eat together. They will hold a big party and banquet dinner with fancy dress for their children when they turn 15. If you think Malaysians love to eat, wait until you mix with the Argentinians."

For businessman, Lim Cheng Jeen, he believes the gap year has helped in character-building of all his three children. "Our education system is too exam-oriented. In this era of globalization, my wife and I wanted our children to see the world in a broader perspective so we sent them abroad to experience gap year. My daughter, Clarissa did her gap year in Germany and I could see her transformation. She is more mature, independent and caring now."

In an e-mail interview, Clarissa-Jan Lim Szu Hwei, who now works as an associate editor at A Plus, a digital news company in New York founded by Ashton Kutcher, says, "Living in Germany was an experience completely outside of my comfort zone. I was a city girl in Malaysia who argued a lot with her parents (as any teenage girl does). I grew up pretty sheltered and I had a regular routine of school and downtime."

"In Germany I lived for the most part in Schweinfurt, Bavaria, a village of 2,000 people with a young family who threw barbecue parties on the weekend and ate dinner together every evening. Everyone knew each other there, and all the young people wanted to practise their English with me while I wanted to practise my German with them."

"I must say my gap year in Germany has helped me become more independent and adventurous, and as a whole, to become the person I am now. Also, knowing another language is not a bad thing, and it looks especially good on my résumé," she adds.

Not all parents share the same view about gap years though. Helen Gooi, a senior manager of a US-based supply chain management company says, "a gap year will prolong my children's education. I would prefer if there were no gap year as it is important for them to start their career early. If you choose a field which requires years of experience to succeed,

being a year behind may not be the best option.

"They can easily lose momentum too. Skills they had learnt through their courses may be forgotten, making the transition back to university life difficult. And if they do not organise their time well, they may end up wasting time during the gap year and find it hard to catch up in their course again."

"Those who work during the gap year may also start to enjoy making money and lose sight of the fact that further education is an investment that will eventually increase their earning power after graduation."

For Ahmad Afiq Md Hashim, a final year Media and Communications student in Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), the gap year gave him an enriching once-in-a-lifetime experience.

"As a foreign exchange student at the University of Tsukuba, Japan under the Asean International Mobility for Students programme, I got to learn about other Asean cultures from the students there. Initially, I had some doubts about Myanmar due to the Rohingya issue but I must admit that after making friends with the students, it has changed my whole perception about them as well as other Asean nations. I learned to respect and accept our differences so I'm proud to say my nationality is Malaysia and my identity is Asean," Ahmad proudly smiles.

Mohd Syazawi Mohd Rafee, a final year Psychology student in UKM opines that a gap year may not be a good idea for students from the lower income group.

"I have friends telling me that they want to graduate on time so that they can start working immediately and help lessen the financial burden of their family. And these are from the B40 income group," he says.

Kisantiny Suthagar, a second year law student in UKM shares the same sentiment but feels that the gap year will give students a new experience which will transform their way of thinking.



Professor Dr Ishak Yusoff supports gap years



Gaining exposure to foreign cultures and building relationships is a good reason for students to take a gap year

PHOTOS BY FRANCIS YIP HON CHENG

"Gap years have more positive than negative values," she says.

The academic point of view

Most academicians believe the introduction of a gap year is a welcome decision but some feel it will take students some time to adjust and familiarise themselves with the implementation of the gap year programme.

According to Associate Professor Dr. Yazrina Yahya, Director of International Relations Centre in UKM Global, "there are many questions on how we are going to implement this. For instance, a student goes for a gap year but what if the modules he missed out on is no longer available when he is back because the enrolment for them is low?"

"It is not economically feasible to continue a class with only two students. So that gap year student will have to wait for another year to continue his studies. Hence, we need to identify what year and what modules the students can forego when they leave for their gap year."

"Conceptually, it's a good idea but technically we still need to sort out how to implement this. On top of that, students may face difficulty with their student loans. Their contract with PTPN requires them to graduate within three years and to start paying back the loan right after graduation. So how do they solve the issue of students delaying their graduation as it does not comply with their contract because of a gap year? The mechanics of the payback period therefore needs to be clearly defined between the sponsor and students who go for a gap year."

"Another issue is the monitoring of the gap year of students. In America, the system has been in place for a long time and hence it is easy to monitor but we are new and monitoring the students can be tough in the beginning," she adds.

