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Digital transformation in education

ONLINE learning has surely been the central figure in the educational narrative over the last two years.

Even now, 19 months since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, educators across the world continue to grapple with rapidly changing circumstances and finding ways to make online teaching and learning more effective for everyone.

During these difficult times, it is both a privilege and necessity for educational stakeholders to come together not only to determine how best to move forward but what we can learn from one another to tide over the challenges borne of this pandemic.

Hosted on Sept 20 and 21 by Open University Malaysia (OUM), the International Conference on Education (ICE2021) provided the platform to do just that.

With the theme Digital Transformation for a Better Future in Education, this virtual conference was a unique opportunity for practitioners, stakeholders, academics, researchers, and learners across Asia and beyond to discuss the latest developments in education.

A line-up of 12 keynote presenters from as near as Indonesia and Thailand, and as far away as Finland and Ireland, spoke on the four sub-themes of Effective Online Learning, Distributed



The International Conference on Education 2021 organised by OUM provided an online platform for education stakeholders from across the world to discuss the future of online learning.

Online Assessment, Innovative Digital Solutions, and New Norms and Emotional Well-Being.

Drawing from their respective fields of expertise, they gave eyeopening presentations with focus on such concepts as achieving authenticity in learning, introducing pedagogy of care, using technological innovations to bridge socio-economic gaps, as well as considering different assessment approaches to make online testing more feasible and rigorous.

Presented by both academics and learners, the papers covered a wide range of topics across the four sub-themes as well.

Many explored learner motivation, preparedness and coping techniques in online learning as well as their perception of tools and technologies needed for studying during the pandemic.

Others had more distinctive perspectives such as one paper that described an online training module for developing microsurgical skills of medical residents, and another that discussed how best to teach and learn online in the specific context

of Islamic studies.

The richness and diversity in research shared over the two-day conference prove that open and distance learning (ODL), via the various key aspects of online learning, is not only relevant today but will be a significant part of our future, even beyond the pandemic. As Malaysia's first ODL

institution, OUM strives to make the most of our own online learning initiatives. Digital transformation is a big part of our efforts to use the tools and capacities at our disposal to make

Bv PROF DR WIDAD OTHMAN



teaching and learning more engaging and relevant. ICE2021 has been our initiative to reach out to fellow ODL practitioners, while also giving us a chance to discover new ideas and

approaches in online learning. Hopefully, some of the innovations shared at the conference will make their way to our learners as well.

The first keynote speaker, Prof Dr Vassilios Makrakis from Frederick University, Cyprus, says that educators should focus on "using the right materials for the right learners, at the right time, for the right reasons, in the right ways"

We wholeheartedly agree and this fundamentally wholesome approach to education serves as the right starting point to inspire positive changes that can help OUM bring out the best in our learners.

Prof Dr Widad Othman is the vice president at OUM.

Enhancing professional credentials with a doctorate

TO meet the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic, businesses around the world had to react in agile and decisive ways. As we move into the next phase, now is the time for business professionals to make sense of this newlyevolved business environment to seek out and seize the opportunities emerging in the recovery.

The need for speed and the flexibility to develop strong and analytical skills have been amplified dramatically. It is a requirement for business professionals to build expertise and have a competitive advantage to differentiate themselves in the marketplace, as well as the ability to recognise and capitalise on rising opportunities.

UNITAR International University's newly launched Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) online programme will equip professionals with in-depth knowledge and advanced skills as well as hone critical thinking to thrive in the ever-changing business landscape. The programme aims to prepare competent practitioners for a firm grounding in the Business and Management field and enhance the credibility of the practitioners; as well as hone competencies to advance professional goals.

Designed to suit busy working professionals, UNITAR's Doctor of **Business Administration** programme is exempt from



Under the leadership of Prof Emeritus Tan Sri Datuk Sri Ir Dr Sahol Hamid, UNITAR continues to gain ground in international university rankings.

examinations and is based on 100% coursework. Doctora seminars will be conducted as part of the programme to enrich industrial perspectives. The programme also offers unparalleled flexibility and accessibility in scheduling consultation hours with supervisors.

