

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

Wawasan Open University (WOU) is in the midst of transformation to meet the challenges of the post pandemic world



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EDITOR'S NOTE

The Covid-19 pandemic has changed the world of education. WOU is therefore purposefully transforming its programmes and courses to gain recognition as a university that produces the best trained graduates for current employer needs.

The Vice Chancellor has put forward her vision and strategies to bolster a mutually benefiting relationship between students and companies from the early stage of study. WOU will ensure that its students are equipped with relevant computing and programming skills for that competitive edge in the marketplace.

In the face of the various movement control orders, the University has been busy engaging with the international community and the public through webinars and online talks. WOU also continually engages its students through different virtual platforms and fun activities.

In keeping with its concern for students, the University extends various financial aid, including the WOU-LYL Scholarship, to help relieve the burden felt by students from families with financial difficulties. Students remain a priority and the University always aims to ensure that their learning, including peer-to-peer interaction and engagement with tutors/lecturers, continues at the optimum level.

In this issue, we want to also honour and bid farewell to two members of WOU's Board of Governors who retired recently. They have journeyed alongside the University to weather the challenges over the years, while providing it the benefit of their knowledge and experiences. Our gratitude to Tan Sri Michael Yeoh and Mr Ooi Teng Chew, and we wish them the very best with their future.

The University is proud whenever its faculty and students achieve recognition, professionally or in the community. In this regard, we not only take delight but want to encourage more graduates from WOU's Accounting degree programme to gain professional qualifications (e.g. CIMA) in their chosen field for career advancement.

As we look to the future, let us support one another in confronting the challenges and rally behind the vision and strategies of WOU towards improving the teaching and learning of our students.

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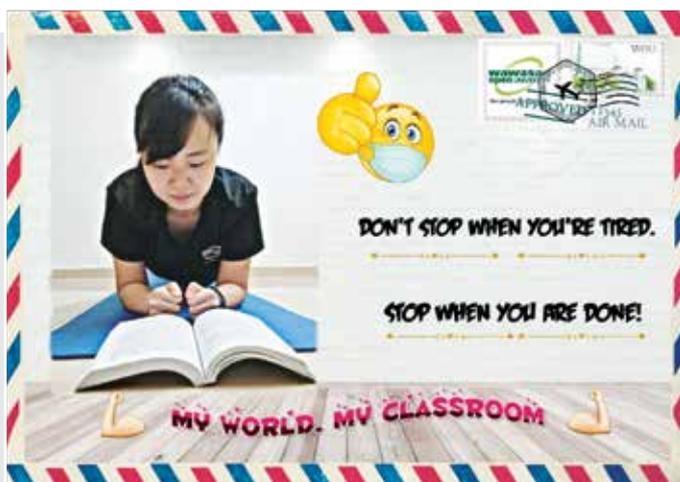
KDN Permit: PP 14958/11/2012 (031535)

Published by

Wawasan Open University [DU013(P)]
Wholly owned by Wawasan Open University Sdn Bhd
[200501018250 (700364-W)]

Printed by

Cheong Seng Chan Sdn Bhd
Plot 10, Lorong Industrial Ringan Satu,
Juru Light Industrial Estate, 14100 Juru, Penang



▲ The winning entry from Tan.

The University wishes to thank its students, both open distance learning and on-campus learning, as well as alumni who participated in the 'Post-a-Postcard' contest with the theme *My World. My Classroom* in May. Our congratulations to the winners who are entitled to the WOU Connect Bonuses in the form of tuition fee rebates when they re-enrol for this year's intakes.

The competition highlighted the flexibility and convenience of the ODL mode of study at WOU. Contestants submitted various witty and ingenious photographs of themselves or their friends in the act of studying against the backdrop of a learning environment of their choice, with meaningful captions.

FUN CHALLENGE TO REV UP YOUR ACTIVE SIDE

Would you like to take on a challenge to spring yourself into performing a productive and healthy activity in an enjoyable way?

WOU is organising a contest for its students and alumni around the theme of 'WOULaaweh! Student Life Challenge' to rev them to complete activities, some of which may be out of their comfort zones. Participants get to share what they have done on the University's social media platforms. It is all part of the University's commitment to drive its students' well-being in both the academic and non-academic spheres.

