

NEW
STRAITSTIMES IN EDUCATION

HIGHER

ED

DIGITAL WORKERS
IN DEMAND

PAGE 8

LIGHT IN THE FACE
OF CANCER

PAGE 12

A culture of volunteerism

» PAGES 6&7



COVER STORY

Be a volunteer

ZULITA MUSTAFA
zulita@nst.com.my

THIS year's Higher Education Ministry agenda, Redesigning Higher Education, once again stressed on the importance of volunteerism among undergraduates at the university or college-level.

In delivering Amanat 2017, Higher Education Minister Datuk Seri Idris Jusoh said volunteerism is gaining popularity among undergraduates, who take part in programmes under Yayasan Sukarelawan Siswa (YSS) and Majlis Sukarelawan Universiti Malaysia (Maskum).

Last year, 220 students and leaders participated in the foundation's high-impact missions in Sabah, Sarawak, Asean and, for the first time, in Europe.

The foundation was established to create Icon Global Volunteer Student Leaders who are holistic in meeting global challenges. Students from institutions of higher learning in the country take part in its Student Volunteers movement which includes courses such as the Volunteer Leadership Development Programme; Green Summer Volunteer Campaign in Vietnam; Student Volunteer Mission to Ban Na in Thailand and Savanakheth in Laos; and Student Volunteer Mission at Malaysian-run initiative Kitchen at Calais to help refugees stranded between the borders of the United Kingdom and France.

The ministry also recognises Maskum's efforts to inculcate the spirit of volunteerism at national and international levels, especially in Asean. As of last year, 117,823 volunteers have participated in its programmes.

Idris said the involvement of undergraduates in volunteer activities can provide an ideal balance between academic achievements and the fostering of good values, positive behaviour as well as developing skills such as leadership, communication and social interaction.

This is also in line with the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2015-2025 (Higher Education) which aims to produce holistic, entrepreneurial and balanced graduates through experiential learning.

To further instil the spirit of volunteerism into undergraduates, the ministry will implement a Gap Year programme at eight public universities to give undergraduates the opportunity to volunteer at government agencies.

The participating universities are Universiti Utara Malaysia, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Universiti Putra Malaysia, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia and Universiti Malaysia Sabah.

"The gap year allows university students to develop a holistic skill set, as they spend the year doing volunteer work or equipping themselves with entrepreneurship skills," added Idris.

BALANCING APPROACH AND STRATEGIES

The participation of undergraduates in volunteer activities is necessary in building human capital which is balanced and comprehensive in every aspect.

Appropriate approach and strategies can help to attract more students, especially undergraduates, to engage in volunteerism.

University of Malaya (UM) Off-campus Student Management and Volunteerism Unit head S. Ramlee Shamsuddin said the culture of volunteerism on campus has existed since the establishment of the tertiary institution.

However, it was not placed under a unit —



We hope that volunteer activities can break down the wall of racism and attract more participation from various communities.

S. RAMLEE SHAMSUDDIN,
UM Off-campus
Student Management and
Volunteerism Unit head



Volunteers from UM stacking donation items for the flood mission in the East Coast early this year.

residential colleges and student associations organised volunteer activities in the form of charity and social welfare programmes.

But in 2011, when Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak launched the iM4U programme, the culture of volunteerism became more organised at public universities, especially those with an iM4U Outreach Centre.

In UM, the Volunteers Unit is placed under the Division of Student Affairs to align activities under one roof.

"We have organised programmes to provide training for students to interest them in volunteerism. In addition to producing holistic and well-balanced students, we want them to be project leaders and give back to society.

"The unit organises basic volunteer courses twice a year. It's a three-day off campus course which combines theoretical and practical aspects of volunteerism."

This unit, established in 2011, also works with Maskum, YSS, UM Volunteers Secretariat as well as non-governmental organisations and various agencies.

"We hope that volunteer activities can break down the wall of racism and attract more participation from various communities. This unit will organise a humanitarian programme to Cambodia in April and three Chinese students will take part in this mission. During the flood relief mission in 2014, we attracted students of various races and also international students."

At the start of a new academic year, representatives from the unit tell fresh undergraduates the importance of volunteerism during Orientation Week.

"Volunteerism is a healthy lifestyle activity. We want students to take part in volunteer activities from the first year. This will boost morale, self-esteem and communication skills as they interact with various parties."



Ian Hannibal Liang
Danial Liang



YSS Student Volunteers (in red T-shirts) with Me Teesside University, Middlesbrough, United Kingdom.

MALAYSIAN UNIVERSITIES VOLUNTEERS COUNCIL

Year	Number of activities	Volunteers Involved
2013	550	94,390
2014	615	99,005
2015	705	99,850
2016	865	117,823

Source: Ministry of Higher Education



SIX CLUSTERS OF PROGRAMMES AT UM

- Education (motivational classes, Smart Tutor for children in Lembah Pantai)
- Medical and Health (We Care for All programme at University Malaya Medical Centre)
- Agri-Bio and Nature (reduce, reuse, recycle campaign)
- Community Development
- Disaster (flood, landslide)
- Information Technology (usage of computer)

INFOGRAPHIC BY NST

volunteerism in lectures is also one way to inspire them."