However, Professor Dr Ishak Yusoff, director of



Students gain lots of varied experiences when they travel overseas



Argentines are like Malaysians in how they love to eat

Career Advancement Centre (UKM-Karier) feels monitoring the students in their gap year shouldn't be a big concern.

"The implementation of the gap year should be done with guided flexibility. What is more important is a gap year provides real working experience for students which universities can't. In fact, we always receive requests from many corporations giving preference of employment to students who have undergone a gap year working in corporations. In a nutshell, graduates with who haven't taken a gap year are more marketable!" he claims.

Dr Abdul Latiff Ahmad, senior lecturer of Inter-Cultural Communication in UKM, says that for many years, the local education system has been focusing on graduating on time and therefore, the introduction of a gap year is a welcome move as it will help students in their own personal growth.

"It makes a lot of difference when students travel abroad during their gap year. They will be more open-minded, knowledgeable and feel a sense of belonging to the global community. And this is what our education should be about - to build character, and not just knowledge," he stresses.

To sum it all up, Professor Dr Phil Oliver Hahn from University of Passau, Germany says, "Public universities in Malaysia may encounter some difficulties in the initial stage of gap year implementation but once it is in place, it's all systems go! Look at the positive side of it."

Personal choices

Regardless of where one may side in the argument, gap years will never be made compulsory for any course. As an optional activity, the final decision therefore rests with the students and their parents. It's not suitable for everyone and those wanting to start their profession as soon as possible would be well served to obtain their degrees as quickly as possible, but for some, the opportunity to take a bit of time to get a taste of the real world before they join it full-time could prove to be an invaluable experience. ■

FEATURE

RAISING the bar

SEGi University & Colleges signs agreements with various parties to bring improvements to the field of education and training in Malaysia

| Text by FAISAL SHAH | faisalshah@hckmedia.com

SEGi University & Colleges added yet another feather in its cap when it signed a series of agreements with various parties to help bring wide ranging improvements that will benefit all Malaysians looking to improve their level of education. The event was held April 6 and was witnessed by the Minister of Higher Education, Datuk Seri Idris Jusoh Minister.

Speaking to *Top Class* a week before the event, SEGi University & Colleges group president, Datuk Mohamed Azahari Mohamed Kamil said that the MOUs will bring the quality of education offered at SEGi up to a new level of excellence while also helping many students who otherwise might not have the financial means to pursue higher education.

Offering a helping hand

First on the list are agreements between SEGi University and Malaysian government-linked companies (GLC) Agrobank, Malaysian Building Society Bhd (MBSB) and Yayasan Sime Darby to jointly finance the education of 200 Bumiputera students from B40 (households with a monthly income of less than RM3,855) households.

"As a private education provider, SEGi has to ensure that its graduates are highly employable as parents pay a lot of money for their child's education. This is why we have so many industry collaborations but the agreement with the GLCs is also about our CSR goals. We'll offer scholarships to students from B40 and below households who have excellent results (CGPA of 3.5 and above) but couldn't get a place in public universities. They will also be extended internships with the companies while they are on their semester breaks throughout the duration of their studies.

"Our goal is to ensure that when they graduate they have already secured jobs in the various organisations collaborating with us, which

in turn will help fuel the nation building efforts these companies have been tasked with. It's a fantastic opportunity for the students as their school fees will be borne by SEGi and the GLCs while living expenses are covered via a loan from the National Higher Education Fund Corporation (PTPTN)," says Azahari.

Being from underprivileged homes brings other challenges though and the programme administrators at SEGi University are aware of them and are thus prepared for any eventuality.

"While this is a fantastic opportunity to help out underprivileged Bumiputera students, we also know of the many issues that could crop up during their time with us that can derail their studies. For example, there may be financial

pressure from home as parents ask their children to work immediately to help pay for basic necessities or they could be influenced by the company they keep who may not have the same focus on improving themselves.

"Our partners know this too and I'm happy to say that all of them have stepped up to the plate and want to collaborate with SEGi to offer extra classes outside of the teaching schedule to educate and counsel these students on matters not strictly related to the courses they're pursuing. These range from religious and civic lessons to courses on Islamic financing, which help prepare these students for working life after they have graduated.

