A culture of volunteerism

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COVER STORY

Be a volunteer

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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 a speech in 2017, Higher Education Minister Datuk Seri Dr Md.mon said volunteerism is gaining popularity among undergraduates, who take part in programmes under Yayasan Sultan Ahmad Shah (YSS) and Majlis Sukarelawan Universiti Malaysia (Masukim).

Last year, 228 students and lecturers participated in the foundation’s high-impact missions in Sabah, Sarawak, Kedah and Perlis, 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 the Student Volunteers Movement, which includes courses such as the Volunteer Leadership Development Programme; Green Summer Volunteer Campaign in Vietnam; Student Volunteerism for the New Economy: Mainstreaming Green and Social Entrepreneurship; Peace and Development in the Pacific, and Student Volunteerism: The Work of the Malaysian-run Initiative Kitchen at Calais to help refugees stranded between the borders of the United Kingdom and France.

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

Irons 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 2015–2020 (Higher Education) which aims to produce holistic, entrepreneurial and balanced graduates through experiential learning.

To further instill 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 Malaysia, Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia and Universiti Malaysia Sarawak.

The gap year allows universities to develop a holistic curriculum and spend the year doing volunteer work or equipping themselves with entrepreneurship skills,” added Irans.

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 Malaysia (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 —

6. 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-wellness programmes.

But in 2011, when Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak launched the IMU programme, the culture of volunteerism became more organised at public universities, especially those with an IMU 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 is a three-day off-campus course which combines theoretical and practical aspects of volunteerism.”

This unit, established in 2011, also works with Masukim, 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 varied races and also international students.

At the start of a new academic year, representatives from the unit will freshen undergraduates’ interest in volunteerism during Orientation Week.

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

MALAYSIAN UNIVERSITIES VOLUNTEERS COUNCIL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Activities</th>
<th>Volunteers Involved</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>14,397</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>615</td>
<td>99,005</td>
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<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>705</td>
<td>99,856</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>865</td>
<td>117,823</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ministry of Higher Education
SIX CLUSTERS OF PROGRAMMES AT UMM

- Education (Instructional 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 Produce (organics, recycle campaign)
- Community Development (Disaster education)
- Information Technology (Usage of computer)

Make a difference

IMAU brand director Tan Shyan Wee 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. It is 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.

IMAU focuses on four pillars - community 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.

IMAU ambassadors such as the serial entrepreneur Michael Tan and actress, host and fashion designer Sherry Farak conduct project management and leadership development, and Style and Sell workshops respectively. Participants also learn through music with Allure, while Kevin Zaini facilitates the Jom Kurus course.