STUDENTS' INVOLVEMENT

Kolej Yayasan UEM student Nur Natasha Ariza Aiza Rizal, 20, said being a volunteer has made her feel a part of something important and bigger.

"It has made me look at my life differently. I am now much more contented. I appreciate the little things in life and I embrace everything that will be coming my way as a path to growing up.

"With such an outlook, I will inherently change the way I interact with people and the way I think.

"It also allows me to look at things from another person's perspective. Empathy is just a word until someone gives it meaning. Until I witnessed hardship with my own eyes, I did not truly understand the plight of the poor.

"And it has truly helped me to be more engaging, more flexible, and simply a better person al-

together," she said.

Multimedia University (Malacca campus) student Ian Hannibal Liang Danial Liang, 22, said: "Volunteer activities in college help nurture students which brings about positive behaviour from a few core lessons — teamwork, soft skills development and time management.

"I look forward to activities where the volunteers consist of various ethnicities.

"I volunteered for multiple activities on campus. I found a balance, juggling my studies and volunteer work despite the fatigue and stress. There are lessons learnt which I can't get from my lectures or textbooks," said Ian, whose volunteer activities include a charity drive for a school for refugees in Gombak and organising events run by the orientation committee.

He added that volunteering for community engagement programmes offers a first-hand experience of its needs and how we can give back to society.

UM Volunteers Secretariat president Mohamad Khairil Amin Mohd Yunus, 23, said being a volunteer helps him to be more mindful of the environment and community.

His involvement in volunteerism began in his first year of studies at university. "We have 12 to 14 projects under six clusters a year.

"For example, recently we organised a flood mission to Kelantan to deliver donations in the form of basic necessities such as rice, milk, sugar and canned food in addition to repairing and cleaning the homes.

"I make sure to delegate appropriate tasks to the different volunteers. I learn leadership skills and it boosts my confidence."

Mohamad Khairil was also involved in an international humanitarian mission in Cambodia.



Malaysia volunteers from Universiti Yarmouk, Jordan and UKM at the Kitchen in Calais mission in France.

level as well as among our staff.

"At the university-level, we incorporate volunteerism as part of the soft skills programme embedded in the co-curriculum," she said.

One of UCTC programmes is the Asean Youth Volunteer Programme (AYVP), a dedicated platform that creates opportunities in knowledge-driven volunteerism, supports the exchange of learning experiences, develops capacity, enhances cross-cultural understanding, and forges a sense of regional identity while making a sustainable difference to communities across Asean.

"The first two AYVP programmes were held in Malaysia and focused on the thematic areas of The Environment and Climate Change, and Protecting Asean's Heritage.

"The 2015 theme was replicated in Cambodia. And last year's AYVP Philippines tackled Disaster Risk Reduction to be followed by AYVP Indonesia this year.

"The one in Philippines was the combined efforts of UKM and three tertiary institutions — University of the Philippines Manila, Ateneo De Manila University and DeLa Salle University.

"The one-month programme gathered 50 youth volunteers from 10 Asean countries, including 13 participants from Malaysia," she said.

Rokiah, who is a low vision specialist, said UKM also works with Yayasan Tun Rahah to run vision screening programmes for schoolchildren, villagers and single mothers in the country.

She ropes in her undergraduate and post-graduate students to run the programmes as their way of giving back to the community.

Other UCTC community projects include volunteering at an Orang Asli village in Kg Chuweh, Temenggong in Perak and at UKM's adopted village in Pulau Manis, Pekan in Pahang.

"Volunteerism can start with primary school pupils' participation in uniformed bodies such as Girl Guides and St John's Ambulance.

"Since the September intake at UKM last year, fresh undergraduates have a choice of two or three volunteerism programmes. Embedding

Make a difference

iM4U brand director Tan Shyue Wern said volunteering adds character and helps build core leadership values such as honesty, integrity, respect and the ability to make a difference.

"By embodying these values, students will be willing to dedicate their time to help the community and the environment.

"Volunteering will help boost their confidence as they are given the chance to try something new and build a real sense of achievement. It will open up their perspective on the different cultures and communities in the country," said Tan, adding that gaining knowledge and experience will also enrich their lives.

iM4U focuses on four pillars — com-

munity well-being; sports; arts, culture and innovation; and knowledge-building.

It also holds motivational conferences and workshops such as ReachOut Convention and Celebration, promotes fitness and health via ReachOut Run, and organises multi-faceted volunteer activities like Volunteer Malaysia.

iM4U ambassadors such as the serial entrepreneur Michael Teoh and actress, host and fashion designer Sazzy Falak conduct project management and leadership development, and Style and Sell workshops respectively. Participants also learn through music with Altimet while Kevin Zahri facilitates the Jom Kurus course.



iM4U volunteers cooking rice at Kampung Bukit Pasu in Kedah.