

CLASS REP

Girl in charge: helming student council

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SHE may look like the girl next door but there's more to Aida Fitri Peli than meets the eye.

Being naturally affable, keen to learn new things and always seeking knowledge has led the 21-year old chemical engineering student to various roles on campus — culminating in her becoming the first female student to be elected president of the Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) Student Representative Council (Majlis Perwakilan Pelajar, [MPP] for the 2017/2018 academic year.

With family hailing from Sarawak, Aida — who was born in Kuala Lumpur and raised in Serdang, Selangor — has always had the curiosity to venture into new areas.

After getting good results in her Penilaian Menengah Rendah at the neighbourhood school — Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan (SMK) Sri Serdang, Aida was offered a place at MRSM Tun Ghafar Baba in Jasin, Melaka — billed as an education institution that churns out one of the best Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) results in the country — for Form 4.

She declined the offer and decided instead to apply for a place at SMK Agama Maahad Hamidiah in Kajang.

"I had heard so much about the school and I was curious to know what they learned there," she said.

Before the SPM results were announced, Aida got a place to do foundation studies in Agriculture Science at UPM based on her trial results.

"It was a fast track programme with a duration of only eight months. So after SPM, I just went through the foundation programme and secured a spot in their chemical engineering programme. I was initially inclined towards pharmaceutical studies, but after a while my interest in chemical engineering — particularly in materials engineering — took centre stage," she said.

Aida dived into her undergraduate life with gusto. From the start, she actively participated in various activities held at UPM's 11th residential college.

"These days we have to collect merit points to stay in college. So my aim was to get as many to be able to stay. I've always gone to day school and never had the dormitory experience and I wanted to give it a try," she said.

In her first year, she participated in almost every activity carried out by college. "In my first year I challenged myself to be the stage manager for the college's 'Tunas Budaya' event. I also joined an all-girls band participating in the university's 'Rentak Putra'



Aida Fitri Peli



Aida Fitri Peli performing at the Chemical Engineering Dinner 2017.



Mobility programme participants from the Eleventh College and Engineering on a trip to Turkey.

competition for two years running.

"I actually learned how to play the guitar by watching YouTube clips when I was 12 years old. My father played the guitar when I was younger, so I decided to give it a try.

In my first year at college, I played lead guitar with the band and I played bass in the second year," Aida recalled.

As she was active with college activities, Aida was drafted into the 11th college student council to hold the arts and culture portfolio. "I was at a cross-roads; to me coming from a religious school and holding the portfolio was a bit of a contradiction and I expressed my concerns to the president of the college council. She told me I was chosen for the post because I was worthy of it," said Aida.

From there, Aida began organising activities that were related to her portfolio in college — of note was a short film festival where she managed to organise prizes for winners of the event.

From her work on the college student council, Aida was asked to try for a seat on the MPP.

"At that time the students did not hold the MPP in high regard and not many students wanted to take on the role of student representative. But I thought to myself, why not give it a try as it is a rare opportunity. I had to go through some workshops on how to sell ourselves to public, how to handle public speaking and I found that I had the knack for it," said Aida.

Aida ran as a general candidate for two years running. The first time she was elected as a representative. The second time, she clinched the top post.

"44 MPP council members were elected. When it came to deciding the top four posts — president, vice-president, secretary and the treasurer — I was nominated for President with half of the votes of those present in the Senate Hall. I accepted the post and asked my fellow student representatives to support me in my role as president.

"Alhamdulillah, they are very supportive of me," said Aida.



Aida Fitri Peli (left) taking a selfie with MPP members.

The welfare of all UPM students is at the top of Aida's list. And among the most pressing issues is the availability of affordable quality food.

"Currently, we are fighting for lower food prices. Last year, we had to pay between RM6 and RM7 per meal and for some students, they could only afford to eat once a day. Right now the food vendors are gradually reducing the price but we have to be persistent in voicing out our requests," she said, adding that she and her team are always on the look out for complaints — be it on living conditions or other issues.

Despite her hectic schedule, Aida makes sure her studies do not suffer. Maintaining a 3.5 GPA, Aida makes sure she focuses 100 per cent during lectures and classes.

"I say the same to the other MPP representatives. We are still students even though we are representatives. Never neglect the responsibility. Whenever you have class, you have to attend to the class no matter what. And then after class, you can go anywhere," she said.

Other than co-curricular activities on campus, Aida participates in activities off campus as well, including university promotion events. She also participates in mobility programmes and youth leadership camps.

As for her future, Aida has several plans: "My plan 'A' is to be an engineer. My plan B is to become a researcher. Eventually, I will be lecturer to and give back to society."