"I believe that it is the role of the university to engage with industry players closely so that

we can ensure our students can secure employment as soon as they leave us. This programme shows our commitment to helping the less fortunate because SEGi University will be sponsoring the bulk of the course fees incurred as our partners are already providing the career opportunities," he adds.

Meeting the needs of industry

The second MoU is to collaborate with the Malaysian Industrial Development Authority (Mida), where the government body will be a corporate advisor to SEGi University and give advice on the courses and curriculum offered to their students.

"There are too many instances today where graduates enter the working world without the required tools or skill sets that are needed by industries with available jobs. Mida will therefore give us guidance to ensure that our curriculum is in line with what is needed by the various investors that are putting their money here.

"This won't be a simple one-off exercise as they will deliver a briefing once every six months to SEGi's administrators to outline the expectations and needs of foreign investors who will either be starting or ramping up their operations in the country," says Azahari.

Mida will review all 220 programmes offered by SEGi University to ensure that the students are being taught courses with excellent employability prospects. Indirectly, they will also help ensure that the talent pool of workers in Malaysia is up to the needs of what a foreign investor requires, thus leading to yet more growth in the national economy.

Filling the gaps in the automotive industry
Malaysia's automotive industry is among the most vibrant in the Asean region with car sales remaining strong despite recent economic downturns. The rapid growth means lots of job opportunities for those entering the job market but it also means there are areas where the lack of skilled workers needs to be addressed quickly. SEGi University will sign an MoU with Uni-

ABOVE:
SEGi University offers its students a modern campus and high quality education to enhance their employment prospect

RIGHT:
Datuk Mohamed Azahari Mohamed Kamil, executive director and group president of SEGi University & Colleges



versity Automotive DRB-Hicom and Proton Edar to develop a Bachelor of Engineering Technology Automotive programme based on a 2u2i framework. Touted by the Higher Education Ministry as a way of enhancing employability, 2u2i programmes offer students two years of studying with two years of industry experience via on the job training.

"This collaboration is a bit different because DRB-Hicom's university is also a private education provider. So our plan right now is for students to perhaps do one year at SEGi, one year at DRB-Hicom and then two years with Proton Edar who are also a part of the DRB-Hicom group. In those two years they will therefore be contributing to the Malaysian automotive industry as the company is such a major part of it.

"By structuring the programme as such, we are also ensuring employability for the students, which mean they have jobs almost as soon as they graduate. I also believe this is the first instance in Malaysia where two private universities are collaborating to jointly produce graduates for a certain industry as the norm is for us to compete against each other," he adds.

Raising standards across the education industry

As more education providers join the industry, the quality of courses offered start to differ vastly as the new players require time to establish and develop their teaching curriculum and staff.

This slows down the efforts to produce quality graduates and also means that careful research needs to be done by parents and students before committing to any form of higher education.

Because it's a highly recognised provider of higher education with five-star ratings for various fields in the QS World University Rankings, many courses offered by SEGi University already meet set standards for teaching curriculum and employability so students can be assured of the quality of education they are getting. To leverage on these strengths, SEGi will now franchise some of its programmes to Kolej Yayasan Pahang (KYP).

"KYP is a private Bumiputera college that is fairly new and by franchising some of our programmes to them we will help to improve the quality of education they offer quickly. We will give them entire teaching curriculums and course structures to be taught by their teachers but with our academic staff guiding and auditing their processes to ensure they meet the standards we expect. This means they can offer high quality courses straightaway without going through the long winded process of getting MQA approval and audits.

"This will also make it easier for KYP students to gain entry to SEGi University in the future should they wish to continue their educational journey. So yes, there is a commercial element to this collaboration but the main thrust is more CSR as we're helping to bring quality education to more people in Malaysia," explains Azahari.

Expanding beyond local borders

The fifth collaboration is between SEGi University and Tanri Abeng University in Indonesia to jointly develop academic programmes and promote the SEGi name to Indonesians to recruit more students to study in Malaysia. Despite the close geographical distance between the two nations and strong cultural links and similarities, Indonesian students are still vastly underrepresented in Malaysia, especially when considering their population of 300 million and rapidly growing middle class.

