Star Special

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HIGHER EDUCATION

Where experience meets academic excellence

AS the global economy increasingly demands upskilling and mental agility, the definition of a "classroom" has evolved.

Institutions like Open University Malaysia (OUM) reflect this shift, offering flexible learning models that allow working adults to pursue higher education without stepping away from their careers.

For more than two decades, the university has worked to dismantle the barriers between professional responsibilities and academic aspirations.

Next month, this journey reaches a significant milestone.

More than 7,000 graduates will gather at the World Trade Centre Kuala Lumpur (WTCKL) for OUM's 30th Convocation.

Running from May 9 to 12, the four-day event is more than a ceremony; it is proof of the university's role as a flexible learning hub and a launchpad for diverse Malaysian ambitions.

More than 7,000 students will graduate from OUM this May in its 30th Convocation Ceremony at WTCKL.

Bridging industry and insight

Among the thousands of graduates this year is Kubrina Dass, a seasoned professional in the high-stakes world of sports marketing.

Since 2009, Dass has worked behind the scenes in the management of some of Malaysia's most iconic sporting figures, including Datuk Seri Lee Chong Wei and Datuk Nicol David.

Her role involves negotiating complex sponsorship deals and aligning brand identities with the grit and grace of national athletes.

Despite her success, Dass, 39, sought to deepen her understanding of human behaviour to better navigate her career.

She chose to pursue a Master of Psychology at OUM, a decision driven by the need for academic rigour that could coexist with a demanding work schedule.

"I negotiate deals with brands and convince them why a national athlete will bring meaning and value to their campaigns," Dass explains.

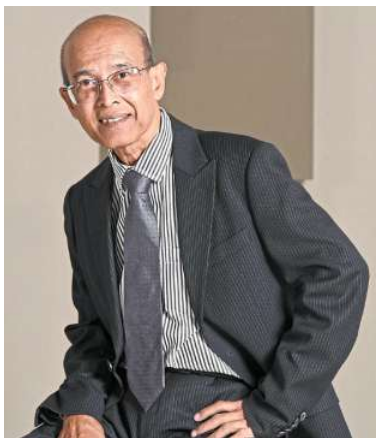
"My studies taught me how to navigate through many characters, how to keep my head up, and the importance of remaining humble."

The turning point for Dass was OUM's accessibility. Having been accepted into a conventional full-time master's programme elsewhere, she realised that physical attendance requirements were incompatible with her career.

"I needed a university that was recognised, approved by the Higher Education Ministry, and built for working adults," she recalls.

"With OUM, I could take my classes anywhere. Even in the middle of a Kuala Lumpur traffic jam, I could log in through my phone.

"As all the lectures are recorded, I could study anywhere anytime."



Dr Malik proves that education has no age limit, completing his master's decades into an already established career.

Dass chose OUM after realising traditional full-time programmes couldn't accommodate her demanding schedule

The ageless pursuit of knowledge

While Dass represents the mid-career professional looking for an edge, Dr Abdul Malik Yusoff, 70, proves that the thirst for knowledge has no expiration date.

A veteran in the medical field, Dr Malik recently completed his Master of Occupational Safety and Health Risk Management.

With a long career in occupational health and clinical practice, Dr Malik has been a clinic director since 1994 and since last year, also serves as a board member for a marketing firm.

For Dr Malik, OUM's Open, Distance and Digital Education (ODDE) model was the only logical choice.

"I chose OUM because it champions lifelong learning," he says. "The model allowed me to study without putting my ongoing professional contributions on hold."

He notes that the OUM environment is uniquely tailored to mature students.

"There was a genuine sense of camaraderie in our forums. We weren't just students; we were professionals sharing lived experiences.

"At OUM, past experience isn't just a memory, it becomes a powerful academic asset," he adds.

A legacy of quality and accessibility

Dass and Dr Malik's experiences reflect a broader body of approximately 140,000 graduates whom OUM has nurtured since its inception in 2000.

Established by a consortium of Malaysia's first 11 public universities, OUM has stayed true to its motto of "University for All".

Today, the university operates five distinct faculties:

> Education
> Business and Management
> Technology and Applied Sciences
> Computing and Analytics
> Social Sciences and Humanities

With over 60 programmes accredited by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency and recognised by various professional bodies, the university ensures that flexible learning is supported by recognised academic standards.

While the learning delivery – assignments, lectures and examinations – is fully online, OUM maintains a human touch through 35 Learning Centres nationwide.

These centres act as focal points for students who require face-to-face support or a dedicated space for academic consultation.