Meanwhile, the supervised research work will help professionals develop more in-depth knowledge, competency, and a focused understanding of the chosen area of expertise.

As the global economy enters a period of recovery after seeing some of the most tumultuous moments in history due to the

pandemic, one thing is certain with the new norm and change in the economic landscape, new businesses and business models will emerge, and we all need to be fully equipped to take advantage of that. It is therefore undeniable that in a time of crisis, now is the best time to take the opportunity to enhance one's knowledge and expertise in building more resilient careers and businesses.

UNITAR'S DBA, with its strong focus on development of strategic thinking, entrepreneurship and social innovation, will not only empower business professionals with the latest and advanced skills and knowledge for solving realworld business issues in this everchanging landscape; it will also help entrepreneurs understand the context involved in starting a new business and open multiple diversified career opportunities from teaching, consulting, leadership and even research.

Established as the first virtual university in South-East Asia in 1997 to offer distance learning in what was then very a niche market, UNITAR has invested in technology as part of its drive to automate business processes and align the academic pedagogy with emerging technologies.

Also ranked by OS as the first in Asia for Online Learning with QS 5-Star Ratings and voted by leading employers in Malaysia as Talentbank's Top Employer's Choice, UNITAR offers a

transformative learning experience for its students, leading to its recognition in providing quality education and innovation to deliver good value for its students.

DBA candidates at UNITAR will learn to communicate and defend rigorous research ideas, studies and findings to both academic and professional audiences as well as develop the ability to facilitate

exceptional analytical and practical skills that can be transferred efficiently into executive-level decision making.

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Wee says the project goals are aligned to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals of affordable and clean energy, responsible consumption and production and life below water.



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Student awarded bursary

CHEMICAL engineering higher degree by research (HDR) student Melvin Wee Xin Jie of Curtin University Malaysia (Curtin Malaysia) was one of four recipients of the Institution of Chemical Engineers (IChemE) Palm Oil Processing Special Interest Group (POPSIG) Student Research Project Bursary 2021 announced by the global professional engineering body recently.

POPSIG is an international special interest group within IChemE that provides a forum to enable knowledge transfer, exchange of best practices and share experience to all that are interested in the palm oil industry.

Promoting palm oil-related research

The group is committed to promoting palm oil-related research among undergraduate and postgraduate students, providing financial support through the POPSIG Student Research Project Bursary to students undertaking six months of original research related to the palm oil sector.

This includes, but is not limited to, the following themes: responsible production in palm oil-related sectors, risk management within palm oilrelated sectors, and digitalisation of palm oil-related processing. Wee, who is pursuing a PhD at Curtin Malaysia, was awarded his bursary based on his project entitled 'Kinetic and Thermodynamic Analyses for the Conversion of Co-Pyrolysis of Palm Oil Wastes and Covid-19 Surgical Waste to Biofuel Production'.

Addressing sustainability

The project addresses the sustainability issue regarding the environmental impacts of landfills of oil palm biomass by providing a waste-to-wealth alternative, that is, thermochemical conversion to biofuels. This will contribute to the circular economy of the palm oil industry.

According to Wee, the project goals are aligned to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of affordable and clean energy, responsible consumption and production and life below water.

"This could improve the industry's resilience to climate change and natural disasters, help the country move towards a more sustainable socio-economic development aligned to the SDGs, as well as achieve the goals of the



12th Malaysia Plan," he says.

Strong team of supervisors

Wee's team of project supervisors include principal supervisor Assoc Prof Agus Saptoro and co-supervisor Dr Bridgid Chin Lai Fui from Curtin Malaysia; and Assoc Prof Dr Jaka Sunarso and Dr Chew Jiuan Jing from Swinburne University of Technology Sarawak Campus, and Prof Ir Dr Suzana Yusup from Universiti Teknologi Petronas as associate supervisors.

The robust supervisory team consistently provides professional support to ensure smooth progress of the research project.

