A great moving experience

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Students who earned a place in one of the country’s 20 public universities moved into residential colleges last weekend to embark on their academic adventure.

Fatini Nadhirah was born with deformed legs. When she was in Form Five, she had a stroke of luck. “I won a notebook in a lucky draw! I started playing with it all the time and now I love computers,” she said. She will be specialising in Computer Science.

USM deputy vice-chancellor (Student Affairs and Alumni) Prof Datuk Dr Adnan Hussein said the university’s intake included 334 poor students who get a 50% discount on tuition fees, 32 state and national athletes, 40 foreign students and 10 physically disabled persons.

The poor students are classified under the Bottom Billion category, which in World Bank terms refer to the 1.4 billion underprivileged people in the world who earn less than US$1.25 (RM53) a day.

They receive special attention in Malaysia as the B40 group, referring to people in the bottom 40% income group of Malaysian households earning less than RM2,500 monthly.

Meanwhile at Universiti Malaya, blind student Kaveenithra Pulanthiran can’t wait to start his studies and hopes to specialise in cyber law one day.

“I chose to study law because our lives are often bound by rules and regulations, so I want to understand how that works. “A law degree offers a good platform to diversify into other careers,” said the 21-year-old, who was among the Sijil Tinggi Persekolahan Malaysia top scorers in the special needs category in 2014.

“My main challenge would be the fact that most books are not available in Braille, so it would take more time to translate the text,” said Kaveenithra, who became visually impaired due to retinopathy when he was a baby.

“However, technology has made things a lot easier, as there are now apps that can be used to scan and digitally convert text into Braille format and to help blind people navigate.”

His parents, administration officer Pulanthiran Muniandy and teacher Thanamala Muniandy, came from Ipoh to help him move in to his new hostel room and register.

“Kaveenithra has been very independent from a young age, as he has been studying at residential schools for the blind in other states. We sent him to those schools because we wanted him to be independent and to get a good education,” said Pulanthiran, 56.

He added that Kaveenithra is a determined person who picked up IT and computer skills on his own.

Coincidentally, Kaveenithra will be sharing a room with Dennis Teo Wei Xiang, whom he has known for the past eight years.

Dennis, who became partially blind due to retinal detachment when he was 12, will be pursuing a degree in Southeast Asian studies.

“I chose it as it’s an interesting course with good job prospects,” he said, adding that he could work as an architect or lecturer.

On his choice of university, the 23-year-old from Puchong said he enrolled at UM as it’s the only university in Malaysia with facilities for the blind.

“I look forward to making new friends and handling new challenges, such as having to rely on people for mobility and familiarising myself with a new environment,” said Dennis, whose family was present to help him move in.

His mother Susie Teo said the family was proud of Dennis.

“He’s set a good example for his two younger siblings. Dennis has always studied hard and does his own research,” said the 58-year-old procurement executive.

UM vice-chancellor Prof Datuk Dr Mohd Amin Jalaludin assured the two boys and their fellow disabled students that they would be well cared for at the varsity.

They will be housed at the Seventh College, which is equipped with disabled-friendly facilities such as ramps, toilets and computers with special software for the blind. There is also a valet modified for transporting wheelchairs to shuttle them around,” he said.

Prof Mohd Amin and UM deputy vice-chancellor (Student Affairs and Alumni) Prof Datuk Dr Rohana Yusof were present to welcome new students during the registration day that also marked the start of UM’s one-week orientation.

He said some 3,000 students are expected to be enrolled at UM for the new semester, though the final count will only be known this month after the appeal cases are evaluated.

“Of note for the 2015/2016 term are that UM has been given autonomy for students enrolment and a new finance degree programme that was introduced due to market demand.

“The autonomy for enrolment makes the process more transparent and procedures clearer.

“The interview stage also ensures that students personally picked their choice of study. They were also counselled if we feel they’re being pressured to study something else,” said Prof Mohd Amin.

Science fiction fan SK Joshua Rahman, who will be majoring in artificial intelligence (AI), is eager to start his computer science programme.

“I’m thrilled as AI was my first-choice course, and I hope to fulfil my dream of creating my own virtual assistant one day. I also look forward to experiencing the diversity and culture of people in KL,” he said.

The 21-year-old from Bangladesh hopes to continue his love for sports at UM. He enjoys football, basketball, hockey, tennis and cricket.