The future of learning

As the 7,000 graduates prepare to walk across the stage at WTCKL this May, they represent the enduring spirit of a Malaysia that is constantly learning.

Whether they are young parents, corporate leaders or retirees, these graduates prove that the traditional constraints of time and geography are no longer obstacles to self-improvement.

For those inspired by the success of the Class of 2026, the door remains open. Whether you are looking to advance your career like Dass or formalise decades of experience like Dr Malik, OUM provides the framework to turn your ambition into reality.

■ To find out more about OUM programmes and how to kick-start your own learning journey, call 03-7801 2000, email admission@oum.edu.my or visit *www.oum.edu.my*

Shaping lives via nutrition

FROM a young age, Gan Jia Yi has been fascinated by how living things grow and function.

When the Covid-19 pandemic struck during her final secondary school years, Gan spent several months at home learning to cook and trying out home-based exercises. These experiences sparked a lasting interest in health and well-being.

Inspired by Hippocrates' words, "Let food be thy medicine and medicine be thy food", Gan became intrigued by the science of nutrition.

During her search for universities, she visited IMU and was captivated by its environment and opportunities.

Though modest in size, IMU felt rich in knowledge, growth and adventure. With passion and curiosity, she began her four-year journey in the Bachelor of Science (Hons) in Dietetics with Nutrition at IMU.

"From engaging lectures to practical patient interactions, every experience deepened my understanding of how nutrition can transform lives," she said.

She added that Year Three was a turning point – when she first encountered Medical Nutrition Therapy, the very essence of Hippocrates' philosophy.

By Year Four, placement experiences brought her face-to-face with patients, mentors and challenges that strengthened her clinical and interpersonal skills.

"My IMU story would not be complete without sharing my experiences with the IMU Nutrition and Dietetics Students' Association (INDSA), the Student Ambassadors (SA) and the Student Dietetics Centre (SDC) – three communities that profoundly shaped my growth.

"Being part of INDSA pushed me to develop myself, from coordinating people and events to thinking creatively and strategically. I learnt to approach challenges with both a business mindset and a nutrition professional's perspective," she said.

From an early age, Gan has been fascinated by how living organisms grow and function.

Joining the SA community was another turning point: "It opened countless opportunities to connect with mentors and peers from different programmes. Together, we hosted major IMU events, led community activities and represented IMU with pride.

"Through soft skills and leadership training, I learned the importance of communication, teamwork and empathy. Being recognised as the Student Ambassador Leader of the Year 2024 remains one of my greatest honours at IMU," she said.

In her final year, Gan decided to challenge herself further by taking on a leadership role in the SDC.

"This role allowed me to apply medical and nutritional knowledge in practical ways – translating complex concepts into clear, accessible information," she said.

SDC also offered opportunities to serve diverse communities such as the Orang Asli community and children with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

"Looking back, IMU has not only shaped me intellectually but also transformed me personally – equipping me with the knowledge, resilience and compassion needed to thrive in the real world," said Gan.

"I graduated with a BSc (Hons) Dietetics with Nutrition in November last year and was awarded the Book Prize for Best Dietetics Student."

At IMU, the BSc (Hons) Dietetics with Nutrition degree is a four-year programme integrated with dietetics practicum in food service management, community dietetics and clinical dietetics, as well as an opportunity to embark on a mobility experience abroad or locally.

The innovative curriculum also offers early work experience exposure and hands-on opportunities to enhance skills through clinical and community projects.

The programme offers students credit transfer options to a bachelor's degree at the University of Newcastle or Griffith University in Australia.

Eligible graduates who would like to become a registered dietitian in the United States can enrol in the master's degree in Clinical Nutrition at the Rutgers School of Health Professions.

The programme commences in July and September each year.

If you are interested in enrolling in the BSc (Hons) Dietetics with Nutrition programme, make an online application today.

■ For details, visit *www.imu.edu.my*, email start@imu.edu.my or call 03-2731 7272.

Leading with strategy and integrity

THE business world today is changing fast. Leaders are expected to do more than manage daily operations. They need to think ahead, make responsible decisions and guide their organisations through uncertainty, digital change, and growing expectations around ethics and sustainability.

Recognising these realities, Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR) offers the Master of Business Administration (MBA) in Corporate Management, a postgraduate programme designed to develop capable, responsible and forward-thinking corporate leaders.

Offered at the Teh Hong Piow Faculty of Business and Finance, the MBA in Corporate Management equips students with a strong foundation in strategic management, corporate governance, finance, marketing, leadership and organisational behaviour.