Among the challenges posed are learning a new life skill, contributing to charity, joining a WOU online talk, attending an online forum, logging in to MyLibrary and LMS, connecting with a classmate via Zoom/MS Teams and even simply watching a good movie.

The contest runs for four months from 7 August to 30 November 2020. While engaging participants in a fun way it is also meant to foster peer relations and boost visitors to WOU's Instagram and Facebook pages.

To participate, the students and alumni need to download the challenge card from the University's main website. They must

CONGRATS TO WINNERS OF POST-A-POSTCARD CONTEST

THREE MAIN WINNERS:

First prize (RM500): Ms Tan Hui Fen (Penang)

2nd prize (RM300): Mr Foo Chuat Meng (alumni) (Penang)

3rd prize (RM200): Ms Vaishali Radhakrishnan (Johor)

Tan also garnered the highest combined number of 939 likes for her entry, which she posted on her Facebook and Instagram pages, to win the special prize.

TEN SPECIAL PRIZE (RM200) WINNERS:

Tan Hui Fen; Sia Xin Yi; Chong Yee Wen; Calvin Chew Chin Chai; Reshvini Jeyaraman; Wong Renee; Vinood Munisamy; Lian Chun Hee; Priscilia Tharishini Arumugam; and Vincent Lee Boon Fei

The above special prize winners - except for Tan and Vincent Lee - also won consolation prizes worth RM100 rebate each. Joining the list of 10 consolation prize winners are students Lavalani Chelliah and Mani Subramaniam.



then follow the instructions on the card, and complete the task or goal before moving on to another stipulated activity.

Once they fulfil all their objectives, they must nominate three friends to take part in the challenge by tagging them. Participants are also required to post their challenge card on their personal Instagram and Facebook pages and tag WOU's Instagram and Facebook accounts as well.

Three winners will be randomly selected every month and their names announced on WOU's Instagram and Facebook pages. Each winner will receive the WOU Connect Bonus in the form of a RM100 tuition fee rebate.

DESERVING WOU STUDENTS GRATEFUL FOR FULL SCHOLARSHIP

The WOU-LYL Scholarship provides full-time students financial aid of up to RM30,000 each for a three-year study at the University. Six recipients from the September 2019 intake share how the scholarship has opened the door wide for them to accomplish their academic and professional dreams.

FREEDOM TO FOCUS ON HER STUDIES



Keen to fulfil her ambition of becoming an auditor, Nur Sabira Mohamad Mydin enrolled in the Bachelor of Business (Hons) in Accounting (BBAC) programme despite drawbacks in her personal life.

Her disabled father, who earns as a car salesman, has been the sole breadwinner of their household which includes her mother and three younger siblings who are still studying. The family also cares for her ailing grandfather and aunt.

With the scholarship she has found much-needed freedom in her time and energy to focus on her assignments and revisions without being forced to worry about money.

She had once thought of discontinuing her studies due to financial woes but a deep passion for learning kept her going. "It has been my dream to become an auditor since secondary school," she explained. Her parents support her educational pursuit and she wants to repay them with the pride of seeing their eldest child with a scroll.

A DEGREE FOR THE LOVE OF MOTHER



Having enrolled in Bachelor of Business (Hons) in Sales and Marketing (BBSM) at WOU, Johnson Lim Chueen Han is determined to succeed, especially as a gift to his mother for all her sacrifices and to alleviate her burden.

His father, who was self-employed, passed away three years ago due to gastrointestinal cancer. It was his mother, now 59, who became the sole breadwinner for them. She works in the purchasing section of an engineering company.

Lim is relieved to receive the scholarship. The funding has lessened his anxiety about completing his degree, and subsequently continuing towards Master's and PhD degrees. "I want my mum to enjoy her life with her savings, not just spend on her kids. With the scholarship, my mother has less to worry about my tuition fees."

He had discovered his aptitude for business while he was working. It spurred him to pursue the BBSM degree. He aspires to become a lecturer and start his own business one day.