"This collaboration is part of our internationalisation effort for SEGi University. Tanri Abeng University is a new institution owned by Tanri Abeng, who is also the president, commissioner and chairman of Pertamina Indonesia. Despite being new, the university has signed agreements with about 500 bupati (district regents) to sponsor students to get their degrees at Tanri Abeng and SEGi.

"The cost of doing a three-year programme in both institutions is quite similar so it will be easy for an Indonesian student to do one year of studying there and two years at SEGi University and be awarded a double degree. This adds value to Malaysia as a whole because we will now be able to tap the vast potential of the Indonesian student market.

"In order to strengthen the relationship, we have also asked Tanri Abeng to be the first Pro Chancellor of SEGi University, and he has graciously accepted. We think this will help make SEGi more attractive to Indonesian university students and gives them assurance about the quality of education they can obtain by coming here," says Azahari.

With their owner's position as chairman of Pertamina, Tanri Abeng University will also be able to assist in identifying students and awarding the various government and industry scholarships available to Indonesians. This will indirectly help to build a steady stream of students coming to Malaysia and to reciprocate; SEGi University will also have exchange programmes for its students who want to spend a year or two studying in Indonesia.

Direct industrial applications

One of the strengths of successful universities is their collaboration with industry players in the areas of research and development. SEGi University will now join their ranks thanks to a new collaboration between the university, Mida and Biocon Sdn Bhd, a global manufacturer of insulin.

"Biocon has a production facility in Johor but thanks to Mida, who helped bring them and us together, they will now collaborate with SEGi University to use our facilities for their research and development efforts. Therefore, our professors and students will also be involved in this initiative, which will benefit them in the long term in terms of building their knowledge base as well as offering them the opportunity for internships with Biocon," Azahari adds.

With six new agreements signed, it's clear that SEGi University is moving quickly to not only expand its market reach but also to bring high quality tertiary education to more people. A lot of the MoUs have elements of CSR incorporated in them to raise employability prospects and provide opportunities for under privileged students to improve the economic standard of their families, which is a sign of the nation building aims of the university. Higher education for all may not be an achievable goal for a private education provider but based on the moves it is taking, SEGi University is set to make it more accessible for the masses. ■



PHOTOS BY SEGI UNIVERSITY & COLLEGES



With the signing of the various collaborations more students will now be able to obtain an education at SEGi University

FEATURE

If your child obtained excellent results for his SPM exams last year or has excelled in his pre-university exams then you need to mark down Saturday April 22 as an important date in your calendars. This is when local education website scholarships2u.com will hold its 2017 scholarship fair at the Eastin Hotel in Petaling Jaya.

"We have over RM15 million worth of scholarships to be given out on that day from education institutions from seven different countries," says Mathew Gan, managing director of ET Education Services, a company specialising in student counselling and placement.

"A scholarship fair is very new to Malaysians, who are more used to education fairs. Our fair will also be about education but the difference is that each exhibitor will have scholarships to give out to students who are able to meet and exceed their requirements," explains Gan.

Of course scholarships to attend schools, colleges and universities have been around since formal education was invented but the process of obtaining one is still unnecessarily complicated and convoluted with many students and parents unsure of the process and steps they need to go through. Furthermore, there are few internationally recognised standard measurements available so it's difficult for education institutions in foreign countries to judge the capabilities of students based on exam formats they're unfamiliar with.

"Traditionally, strong students with great academic results will apply for scholarships but this process can be incredibly tedious. To ensure success, many will put in applications to multiple education institutions as well as corporate entities but that means they have to collate a series of portfolios for each application and in most cases customise them too depending on whom they are sending it too. This takes an incredible amount of work and in most cases is also emotionally draining because students put their heart and soul into each application they send, so their expectations are naturally high.

"As for those who disburse scholarships, the sheer number of applications that flood in can be intimidating to deal with. They would have several layers of filters in place to cut down on the volume of paperwork they have to sift through and this is where a lot of applications fall through the



Funding STUDIES

By gathering scholarship providers at a fair Mathew Gan hopes to make it easier for students and parents to pay for their studies

| Text by FAISAL SHAH | faisalshah@hckmedia.com



TOP: The scholarship will help students and their parents to navigate the minefield of scholarship applications

LEFT: Mathew Gan hopes to simplify the scholarship application process at the scholarship fair

BELOW: About 3,000 students are expected to attend the fair this year

cracks. Imagine if you have to go through 1,000 individual applications for just five available scholarships. It would be human nature to just dismiss a number of them due to tiny errors because it's impossible to read through 1,000 cover letters and files and judge them individually," he says.