Bridging theory and practice

The programme combines academic knowledge with real business applications, helping students connect theory directly to workplace practice.

More than an academic qualification, the programme focuses on developing critical thinking, sound decision-making and governance awareness, which are essential skills for today's corporate leaders.

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Driven to excel in healthcare services

A RELENTLESS passion for healthcare and service, extensive leadership experience and astounding sportsmanship earned Wardena Ningseh Abdul Malek the Mohd Shukri Yajid Outstanding Award at the 36th Convocation Ceremony of Management and Science University (MSU). Her journey illustrates the qualities of a truly well-rounded and accomplished graduate.

Born and raised in Port Dickson, Seremban, with family roots in Penang, Wardena is the third of five siblings. Her early education began at a Chinese kindergarten, followed by primary schooling at SJK(C) Chung Hua.

"This multicultural foundation shaped my adaptability, communication skills and strong work ethic," she said.

Driven by a deep commitment to healthcare and service, Wardena began her academic journey at MSU by pursuing a Diploma in Medical and Health Science (formerly known as medical assistant) at the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences (FHLS).

(Above) Wardena (second from right) received the Mohd Shukri Yajid Outstanding Award during MSU's 36th Convocation in December 2025. (Right) Wardena's clinical internships at IJN played a big role in shaping her professional aspirations.

"During my diploma years, I actively engaged in humanitarian and leadership initiatives, serving as the president for the MSU Malaysia Red Crescent for three. I led volunteerism, emergency response training and community-based health programmes.

"These experiences strengthened my leadership capabilities and reinforced my passion for serving others," Wardena said.

She later advanced to the Bachelor in Cardiovascular Technology (Honours), also at FHLS, motivated by her sense of responsibility in delivering accurate, timely and life-sustaining cardiovascular care.

Wardena describes cardiovascular technology as a field that integrates advanced medical technology with direct patient impact.

"As my clinical experience progressed, I became increasingly drawn to the technical and diagnostic aspects of cardiovascular care. I developed a strong interest in electrocardiography, echocardiography, haemodynamic monitoring and stress-testing and catheterisation laboratory support."

A significant influence on her professional aspirations came from her clinical internships at Institut Jantung Negara (IJN) and Hospital UiTM.

"I was exposed to high-volume tertiary cardiac centres and complex cardiovascular cases. These experiences allowed me to observe and participate in evidence-based practices, interprofessional collaboration and advanced cardiovascular procedures," she reflected.

She currently trains in taekwondo under Iron Fist Taekwondo Academy (Selangor IFTM), where she earned gold medals in Sparring at KTU 2024 and 2025.

These pursuits, she claims, reinforce her appreciation for focus, discipline and calculated risk-taking and the ability to perform under pressure, qualities that are essential in cardiovascular diagnostic and interventional settings.

She was also appointed an executive member of the National Student Consultative Council (MPPK 2024), where she held the portfolio of International Affairs and contributed to student representation and policy discussions at the national level.

"Additionally, I had the honour of serving as a student ambassador representing MSU and Malaysia at the Global Student Leadership Summit 2024 in Turkiye, an experience that broadened my global perspective on leadership and higher education collaboration," Wardena said.

Looking ahead, she intends to pursue a master's degree to deepen her knowledge and expertise in cardiovascular technology. She is also preparing for the Cardiovascular Credentialling International examination, aiming to attain an internationally recognised certification that will further strengthen her professional credentials.

MSU encompasses a diverse range of faculties and schools, including the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences, the Faculty of Business Management and Professional Studies, the Faculty of Information Sciences and Engineering, the International Medical School, the School of Pharmacy, the School of Dentistry, the School of Veterinary Medicine, the School of Education and Social Sciences, the School of Hospitality and Creative Arts, the School of Graduate Studies, the Graduate School of Management, and the Centre for Fundamental Studies.

■ Visit MSU's Open Day and discover where your journey begins.