A SENTIMENTAL INCLINATION FOR TECHNOLOGY



Cheah Yong Th'ng selected the Bachelor of Information Technology (Hons) in Computer Systems and Networks (BITC) programme as it resonated with her on an emotional level.

When she was young, her father would often share his experiences of working in various technological industries. Listening to the stories created in her an interest in technology.

Her father is a salesperson and her mother a full-time homemaker. She has a younger sister who is pursuing a diploma at a private college. Yong revealed that she and her sister often undertook odd jobs to finance their studies.

The scholarship therefore comes as a godsend to ease her family's financial burden. "The scholarship allows me to focus on my studies and classes instead of working at odd hours of the week to pay for my education," she said. Her aspiration is to work and excel at any major technological company in the future.

A HEART FOR GAMES, ADVENTURE AND ENGINEERING



In his teenage days Goh Loh Meng Sheng dreamt of becoming a game developer as he loved playing action, adventure and strategy games. He is thus excited today about the Bachelor of Software Engineering (Hons) (BSEG) programme. It allows him to learn new programming languages to boost his employment opportunities, especially in the electronic gaming industry.

He is thankful for the scholarship which has resolved his tuition fee worries. His mother, who works at an electrical engineering company, has been the sole breadwinner for him and his younger sister after his parents divorced while he was in primary school.

Goh plans to further his studies in Japan after graduation and work with a major game developer there. He is so earnest that he had used the extended break after his SPM exams to study programming languages and also Japanese. When an eye surgery delayed the completion of his diploma, he used the free time to learn new skills online and even created his own mini games.

He hopes to return to Malaysia after gaining enough experience overseas to create games and become a famous developer here.

ASCENDING HER CAREER LADDER WITH EDUCATION

When Nimaeswari Mohan opted to study for the Bachelor of Business (Hons) in Logistics and Supply Chain Management (BBLC) degree, her decision was based on her keen interest in the field.

She felt that the knowledge and skills from the programme would provide her with good employment opportunities in the 21st century. Her aim is to become the head of procurement in a company some day. "I believe education is the key to success," she said, revealing that she wants to go even further and earn a Master's degree.

She is grateful for the scholarship as it will reduce her father's burden. Her father is a retired bank teller and her mother a full-time homemaker. She has two younger sisters, one in Form Five and the other in the first year of a medical degree programme at a private university.



EXPLORING BUSINESS WITH MANAGEMENT PSYCHOLOGY



With an avid interest in both business and human behaviour, Laavania Seger chose the Bachelor of Management (Hons) with Psychology (BMPS) programme as she aspires to become a management psychologist.

She is grateful for the scholarship as she used to work several hours a week to support her family. Her father is a mechanical engineer at a private company and her mother a homemaker. She is their eldest child and has two younger siblings.

She always had a keenness for business, including during her time in college before joining WOU. "I looked forward to my courses in business," she said. "I found my business projects and presentations to be the most challenging and rewarding of all my undergraduate coursework."

One of her early mentors was her best friend's father who was very successful as a business director. "He encouraged me to explore opportunities in the industry," she recalled. "My own explorations combined with the guidance my instructors provided while in school helped to confirm that management psychology was the right path for me."

FAREWELL TO DISTINGUISHED BOARD MEMBERS

Saying goodbye is never easy, especially when it involves two eminent members of WOU's Board of Governors who retired in March 2020 after years of dedicated service. Here we pay tribute to the departing individuals for invaluable contributing their ideas and time to the University.



TAN SRI DR MICHAEL YEOH OON KHENG

Tan Sri Yeoh's relationship with WOU began during its very planning stage before the institution began operations. He was a member of the WOU Council from April 2005 to June 2010, and appointed to the Board of Governors in May 2013.

"He has a reassuring presence and a great demeanour," shared WOU Registrar Yeong Sik Kheong, who has long served as Secretary of the Board, in providing a personal glimpse of the man.

"Each time he spoke, he brought useful tips and suggestions for the Board to consider. A man of few words, yet when he speaks there is such evidence of a wealth of experience in his advice," Yeong said.

