

Look beyond popular courses

STPM leavers and those about to enrol at institutions of higher learning should be aware that there are several courses that they can pursue, amongst which are medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, accountancy, law and engineering.

While these are the popular courses much sought after by students, it is not the end of the world should they fail to get their desired course.

It was reported that MIC national youth council member G. Kalaichelvan said many Indian students are dejected when the Sijil Tinggi Persekolahan Malaysia (STPM) results are out.

It should be pointed out if students meet the minimum requirement, it allows them to apply for a programme or course of their choice.

However, that does not mean that it will guarantee them a place in an institution for the course of their choice.

In an earlier article, it was mentioned that on top of the minimum academic requirement, there are also university-specific requirements and other general requirements to be taken into account, such as those set by the Malaysian Medical Association for would-be doctors.

Interviews and written assessments are carried out by universities to ensure that the academically-qualified candidate fulfil their suitability criteria.

Even so, there are students who fall short of fulfilling the university requirements, including students who get a cumulative grade point average (CGPA) in their STPM/Matriculation/Asasi (foundation) programmes.

There have been instances of those keen on pursuing medicine eventually dropping out of their course, simply because they were averse to blood.

Students and parents must look at the bigger picture.

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They must look at other potential courses or programmes that fall within a particular discipline:

For example, students can study dietetics, occupational therapy, nursing, pharmacy, biomedical science and biomedical imaging.

Biomedical science for example is a basic medical sciences course where students are introduced to medical laboratory discipline encompassing anatomic pathology, haematology, blood banking, clinical chem-

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istry and medical microbiology.

This applies to the other competitive programmes too.

Most students would apply for the three main engineering strands — mechanical, chemical and electrical without even giving a glimpse at the other courses within the discipline like petrochemical and geotechnical engineering.

Students and parents should know that such engineering courses, not just the medical programmes, have wide-ranging career opportunities.

Let's take the example of Dr Khairul Bariah, one of the top students of her school.

Becoming a doctor has always been her dream but after much soul-searching, she opted to pursue a degree in biochemistry before continuing with her PhD in the same field.

She said that she could have applied for medicine and would have been easily accepted into the programme, but she was not the studious kind.

Furthermore, she did not like working round-the-clock, as she had always wanted a work-life balance.

She never regretted her decision. Her interest in the medical field specifically in cancer studies has so far taken her to Russia.

She was part of a research group on cell experiments in space during the *Program Angkasawan Negara* in 2007.

She is currently teaching and heading a research project in dental stem cell technology in one of our leading public universities.

Students are encouraged to do a little bit of homework and look at the statistics.

They have to consider the possibility of employment as well as make comparative analysis on the average salary.

This may come as a shock to students and parents — that a geophysist earns as much as a doctor!

According to an employment website, a medical doctor who has just graduated earns only RM119 more than what a new graduate in geophysics earns which is RM2,600.

Another hard fact to swallow — a software developer, oil and gas engineer or a geotechnical engineer — are all highly in demand and earn more than a mechanical engineer with experience.

We list below the average salaries per month of new graduates in various fields as posted by employers of a job website from January to August last year. Pharmacist: RM3,640, corporate strategist: RM3,200, sales - financial services: RM3,054, doctor: RM2,719, sales - engineering/IT: RM2,612, geophysics: RM2,600, aviation: RM2,533, actuarial science: RM2,475, corporate sales: RM2,456 and IT - software: RM 2,452

It is time that we look at the bigger picture and let students pursue other courses that are traditionally not popular or prestigious, but are just as interesting and challenging.

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