

Star educate



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A new chapter begins

It is a new beginning for the more than 52,000 freshmen at the nation's public universities as they take on different challenges and move forward. > 6 & 7



It is a familiar sight on public university campuses as students and their relatives arrive with the comforts of home and other essential items.



About 65% of the 2,451 new students will be studying science at UMT.



It only takes three to five minutes for these students to sign in as UPM has introduced an e-registration process.



Bringing a comfortable pillow from home to ensure a good rest.



A USM volunteer provides a handy umbrella during a wet day.

Moving in and starting a new chapter

Thousands moved into the residential halls of the 20 public universities last weekend and started as undergraduates in various degree programmes.

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MORE than 52,000 new students were probably anxious, excited and uncertain at the same time as they moved away from home to begin new lives at the country's 20 public universities.

Last weekend and over the week, thousands flew the coop in pursuit of tertiary education. In his Twitter account, Education Minister Dr Maszlee Malik welcomed students to university life.

"A university is an open intellectual field filled with idealism.

"So use this opportunity as best as possible to gain knowledge," he advised.

It was probably a familiar sight at the public universities as students bid good bye to their families and friends and decided what they would need in the residential halls.

Students and their relatives could be seen loaded with essentials including mattresses, suitcases, pails, stuffed toys, toilet tissue, brooms, pillows and provisions.

Thanks to Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) vice-chancellor Prof Datin Paduka Dr Aini Ideris' innovative solution, the registration process has been described as a breeze.

"UPM started the e-registration process from the 2017/18 academic intake.

"This means that students register online before coming to UPM. Fees are also paid online. The students receive guidelines on how they can register electronically when they receive their offers.

"The whole process has become smoother as a result," she said when asked about the e-registration.

The university also ran simulation exercises to ensure that the registration process would not take up too much time.

Prof Aini said it took from around three to five minutes per student from checking the documents to the physical registration, signing up for uniformed bodies for those interested to obtaining the room key during the process last weekend.

The registration was carried out at the various residential halls, which have been allocated to the students.

"This is part of the ISO certification for UPM. Auditors from Sirim were also present to monitor the registration process to ensure it is continually being improved," she said.

Students were also asked to fill a quick survey so that the process could be further improved for the following year.

Another new initiative is the introduction of the "Putra Virtual ID" — a cardless matriculation identification for all first year undergraduates. They will use this identification for all things on campus including ICT applications, whether they are present and proof of varsity identification.

"Volunteers comprising students and staff were on hand to help welcome the new arrivals to the campus," said Prof Aini.

A total of 3,594 new students registered at UPM for the 2018/19 academic year.

"To students who have left their homes for the first time, I hope they will learn to manage their time and needs, be unafraid to ask questions and make new friends," she said, encouraging students to enjoy their journey.

Home away from home

The atmosphere at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) was electric.

Parents, grandparents, friends, older and younger siblings, even toddlers, filled the campus.

By sunset, emotions ran high as the realisation of living away from their families for the first time hit the freshers.

Twins Nabighah Azrun and Nadhrah Azrun, 20, couldn't control their tears when their parents left to return to Melaka. They are among the 4,107 students who registered at UKM last Sunday.

"We are so excited to start our course but we're also feeling sad; even my mum cried!

"UKM was our first choice and we couldn't have been happier to finally be here," said Nabighah, hanging on tightly to her twin.

While an emotional Nadhrah also feels the same way, she believes separation from family is something students have to endure in search of knowledge.

"We are studying the same course which is political science and also share a room," she added.

Nervous, tired and hungry - these were the emotions Rapture Rajendran, 21, felt.

Before her parents returned to Seremban, they left her with advice - always lock your cupboard and don't blindly trust anyone.

"I will miss my mum's cooking the most. Unfortunately I have not mastered her recipes; I don't think we are allowed to cook here anyway.

"I have never lived apart from my family so I am feeling a little nervous but I know I will get used to my new environment over time. "My older brother is doing his Master's degree here so during my application process, he recommended UKM because of its conducive and encouraging environment," said an enthusiastic Rapture, who is looking forward to starting her course in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL).