Furthermore, this project is one of the strategic research collaborations between Curtin Malaysia and other universities such as Swinburne University of Technology Sarawak Campus, Universiti Teknologi Petronas in Malaysia, and Manipal University Jaipur in India, in the areas of waste to energy and waste to value-added chemicals.

For more information on Curtin Malaysia, visit www.curtin.edu.my or look for Curtin Malaysia on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, or LinkedIn.

Pursue your passion for research

LEARNING does not stop after undergraduate studies. Gaining a master's degree would expand and build upon the knowledge and skills that you have developed at bachelor's level. This is the aim of the IMU Master of Science in Analytical and Pharmaceutical Chemistry (MAPC) programme, which is a mixed mode master's consisting of 21 credits of coursework and 22 credits of research project. Students may study full-time, or part-time to fit in with

their other commitments "Besides the research skills, the most unforgettable knowledge I had learnt during this programme was during the quality management and regulatory management module, as this module was entirely taught by the guest lecturers who have prior experiences in various

narmaceutical industries," shares MAPC student Eddy Yii Chung Ann who is an analytical research and development executive at Oncogen Pharma Malaysia Sdn Bhd.

"The MAPC programme allows me to learn all these through the various modules and lab practical sessions. Most of them are totally relatable and competent to what we always practice at pharmaceutical labs."

For Nur Najihah Salahuddin, a pharmacist at Klinik Kesihatan Ampangan and MAPC student, the availability of the open and distance learning (ODL) delivery mode was an added advantage. "I think the ODL mode saved my life. The easy access to lecture notes, discussion, and

assignment submissions allows me to have flexible time to study

"Even though the ODL mode is an excellent alternative for working students, I also struggle with time commitment between work and school workload. This proves that postgraduate courses are more autonomous, requiring students to put more personal effort into the learning process and engage independently. These somehow help me to enhance my time management skills, professional skills, and self-motivation," says Naiihah.

"For my research, I have wanted to work on developing a medicated formulation that could help society. With my background previously majoring in cosmetic science, I was initially unsure if I would be able to work on something related to the skills that I have gained from my bachelor's degree. Frankly speaking, I was dumbfounded by how my supervisors could supervise me in combining my skills and interests to create something great, which could be beneficial to anyone out there in the future," shares MAPC student Wong Yoke Lan (Kath) who has successfully defended her

dissertation recently. She continues, "For anyone who is considering a master's degree, find your passion, believe in yourself and go for it.

"It doesn't matter if you still haven't gotten your life all figured out, just make sure to discover

yourself along the path you've chosen.'

The duration for the MAPC programme is one year for full-time study and up to 6 years for parttime study.

Teaching and learning activities are conducted over the weekends, and the programme is available in both ODL, and conventional delivery modes. The programme is accredited by MQA and internationally accredited by the Royal Society of Chemistry, UK.

The commencement of this programme is in March and September of each year.

IMU offers postgraduate programmes including Master in Science programmes in Public Health, Analytical and Pharmaceutical Chemistry, Molecular Medicine, Acupuncture and Pharmacy Practice; Master of Counselling; postgraduate diplomas in Diabetes Management and Education, Implant Dentistry, Endodontics and Prosthodontics; postgraduate programmes in Health Professions Education, Health Informatics and Analytics and Business Administration in Healthcare Management as well as MSc and PhD in Medical and Health Sciences.

For more information about this or IMU's other postgraduate programmes, call 03-2731 7272, email postgraduate@imu.edu.my or visit www.imu.edu.my.







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Why we need to listen to young people

MY journey into academic life was an interesting one. I started university as a mature student, joining primarily to obtain my academic and professional qualifications to pursue a career in youth work.

I became a youth worker because I was passionate, even as an adolescent myself, about finding opportunities to increase young people's voice and influence in society. I believed then and still do now, that some of the most impressive ideas about the future come from those most likely to be affected by them. Ignore young people's contributions and we fail to value the generation that will follow us.

In recent weeks, I've been struck by several unrelated events that have reminded me of the importance of listening to the voices of young people.