Seeing a need to improve the process of awarding scholarships led Gan to starting the scholarships2u.com website and eventually, the scholarship fair.

"Our fair is a one-stop centre where we bring scholarship providers and those looking to obtain scholarships together. A student who registers to attend our fair can apply for however many scholarships he is eligible for but they will only need to hand in one application. This is possible because we will do one standardised test in English and Mathematics, which we term as the Scholarship Benchmark Test (SBT) to be used as the first level of testing by the scholarship providers. Should the student obtain the required level of proficiency and the education institution shows interest in possibly awarding them a scholarship we will then move on to the next level of the application, which includes document submissions and interviews.

"So, yes, the scholarship fair doesn't offer a shortcut to obtaining a scholarship but with our SBT giving the education institutions a common platform to judge the abilities of students, it at least means that their applications are no longer anonymous envelopes that could be cast aside because there are just too many to deal with.

"In my view, the service scholarships2u.com provides is important because in my experience, the main reason why so many scholarships go unclaimed every year is due to two simple reasons. One is that not enough people know about the scholarships existing and the other is that the process to even get an interview for consideration is an unnecessarily long and tedious one, thus discouraging many from even applying in the first place," Gan adds.

In the long-term, Gan hopes that the website can be used as a depository for scholarship providers who will use it to advertise their offers, which can then be matched to students who have expressed interest in obtaining such scholarships. It's not aimed just at educational institutions either as Gan has hopes of becoming an intermediary for corporate entities too that often have many scholarships to give out as part of their CSR efforts.

"There are many big companies that offer scholarships that cover both tuition and even living expenses for students. The trouble is getting a pool of students who are worthy of getting these awards takes a lot of resources these companies just do not have. This is where we step in to provide a service that filters possible candidates for these companies and giving them a short list of possible award recipients.

"We will also make it easier to publicise the availability of the scholarships as our website is focussed on providing information to people seeking out such information. Ultimately, we hope that in the near future we can streamline the application process for both students and scholarship providers so that it can be done easily online and that the resources are allocated to where it is most required," he adds.

Gan also has plans to roll out his website platform to more countries, but for the immediate future, his focus is on the scholarship fair happening in just two weeks. He expects about 3,000 students to attend with their parents and if your child has excellent academic records, then you should be there too. ■



Radio announcer
Vimalanathan
Gnanasekaran.

CAREER ADVICE

Being on the AIRWAVES

If you have ever wondered what you have to do to be a radio announcer we have some career advice

| Text by KEVIN WONG | ecwong@hckmedia.com

Despite having never given any thought to becoming a radio announcer, the desire to have a career in the entertainment industry led to Vimalanathan Gnanasekaran to the radio industry where he has worked for the past 16 years. Initially, he started off as broadcaster for a shopping mall and a disc jockey for events before successfully passing an open audition for then Radio4, now known as TRAXXfm. So what does it take for aspiring radio announcers to get their foot through the industry door? Here's some advice.

Top Class: Tell us about your career path.

Vimalanathan: I joined the radio industry when I was a 21-year-old and I was really excited as the nation would hear me on the airwaves. I could say that my overall journey to date has been the best moment of my life. However, I cannot say that it has been all rosy and sweet as I have faced many challenges in my career. That being said, these challenges have taught me to be a better radio announcer and most importantly a better person. Ups and downs are part and parcel of our lives.

Meanwhile, one of the main obstacles that I have faced so far would be managing the ideas and visions of my various superiors. Instead of complaining and being bitter about constant changes, I will just adapt and adopt a positive mind-set and move forward. Honestly, these obstacles and challenges have broken me before where I wanted to quit and walk away from the industry four years ago. It was because of my perseverance that I managed to pull through and it was really worth it. Since then, I have been a strong believer that there is always a solution to a problem.

What is a typical day at work like for you?

I would start my day with food! I will then head for the studio about two hours before my show just in case there are some recordings that my producers need me to do. After that it's all about the show where my co-host and I would prepare a day before. Once the show is over, we will stay back to discuss about the show for the next day. However, the main elements of the show; music, phone topics, giveaways and content are planned one week in advance. After all of the hard work, I head home and have a good dinner unless I have been invited to attend or host events.