Fatin Afiqah Anuar, 20, lugged a pail filled with hangers in one hand and important documents in another, while her eldest brother Mohd Ridzuan Anuar helped by rolling her suitcase along.

"The baby of our home is leaving the nest," he said, looking at his youngest sibling fondly. Although her family only lives 20 km away from her in Putrajaya, Fatin Afiqah said she will miss everything about her home.

On the other hand, she is eager to start as a Liberal Science student.

A new undergraduate programme introduced for the 2018/2019 academic year, vice-chancellor Prof Tan Sri Dr Noor Azlan Ghazali described the course as wide.

"Students can select from a buffet of programmes under this course to major in.

"It was designed to produce students who are versatile, able to adapt to society faster and communicate well," he added.



Nicholas Devraj is accompanied by mother Jothy Paul and younger sister Dina Daisy as he gets settled into his new role as an undergraduate in UKM. — Photos by NORAFIFI EHSAN/The Star and courtesy of UPM, USM, UM and UMT.

UKM general studies centre director Prof Dr Khaidzir Ismail said the course is similar to the concept of Liberal Arts in the United States.

"Our aim is to develop students who have expertise in different fields and can contribute in different departments in the workforce upon graduating.

"In their first year, students will study general subjects in the sciences and arts; from literature and languages, to ethics of biology, selected subjects from law, psychology and accountancy, among others.

"After gaining such exposure in their first year, they will have to make a decision as to what they'd like to focus on in their second year," he said, adding that an academic advisor from relevant faculties will be available to guide students on what subjects will best suit their needs after they have made a decision.

If a student wishes to study Psychology, Prof Khaidzir said, they will study the likes of three psychology modules, along with a mix of law and criminology.

The student, however, will not be a licensed psychologist but can work for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and companies as an advisor, he shared.

This year, the varsity held its orientation week using a mobile application dubbed Mesra@UKM, which has detailed instructions on every activity, integrated with maps.

Students had the freedom to select which activity they wanted to participate in.

"We wanted them to venture (around the campus) by themselves.

"It's okay if they get lost, it is part and parcel of life," said Prof Noor Azlan, who was present to welcome the new students.

By 4.30pm, the hustle and bustle at Universiti Malaya (UM) waned as students settled in their dorms.

Deputy vice-chancellor (development) Prof Dr Faisal Rafiq Mahamd Adikan held a brief-

ing for parents, where he announced the giving away of 100 laptops to new students from less fortunate families.

"I hope the new students will gain valuable experience in UM which will mould them into upright citizens of our country.

"It is also important that they enjoy their time here while simultaneously building a strong character that can serve as a solid foundation for their future," he shared.

This year, 3,704 students registered at the country's pioneer varsity.

Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) accepted 24 national and international student athletes for the 2018/2019 academic year.

"It's an effort by USM to produce graduates who are holistic, entrepreneurial, balanced, articulate and thinking.

"Overall, 4,615 students registered with us to pursue full time bachelor's degree courses," the varsity said.

There were 256 volunteers comprising second to fourth year students — 175 on the main campus, 41 in the engineering campus and 40 in the health campus, who helped welcome new students.

"Dressed in blue t-shirts, the volunteers did a great job during the registration process," said a USM official.

Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT) deputy vice-chancellor (Academic and International) Prof Noor Azuan Osman said 2,451 new students registered at the university.

"The new students include 14 with special needs and a pair of twins, one of whom has special needs," he said.

The new students will be studying one of 27 undergraduate degrees offered at UMT, he said, adding that the university is becoming the top choice.

"About 65% have chosen to take up science while the rest will be doing social science," he added.



Family members help carry brooms and buckets.



Hand in hand, twins Nabighah (right) and Nadhrah explore their new home, UKM, after saying goodbye to their parents.



A UKM student volunteer dressed in a red shirt lends Rapture (left) and her parents a helping hand as she settles into her residential hall.