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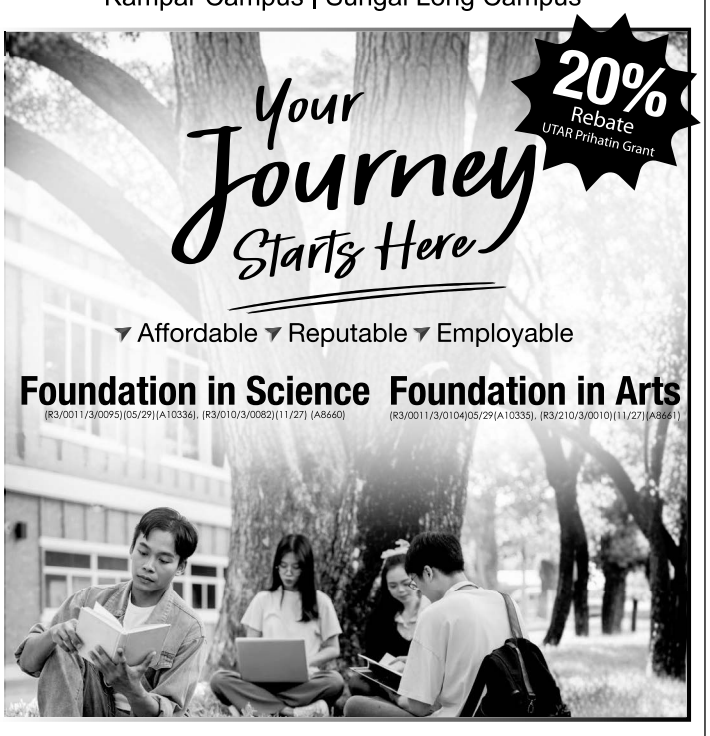

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April 2026	25-26
May 2026	2-3, 16-17, 23-24

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Nurturing forward-thinking business leaders

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Programme head Azeyan Awee shared that the programme is designed with the future of corporate leadership in mind.

"Many of our students are already working and managing responsibilities at work. The programme is designed to help them think more clearly, make better decisions and lead with integrity, not just to earn a qualification," she shared.

Flexible learning

The MBA in Corporate Management is suitable for working professionals, mid-level managers, entrepreneurs and those preparing for senior leadership roles.

Classes involve discussions, case studies, applied projects and real business examples that students can immediately relate to their own work.

The flexible structure allows students to continue working while studying, making it a practical option for those who want to upgrade themselves without putting their careers on hold.

As organisations continue to face rapid change, the need for leaders, who are both strategic and responsible, has never been greater. UTAR's MBA in Corporate Management aims to develop leaders who can make a difference not only for their organisations, but for society as well.

Developing strong corporate partnerships and sound decision-making skills are key focuses of UTAR's MBA in Corporate Management programme.

Reflecting the programme's real-world impact, here is what students and alumni have to say about their experience:

Ooi San Tee
MBA (Corporate Management) alumna

"Pursuing the MBA (Corporate Management) at UTAR truly transformed my mindset. It sharpened my strategic thinking and strengthened my business capabilities. The programme played an important role in building my brands, GSKV Sports and GlassglowSK. I highly recommend this programme to anyone seeking real-world impact and long-term growth."

Takanori Hayashi
Exchange student from the University of Tsukuba (Japan)

"The MBA programme at UTAR offers an engaging and dynamic learning experience. It equipped me with practical knowledge that I could apply in my professional role. Learning alongside passionate professors and classmates from diverse backgrounds broadened my perspective and strengthened my leadership skills. I strongly encourage aspiring leaders to join this journey."

■ Visit UTAR Open Day on April 25–26 and May 2–3, 16–17, and 23–24 (9am to 4.30pm) at both Kampar and Sungai Long campuses. For more information, go to *www.utar.edu.my* or call 05-468 8888 (Kampar Campus), 03-9086 0288 (Sungai Long Campus).

The science of effective listening

IN a world shaped by rapid change and complex social influences, understanding human behaviour is no longer just an academic pursuit. It has become a vital skill for navigating modern life.

At Tunku Abdul Rahman University of Management and Technology (TAR UMT), the Bachelor of Social Science (Honours) in Psychology programme is designed to transform curiosity into professional expertise, with a strong emphasis on real-world application and meaningful human connection.

"Psychology is often misunderstood as a field devoted to 'reading minds' or treating severe illness," said Faculty of Social Science and Humanities (FSSH) Assoc Prof Dr Law Mei Yui.

"In reality, it is the scientific study of how individuals think, feel and behave in everyday settings."

She emphasised that discipline is an essential tool for uncovering the "why" behind human actions.

"Psychology helps us understand why people behave the way they do at school, at work and in their personal relationships.

"At TAR UMT, our goal is to move beyond theory, enabling students to witness these concepts in action within society," Prof Law added.

These include mental health awareness campaigns, community outreach initiatives and educational visits to professional settings such as psychiatric hospitals and therapy centres.