On the world stage, one cannot help but be inspired by the eloquent and powerful challenge to world governments put forward by climate change activist Greta Thunberg. Now aged 18, Thunberg has become an important symbol, providing absolute clarity that the decisions we make now will have a lasting impact for our children and their children.

Her most recent interventions, ahead of the Cop26 Climate Summit taking place at the end of this month, hold politicians to account on favouring warm words over concrete actions. As she says, "Words...sound great but so far have not led to action. Our hopes and ambitions drown in their empty promises."

Thunberg's warnings should be heeded. Ongoing research tells us that children born today will experience many times more extreme heatwaves and other climate disasters over their lifetimes compared to previous generations. The scale of the challenge requires bold and decisive action.

Not every example is as high profile as



Screenshot from Dr Pandya-Wood's welcome address to new students undertaking his module.

Thunberg's story, but it is impactful nonetheless. I have recently started recording a podcast with the charity Citizens UK. The series, to be launched next year, looks at the incredible impact of community organising in everyday neighbourhoods, and spotlights the stories of those who have made a tangible difference to the lives of others.

In our most recent interviews, we heard how a group of children helped to lead a campaign that resulted in a wage rise for around 200 airport workers, helping to tackle endemic poverty in their community. This was not your classic protest story. These children did their research, collected stories and sat in boardrooms negotiating with airport executives to secure their win.

Inspired by these stories, I look forward to working with our new students who have

just joined us. This is always my favourite time in the academic year, offering us so much in terms of the promise of things to come. This year, I am lucky enough to be leading a module with final year students focused on policy, politics, and persuasion.

When we met for the first time at the end of last month, I asked them all to share with me why they had chosen the module. I was struck by the number of students who had done so because they had volunteered or worked alongside a range of organisations making a difference here in Malaysia. They had spent their summers and weekends helping NGOs, advocacy groups, politicians, and policy makers. They were articulate and passionate about the things they believe should change.

In response, I told this group of students that our learning journey together would be

By ASSOC PROF DR JASON PANDYA-WOOD



"I am looking forward to being inspired by students' stories and actions, all of which are committed to making our world a better place."

reciprocal. I realised, as I so often do in this job, that students are as much the teachers as they are the learners. Over the coming semester, I am looking forward to being inspired by their stories and actions, all of which are committed to making our world a better place.

So, whether it is through megaphones in front of the global news media, leading boardroom negotiations or debating in the virtual classroom, the message is clear. Let's take the time and provide the opportunities for young people to have a say. They have got lots to teach us.

• Assoc Prof Dr Jason Pandya-Wood is dean of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Nottingham Malaysia.



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THE real estate industry has grown exponentially over the past few years. It is a lucrative industry and continues to expand, requiring more highly skilled professionals than ever before. If one wants to succeed in the industry, earning a master's degree in real estate is a crucial investment and a great way to get started.

"Real estate development is essential in such a way that it provides the basic needs accommodation to fulfil our habitat needs while also providing spaces for economic activities that serve as an important pillar to the nation's building. In other words, as long as there is mankind and economic activity, demand for spaces will be there and this will further stimulate real estate development activities," says UTAR's Master of Business Administration (Building Management) and Master of Real Estate Development



A memorandum of agreement was signed between UTAR and REHDA last year to set the path for knowledge sharing and research collaboration between the two parties.

programme head Dr Chin Hon Choong. Undoubtedly, there is a high demand for qualified professionals and diverse career opportunities in the real estate industry. To



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meet this demand, UTAR provides a master's degree programme for students and professionals to improve themselves in the field of real estate by upgrading their academic qualifications, skills and practices.

The master's degree programme, namely the Master of Real Estate Development (MRED), addresses the challenges and opportunities facing professionals in the industry. The programme's hands-on approach combined with analytical skills would train the students in responding to any particular development problems with derived solutions and assist them to assess the feasibility of real estate development and investment. The students would also be able to learn the intricacies of real estate development from experienced industry players and build a strong professional network in the process.

They would be given an opportunity to join the REHDA Malaysia Taskforce in preparing policy papers for issues pertaining to real estate development and the construction sector.