Tan Sri Yeoh continues to contribute to society in various capacities. He is the President of Kingsley Strategic Institute

for Asia Pacific. With some 35 years of experience in senior corporate management, he currently sits on the boards of Pan Malaysian Corporation, MUI Properties and Kashtec Holdings.

He is also a Director of the Malaysia-China Business Council and British Malaysian Chamber of Commerce, and a Trustee of OSK Foundation and Yayasan Wesley. He was the co-founder and CEO of independent think tank Asian Strategy and Leadership Institute and founding vice-chairman of the Centre for Public Policy Studies. He had previously served in public services, including the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia and the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission.

A certified public accountant, he holds a Bachelor of Economics from Monash University, Australia and has pursued senior management courses at Harvard Business School and The Wharton School in the US.

Tan Sri Yeoh has given some words of encouragement to the University as it forges ahead in the future: "WOU has done well over the years and has emerged as the premier distance learning institution in Malaysia. I wish the Chairman and Board and Vice Chancellor all the best in taking WOU to newer heights of achievements. To WOU students, aspire to be the best you can be and live your dreams."



MR OOI TENG CHEW

He was appointed to the Board of Governors in December 2011 and served as Chairman of its Finance Committee. He was also on the Board of Directors of WOU Sdn Bhd and its subsidiary Disted Pulau Pinang Sdn Bhd.

Yeong, who as WOU's Chief Operating Officer attends the Finance Committee meetings, said the University has benefited from Mr Ooi's probing eye and keen insight. "Often I found that though he spoke softly he was deep in his scrutiny and intimidating in his manner," Yeong recalled. "When he raised questions about finance, I had to take his suggestions into consideration as I have a lot of respect for the man. He asked deep searching questions and spotted gaps immediately. We will miss his ever watchful eye on our finances."

Ooi is presently an independent non-executive director of Johan Holdings Bhd. He was previously on the Board of Directors of Dreamgate Corporation Bhd and SSB Asset Management Sdn Bhd.

A qualified accountant with over 26 years of experience in public practice, he had started out as a partner with Ernst & Young in Penang, before retiring in 2001.

A BUSINESS DOCTORATE FOR CAREER ADVANCEMENT

Aspiring learners can now earn a reputable doctorate via open distance learning (ODL) from WOU, through the School of Business & Administration (SBA), while working.



Q1: What is the programme about?

Designed for experienced professional managers, the DBA is the pinnacle of business management education. It brings together academic theories and concepts with business and management practices. It aims to provide learners with advanced knowledge, plus conceptual and strategic skills that corporate leaders are expected to have for sectors like manufacturing, service and operations in Malaysia.

Q2: Who should pursue DBA at WOU, and why?

The programme is ideal for anyone who wishes to heighten their business skills and practices for the real world, as well as those who aspire to ascend the managerial ladder. Besides gaining in-depth knowledge, students learn vital strategies and methods needed to conduct research and consultancy in the related fields. They also gain expertise in evaluating and critiquing relevant theories and concepts, while enhancing the ability to provide leadership and consultation to the community.

Q3: What are the primary content areas in this programme?

There are a total of 10 courses, including the dissertation (40 credits) which involves completing a written thesis and passing an oral assessment. The courses under the DBA are:

- Advanced Management Accounting and Corporate Decision Making
- Corporate Social Responsibility and Governance
- Global Supply Chain Management
- Transformational Leadership and Change
- Contemporary Issues in Marketing Management
- Strategic Thinking and Implementation
- Management Consultancy
- Research Conceptualisation & Theoretical Development in Research
- Quantitative and Qualitative Analysis in Business Research
- Dissertation

Q4: What competencies do learners gain from this programme?

They garner competencies to generate, design, implement and adopt advanced tools and techniques in business management. These include the ability to undertake research and consultancy in corporate areas of business management in a scientific manner. Learners also develop superior leadership qualities. They become adept at communicating and disseminating information, ideas and solutions effectively to both the professional community and general public.

Q5: What are the career prospects for graduates of DBA?

Graduates can land promising new employment or move up in their careers. Among the prospective professions are academicians, researchers, consultants, corporate heads, managers, project directors, strategic planning directors, human resource directors, business development directors, corporate project consultants and corporate analysts. They can be part of the top management at colleges, NGOs, government bodies and private companies.