Abigail Chen Yi Qian, a Bachelor of Social Science (Honours) in Psychology student, shared how she and her team applied psychological principles to explain why individuals deviate from social norms and how psychological manipulation occurs in real life.

"Despite widespread awareness campaigns about love scams, many people still fall victim, as evidenced by the continuous stream of news reports. Individuals from various age groups are susceptible to such scams," she noted.

"One possible reason is that scammers exploit people's emotions. This is why we chose to focus on love scams in a mental health campaign spearheaded by the Psychology Society.

"We designed a 'Love Scams' booth to demonstrate how scammers use excessive attention to create an artificial sense of security and foster intense emotional dependency," Chen pointed out.

"By triggering a victim's need for belonging and then creating a false sense of urgency or crisis, scammers bypass logical thinking.

"Psychology is not merely about studying people; it is about learning how to work with them and how to help them."

Learning beyond the classroom

The learning journey extended beyond the campus. For Chen, visits to Hospital Bahagia were eye-opening.

"Observing how professionals work with patients made everything we had learned feel real," she said.

"It taught me the importance of empathy and practical understanding. In class, it is easy to be told that empathy is essential. But witnessing how the professionals apply empathy in their clinical work is an

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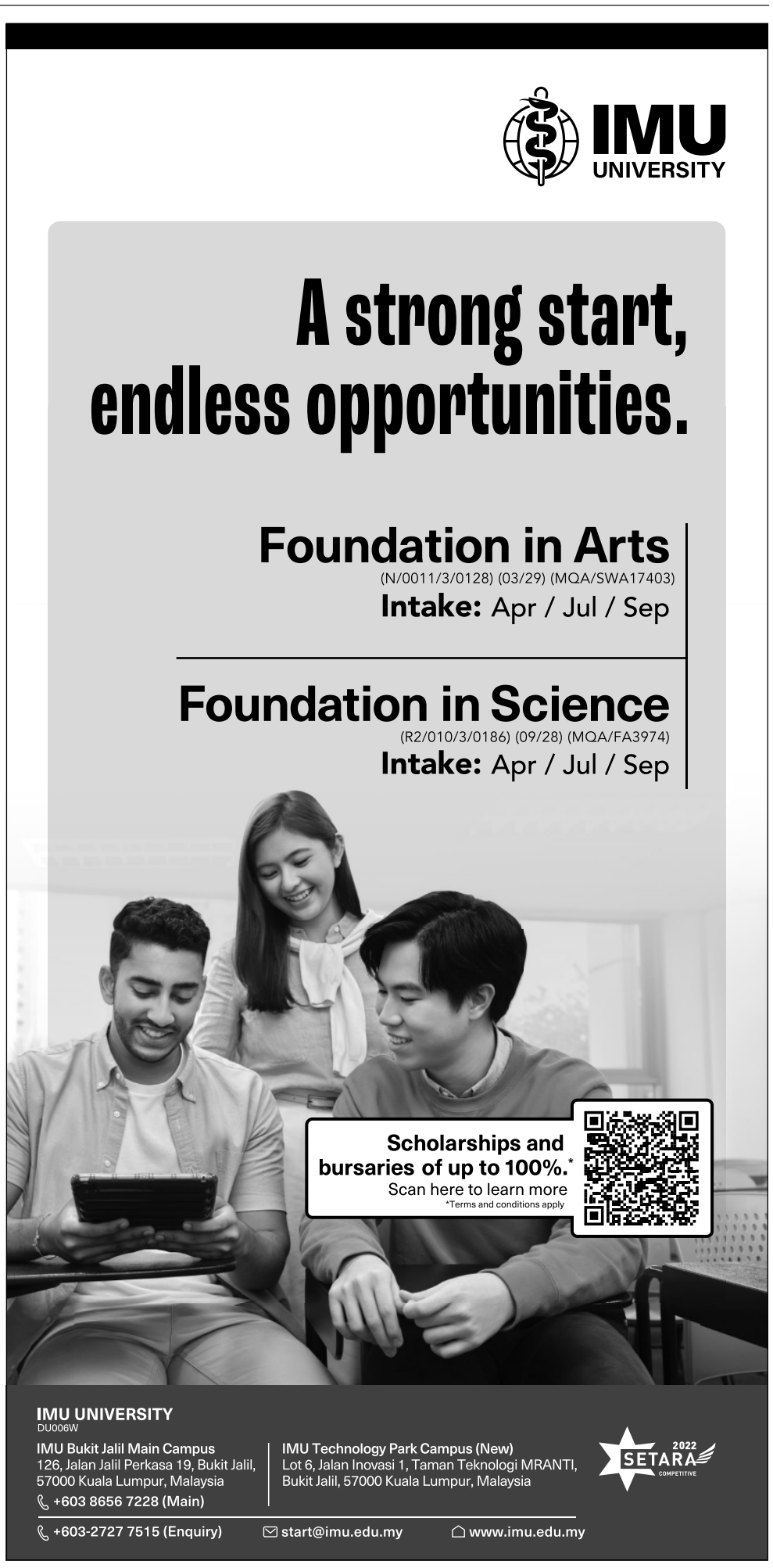
Psychology students attending a lecture in the psychology laboratory at TAR UMT.