"MRED is a postgraduate programme with integration of theoretical knowledge and practical skills. The programme is developed



via the collaboration with REHDA Institute. Through this collaboration, well-known industry practitioners and professionals will be invited as guest speakers to share their insights and experiences with the students. Besides networking with the industry captains, students will be exposed to realtime learning and application of knowledge from the sharing by our invited guest speakers," says Dr Chin.

Since 2018, UTAR has been working closely with REHDA Institute to roll out the MRED programme. The programme has been carefully designed through extensive industry input to equip industry executives, managers and stakeholders with substantial exposure, advanced knowledge and professional skills needed to meet the challenges of this multifaceted industry head-on.

UTAR is a university offering undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in Accountancy, Actuarial Science, Applied Mathematics, Arts, Chinese Studies, Malaysia Studies, Business and Economics, Biotechnology, Engineering and Build Environment, Information and Communication Technology, Life and Physical Sciences, Medicine and Health Sciences, Media and Journalism, Education and General Studies, Agriculture and Food Science.

UTAR also engages in the provision and conduct of research, consultation, management and leadership training and other related educational services at its campuses at Bandar Sungai Long and Kampar.

■ For information about MRED, visit *https://* ipsr.utar.edu.my/MRED.php. For more information about UTAR, call 05-468 8888 (Kampar Campus), 03-9086 0288 (Sungai Long Campus) or visit *www.utar.edu.my*.



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Gold award in technology expo

MANAGEMENT and Science University (MSU) has bagged another gold from the Malaysia Technology Expo (MTE).

Receiving the Covid-19 International Innovation Award II at the 2021 edition of MTE was a Novel Covid-19 Symptom Detection and Diagnosis System using Internet of Things-based technology from MSU's Faculty of Information Sciences and Engineering (FISE).

The MSU system of detection and monitoring comprises a smart helmet and a drone. Each is integrated with IoT technology and thermal imaging – which allows for multiple temperature points to be recorded in a single image and at a fraction of a second.

The thermography technology is thus ideal for scanning not just individuals but also crowds. Mobility and flexibility are its advantages over static detection at one location. The system is also equipped with facial-recognition technology, which enables it to display a pedestrian's personal information and automatically takes the pedestrian's temperature. The reduced human interaction minimises exposure to asymptomatic carriers, whilst use of infer vision software enables quick diagnosing with no risk of human error.

The technology of remote sensing and detection presents extraordinary possibilities in meeting healthcare's safety needs. The MSU system's capability of real-time data input through Google Location History not only enables early detection, isolation, and treatment, but also provides quick alerts to the authorities for immediate riskminimising actions to be taken.

The award-winning invention is a joint effort by FISE academic Assoc Prof Dr Mohammed N. Abdulrazaq with graduate students Halimatuz Zuhriyah and Nurul Aslamiah Istiqomah from MSU's Master in



Dr Omar Ismael Al-Sanjary (left) and Assoc Prof Dr Mohammed N. Abdulrazaq (right) with the Gold Award they secured at the Malaysia Technology Expo 2021.

Information Technology programme, also with Dr Omar Ismael Al-Sanjary and Prof Dr Eddy Yusuf.

The postgraduate studies at MSU offers advanced degrees at MBA, MSc and PhD levels covering Management and Business, Accounting and Finance, Educational Management and Leadership, Teaching English as Second Language, International Business, Fashion Business, International Hospitality and Tourism Management, Early Childhood Education, Counselling and Guidance, International Event Management, Computer Science, Information and Communication Technology, Food Service Technology, Biomedicine, Engineering, Applied Science, Health Sciences, Biomedical Sciences, Information Technology, Clinical Pharmacy, Pharmacy, Applied Science, Design, Medical Physiology, Public Health and Anatomy. These programmes are offered under the School of Graduate Studies (SGS) and Graduate School of Management (GSM).

The university's award-winning academic programmes meet stringent standards of local and international bodies. MSU accreditors include the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA), the UK's Accreditation Services for International Schools, Colleges & Universities (ASIC), Japan's Alliance on Business Education and Scholarship for Tomorrow (ABEST21) and the Accreditation Council for Entrepreneurial & Engaged Universities (ACEEU).