Q6: What's unique about this DBA?

The DBA is competitively priced and incorporates current developments and practices in business management. It aims to produce highly skilled and critical thinking scholars and leaders. It helps them to conceptualise, develop and conduct research and consultancy so as to address various corporate and social situations.

QUICK FACTS:

Location:

WOU Regional Centres in Penang, Kuala Lumpur and Johor Bahru

Minimum entry requirements:

A Master's degree from WOU or any other higher learning institution, or an equivalent qualification, plus a minimum of five (5) years relevant working experience

Intakes:

January, March, May, July, September & November

Duration of study: Minimum 3 years

VC SPEAKS: DYNAMIC ASPIRATIONS FOR WOU

Chief Executive and Vice Chancellor Prof Dr Lily Chan shares her thoughts on transforming WOU and making it more engaging in the coming years, in an interview by Tan Sri Andrew Sheng, Chairman of George Town Institute of Open and Advanced Studies (GIOAS). The discussion was recorded for George Town Conversations.



Tan Sri Sheng: What is your vision for the University in the post-pandemic world?

Prof Chan: About 95% of the students at WOU are working adults. Over 85% are below the age of 40, and the majority of that 85% are below 35. How do we make our course curriculum and content relevant to their working life? This pandemic probably fast-tracked the vision and strategy and what I would like to do at WOU.

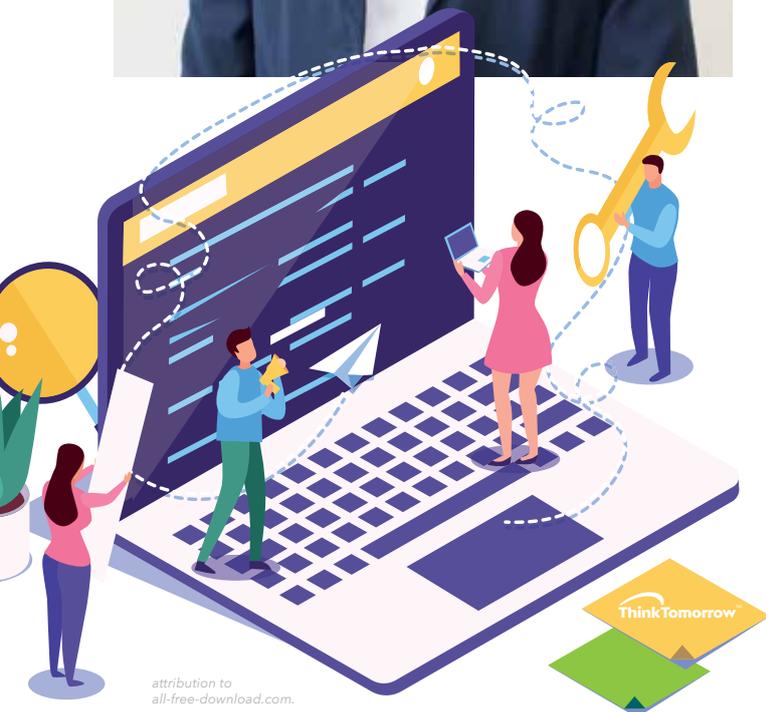
Tan Sri Sheng: How can WOU help its students to become more effective when the content is changing and some jobs will disappear?

Prof Chan: One of my visions is that every student who comes in to WOU has the option to take a course in the fundamentals of programming or coding. We will start to offer it to all our science and technology students as a first course. And subsequently offer it across other Schools because even business school students now need to understand data analytics.

We want to start offering programmes where in the first year, even if the students are working or are in mid-career changes, the programmes and contents will be relevant to industry. As such, we will re-design the curriculum so that it can be highly collaborative in the first year with industry partners. Once we have piloted it, we can scale and duplicate the programmes in our various regional centres.

We have started a new School, the School of Digital Technology (DiGiT), to deliver programmes and courses that will equip graduates with the required skill sets for the Fourth Industrial Revolution or IR 4.0.