Crafting impactful visual stories

GRAPHIC design is more than just creating images – it's the powerful art of communicating ideas, emotions and stories through visual and textual elements.

From stunning advertisements and impactful branding to sleek web designs and captivating magazine layouts, graphic design shapes how the world sees and experiences ideas.

At Management and Science University (MSU) College, the School of Science and Technology offers a Diploma in Graphic Design programme, designed to unleash creativity and prepare graduates for the fast-evolving creative industry.

This comprehensive two-and-a-half-year programme blends artistic vision with practical industry skills, empowering students to become confident, innovative and industry-ready designers.

Among the programme highlights is that students will explore a wide spectrum of subjects thoughtfully selected to strengthen both their creative and technical capabilities.

This includes visual communication, typography, communication skills, advertising design and interactive multimedia.

Through hands-on projects, real-world assignments and industry-relevant coursework, students will learn how to craft designs that inspire, inform and influence – across print, digital and interactive platforms.

Graduates of this programme are prepared to step confidently into diverse roles such as graphic designer, layout artist, technical illustrator, art director and creative director.

MSU College's Diploma in Graphic Design equips aspiring designers with the technical skills and creative confidence needed to thrive in today's fast-paced creative industry.

Graduates will also find opportunities in fields such as advertising, branding, corporate identity, packaging design, digital media, app design, signage and website development – basically anywhere creativity meets communication.

Entry requirements for the programme are a pass in Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia or its equivalent with three credits in any subject, or an MSU College certificate in a related field with passes in all subjects.

Upon completing the diploma, graduates may advance directly into the second year of the Bachelor's programme at MSU, through the Faculty of Information Sciences and Engineering.

MSU College is also the MSU APEL Centre for potential candidates to take the APEL Aptitude Test as the non-conventional pre-qualification for entry into higher studies, in which MSU currently offers APEL A and APEL C at T-3 (certificate), T-4 (diploma), T-6 (bachelor's degree) and T-7 (master's degree) levels.

At MSU College, your ideas don't just stay on paper – they come to life. So, step into the world of design innovation and start your creative journey today.

■ For more information on programmes offered, call 06-764 8686 or 03-5521 6868, email enquiry@msucollege.my or visit *www.msucollege.edu.my*

TAR UMT psychology students conducting an awareness campaign on love scams.

Exploring the human mind

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entirely different experience."

Chen described her study of psychology as both challenging and rewarding.

"Studying psychology has changed the way I perceive people and society.

"It is not merely about acquiring knowledge; it is also about understanding the complexities of the human mind and behaviour and applying what I have learned and experienced in real-world settings to address people's challenges," she reflected.

■ To find out more about TAR UMT's Psychology programmes and other Social Science programmes, join the university's team at the Open Day from April 18-19 and 25-26, 10am to 5pm, at TAR UMT campuses nationwide.

Qualified students will receive their on-the-spot offers during the Open Day at TAR UMT's Kuala Lumpur campus (terms and conditions apply).

You can also contact 011-1078 5990/011-1059 7135 or email fssh@tarc.edu.my. To apply online, visit *www.tarc.edu.my*

Various financial aid are also available for qualified students.

Prep early for a better day

ALTHOUGH research shows that waking up early isn't always the most effective way to learn, students still often face morning classes. These tips can help keep your energy up for those early starts:

Establish a consistent sleep schedule

Go to bed at the same time each night. Your body thrives on routine, so train yourself to sleep at a reasonable hour. Aim for seven to eight hours of sleep.

Harness natural light

Daylight stimulates the brain, just as darkness promotes sleep. If you need to rise after dawn, open your curtains when your alarm goes off to soak in the sun's energising rays.

Prepare the night before

Lay out your clothes and pack your book bag the night before. This minimises morning decision-making and lets you wake up at your own pace, reducing stress.