Was it your ambition to become a radio announcer?

Actually, it was never my chosen career path as I really wanted to be a pilot but my parents couldn't afford to send me to flight school and I have really poor vision anyway. So I scratched that off my list and thought about being an aircraft engineer instead as I would not be able to fly one. However, that was scratched off too because my parents could not afford the exorbitant tuition fees. I eventually settled on studying electrical and electronic engineering where I met good people whom I can call my extended family. And even though I may not be able to fly or work with planes, I am actually on the airwaves after all.

What continues to drive you for the past 16 years and how do you come up with content that is entertaining on a daily basis?

New music has always been what motivates me to continue to be on radio as well as playing good music helps to keep me on my feet. The urge to host great shows and to be better than other radio announcers also keeps me going every day. I will always tell myself that motivation starts from within and there would be someone better than you out there, so keep improving. And the best part of my job, every day is different as there is always something that I have to keep my audience informed about. As for content, it can be found everywhere. Everything or anything around us can be content. A meet-up session with friends could easily contribute an idea to explore on my radio show. Besides reading the newspapers and news online, I also use my everyday life experience as a basis for my content.

What are some of your best moments as a radio announcer?

Just to name a few, I had the opportunity to in-

terview both local and international musicians. I have interviewed Linkin Park, Michael Learns to Rock, Scorpions, O-Town, Marie Digby and many others. At the same time, I managed to interview prominent figures such as Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, seven-time Formula 1 world champion Michael Schumacher and more recently, Lewis Hamilton. I also hosted the National Day Parade live for TV2 in 2004. However, the best moments for me as a radio announcer is hosting the prime time evening drive show for the last 12 years.

Looking at how far you have come, if you could go back in time what would you tell your younger self?

Well, I would definitely tell my younger self to not panic and relax when I meet all the celebrities as I was absolutely a fan boy. Otherwise, I would not change a thing as my career as a radio announcer has been magnificent so far.

What advice would you give to someone who wants to be a radio announcer just like yourself?

The experience one gets as a radio announcer is priceless. But to be an announcer requires discipline. You will become a public figure where you will have to learn how to carry yourself because the world is listening to you. You will also need to be driven at all times and you need to sacrifice your time to bring out your best.

However, if you are in it just for the glamour and popularity, I will strongly advise you to choose a different career path. The glitz and glam will come when people recognize your hard work. In all honesty, the radio industry is beautiful but some of us let it get to our heads and that is where you lose it all.

Always remember to put your audience as the top priority because without them, you would be talking to yourself in a room. And if you think you just have the gift to fill in the gap, you're wrong. You must have the whole package and passion for radio is a requirement. At the end, in life, no matter what journey you embark on, if you have no passion for it, its game over. ■

As a radio announcer, you will need to be driven at all times and you need to sacrifice your time to bring out your best but if you are in it just for the glam and popularity, I will strongly advise you to choose a different career path

— Radio announcer Vimalanathan Gnanasekaran.

CAREER ADVICE

Service with a SMILE

Serving customers their daily cup of coffee can lead to a long term lucrative career

| Text by KEVIN WONG | ecwong@hckmedia.com

Like most children of the 1970s and 80s, Sydney Lawrence Quays was influenced by the various TV series he viewed with his family. For Quays, his favourites were the investigative police shows, which is why he aspired to become a police detective when he grew up.

Life doesn't always turn out the way we plan though and quite by coincidence, he found himself working in the hospitality and food and beverage (F&B) industry. It turned out to be his true calling though because 19 years later, Quays is at the top of his game and managing a business that delivers a product and service millions consider essential to their working day.

Intrigued? We were which is why we picked the brain of the Berjaya Starbucks Malaysia Coffee Company Sdn Bhd managing director and Berjaya Food Bhd executive director to gain some insights about how the industry has developed as well as some advice for those pursuing a qualification in the hospitality and F&B sector.

How did you begin your career in the hospitality industry?

My exposure to the hospitality industry started when I first worked as casual worker at hotels to earn pocket money during the school holidays. I ended up studying hotel management by chance as some of my friends were taking it and through their influence I began my formal journey into the industry. So I guess you could say it wasn't something I planned to do initially but eventually became something I grew passionate about.