MSU currently ranks in the Top 100 among the world's top young universities, Top 200 among Asia's best universities, Top 301+ for Graduate Employability Ranking and Top 601+ for University Impact. Ranked by both Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) and Times Higher Education (THE), MSU's world rankings place it in the Top 47% of the world's best universities in the QS WUR 2022 and Top 200 for impact on gender equality and no poverty in the THE University Impact Rankings 2021.

MSU has also been awarded Platinum 5 Crowns by the UK's Accreditation Service for International Schools, Colleges and Universities (ASIC); and QS-rated 5-Stars on the metrics of Overall as well as individually across teaching, graduate employability, academic development, internationalisation, online learning, social responsibility, inclusiveness, and hospitality and leisure management. Also rated by the Higher Education Ministry as a SETARA Tier-5 Excellent Status University as well as ranked The Most Entrepreneurial Private University in Malaysia.

In all, as an applied, enterprise, holistic and international university, MSU offers foundation, undergraduate, postgraduate and flexible programmes through an entry system that facilitates admission of students from all walks of life, where it aims at transforming lives and enriching future.

■ For more information on postgraduate programmes offered at MSU, call 03-5521 6868, email enquiry@msu.edu.my or visit *www.msu.edu.my*.



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Dr Ooi Lai Yee can certainly attest to that. Dr Ooi, 38, took a bold step to enrol in the EdD programme and successfully graduated this year. The qualification has helped her move up the career ladder as deputy principal at a private school in Kuala Lumpur.

"This latest achievement has taken my career to the next level, as with the knowledge that I have gained, I have been given the opportunity to head a private school," says Dr Ooi.

"I was among the first batch of learners who signed up for the EdD in 2012. As a teacher, I was searching for a doctoral programme in Education Management that not only focuses on research, but also provides coursework for practitioners. "With 12 modules followed by a

dissertation, the EdD has been particularly useful to me."

Dr Ooi adds that the programme is suitable for busy working adults who want to pursue their studies while working because the lessons were mostly held on weekends. Now that OUM is running programmes on a fully online mode, learners can enjoy even greater flexibility in the programme.

The programme prepares scholars and leaders for 21st century education with rigorous teaching in various areas in education, and research training that equips graduates with critical thinking, problemsolving and research skills to make a significant impact in the world of educational policy and practice.

As an educator herself, Dr Ooi says the pandemic has compelled her to teach online too. She explains, "Online teaching requires new skills. I have been able to learn about Minecraft education, which involves gamification in teaching academic subjects. The school where I work at is promoting 21st century skills for students, so we use a lot of software, particularly Microsoft, to assist in teaching and learning."

She adds, "I have enjoyed getting students more interested and involved in learning. I always try to make my high school mathematics lessons more interesting. For example, I often use YouTube videos to teach difficult topics, because videos and animations are better at capturing students' attention."

At OUM, the myINSPIRE learning management system provides round-theclock access to learning materials. Learners can interact with tutors and peers in online forums. Also available are various learning resources, including PDF modules, video lectures, e-books and digital library resources.

Dr Ooi thinks digital library resources have been one of the most important benefits of studying at OUM.

She says, "The digital library always provided me with easy access to e-books, articles, and journals."

Having completed her doctorate, Dr Ooi remains actively involved in academic research today. "This latest achievement has taken my career to the next level. With 12 modules followed by a dissertation, the EdD has been particularly useful to me."

Dr Ooi Lai Yee

"I am now in the midst of preparing articles for academic journals based on my thesis, which compared discipline in international and private national schools in Selangor," she concludes.

Dr Ooi is one of many graduates who is reaping the benefits of the EdD programme. From enhanced knowledge of in-classroom learning methods to research writing, the EdD will provide you with transferable knowledge and skills that can make a real difference in the teaching profession.

■ For more information on EdD and other programmes at OUM, call or WhatsApp 012-303 9935 / 019-357 9074 / 012-372 7480, email admission@oum.edu.my or visit *www.oum.edu.my*.



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