Where did you study hospitality and were your parents supportive of your decision?

I graduated with Honours from Stamford University majoring in Hospitality Management and Marketing. I really enjoyed being a student and sometimes I miss those carefree days hanging out and studying with friends but then we all have to grow up eventually and take on more responsibilities. Thankfully my parents were very supportive of my choice though maybe they were just glad I didn't become a police detective instead.

What changes have you seen in the industry over the past decade?

The F&B and hospitality industry in general has changed tremendously over the last 10 years. This is a dynamic industry that deals with people directly and the wants, needs and expectations of people are constantly changing. What a customer wanted yesterday is not the same as what he wants now so we need to be aware of this and quickly adapt to the change.

Furthermore, factors like cheaper travelling, the internet and how it's changed the way we interact and keener competition amongst industry players have all affected the way we do business. A simple example would be how unhappy customers used to just tell their immediate circle of friends and family about their experience but today they would take pictures, shoot a video and share it on social media so it could potentially reach millions around the world in mere minutes.

Has the Malaysian hospitality and F&B industry grown?

I believe the F&B industry in Malaysia is growing steadily. This can be seen from the proliferation of new and exciting F&B outlets, which is a fairly recent development. I must however add that there have been some bumps in the road like reduced customer spending due to uncertainties in the macroeconomic climate. However, I believe that this is just a temporary situation and soon the industry will continue to grow at a healthy rate.

What do you think is critical to succeed in this industry?

In order to achieve success in anything that we do, we must first have

passion for what we are doing. Passion is the cornerstone to keep the flame of determination ablaze despite the hurdles and failures one may face. Personally, I am passionate in whatever I do and always keep my focus on it. At the same time, I tend to approach anything with a "can do" attitude rather than a negative one, despite how farfetched the goal may seem. Also, I embrace the motto of "the harder I work, the luckier I get".

Could you share some of the challenges you face and how do you overcome them?

The biggest challenge in the industry today is to consistently exceed the expectations of our customers. As mentioned earlier, customer expectations will always change due to different circumstances. Here at Starbucks, we pride ourselves with ensuring that we deliver the 'Starbucks experience' to all our customers. Every day, our customers come to our stores having high expectations in the sense of quality, service and the overall environment. Hence, we must strive hard to meet or beat these expectations by ensuring that the 'Starbucks experience' is delivered to each customer.

We do this by investing in our people who we call our 'partners'. From the initial stage of hiring the right candidates, followed by providing various forms of training and talent development programmes we want to ensure that our partners are ready to serve so that Starbucks can be a 'third place' to our customers. All of these factors contribute to the satisfaction of our customers each and every time they visit us.

How do you keep yourself motivated?

I have been in the industry for nearly 25 years now and to be honest; staying motivated is not something that I think about every day. I love what I do and all the rewards and challenges that comes with it. Every day is a new challenge

in the hospitality business as we deal a lot with different kinds of people. It is a combination of so many factors that keep me motivated. Additionally, my family has been a great source of motivation as well.

What has been your proudest moment and why?

In my 19 years career with Starbucks, we have achieved so many successes that I am proud of. From being recognized by Aon Hewitt as the "Best of the Best" employer in Malaysia, to the opening of our 200th store in Malaysia in September 2016, these are some of the proud milestones for the company.

If I had to pick one, my absolute proudest moment is the opening of the Starbucks signing store in Bangsar Village II. It is the first ever Starbucks outlet in the world that is managed and served by deaf partners. This has given Starbucks Malaysia global recognition in providing career building opportunities to the hearing impaired community. But more importantly, we have set the path for more such Starbucks stores around the world.

What is your advice to students pursuing a qualification in hospitality, especially in F&B?

My advice for students who are looking to pursue a career in the hospitality industry is to really understand that the core of this industry is people. To succeed, you must first have a service/hospitality mind-set, and always be ready to start from the very bottom as this industry involves a lot of on the job learning and experience. There will be no short cuts as you will have to experience everything on your own. Then, as with any other vocation, set your goals, build your career path and most importantly be passionate and work hard. **T**

Is Berjaya Starbucks Malaysia Coffee Company Sdn Bhd managing director and Berjaya Food Bhd executive director Sydney Lawrence Quays