We are talking to companies who can now come in from day one to work with us and start to 'hothouse' a pilot group of students through these programmes in their first year. I would like to gradually introduce this into most of our existing programmes.



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Prof Chan responded to a few other pertinent questions on how to make the students' learning experience more holistic and produce future-ready graduates. Her thoughts are summarised below:

MAKING CONTENT INTERESTING FOR EFFECTIVE LEARNING

The various online interviews with industry experts across the country and the world recorded by GIOAS under 'George Town Conversations' can be made available to students of WOU as supplementary course materials. The course content thus becomes really engaging as the students have the opportunity to listen to captains and top leaders of various fields, including finance, economics and business, as they share secrets of how they do their job and find solutions to real-world problems.

The University is also redoing the learning guide for its courses to make the content more interactive and allowing for links to such conversations along with videos and materials from the web. Students are able to give feedback on the course materials as there is a survey in place when they submit their assignments.

PRODUCING BEST TRAINED GRADUATES FOR EMPLOYER NEEDS

WOU aims to establish strong collaboration with employers so as to facilitate close links between its students and companies from the very beginning of the study journey at the University.

There are various arrangements in the pipeline towards this purpose. They include creating open spaces for the students - starting with those enrolled in the new programmes - to undertake real work projects in the first year. The companies would be invited to come in one at a time to discuss with the students on small projects in which they can apply what they learnt to find practical solutions for the companies. The students can also become potential interns for the respective companies.

With this win-win collaboration, WOU will be able to front-load a lot of skill sets onto our students at the end of their first year of study.

“ ... One of my visions is that every student who comes in to WOU has the option to take a course in the fundamentals of programming or coding.

... We have started a new School, the School of Digital Technology (DiGiT), to deliver programmes and courses that will equip graduates with the required skill sets for the Fourth Industrial Revolution or IR 4.0.

”

EMBRACING MINDSET SHIFT IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

The future of work need not be confined to a typical office space. The staff and faculty of WOU have been able to work at home and various places with their desktop computers, laptops and notebooks. As such, the concept of an enclosed space as an office will slowly disappear, especially in educational institutions.

Our lecturers and tutors have been engaging with students, and conducting lessons through Microsoft Teams, Zoom and other virtual platforms during the pandemic. With these measures they ensure minimal disruption to the learning process. Students' attendance at tutorials and lectures has increased and they are also more vocal in asking questions.

The technology-enabled platforms also allow WOU to efficiently plan and deliver the best teaching and learning to our students. For example, if there are only two students in JB, five in KL and ten in Penang, WOU can pick the best tutor to run the course for all of them online. The students can also then communicate with one another from across the country.

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON HIGHER EDUCATION INDUSTRY



▲ Prof Zita called for training grants from the government.

Ever since the Covid-19 pandemic hit Malaysia, private higher education institutions (PHEIs) here have been increasingly saddled with concerns such as finances, student enrolment, digital readiness and graduate employment.

In an attempt to air such issues and bring them to the authorities' attention, a free webinar was held on 18 June 2020 to discuss the impact of the pandemic and possible remedial actions by the industry. The webinar on *The Challenges and Issues Faced by the Malaysian Private Higher Education Brought About by COVID-19* was organised by the Malaysian International Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MICCI).

The panel speakers were Tan Sri Prof Teo Chiang Liang, Vice President of the Malaysian Association of Private Colleges and Universities (MAPCU), and Prof Zita Mohd Fahmi, Vice Chancellor of Quest International University. The issues raised are to be incorporated into a paper for submission by MICCI and MAPCU to the government towards policies and resources to sustain the higher education industry.

Tan Sri Teo explained that the pandemic impacted on the PHEIs' cash flow due to decline in new student enrolment, drop in student hostels occupancy rate and delay of tuition fee payments by existing students.

He said a high number of students are delaying their enrolment to next year for fear of retrenchment or unemployment. He suggested a review of the criteria for loans under the National Higher Education Fund Corporation (PTPTN) to help those who are retrenched or unemployed.

"How long more can we sustain because our cash flow is affected?" he said. "We hope the government will lend a helping hand."

Meanwhile, Prof Zita stressed that financial stability is crucial to ensure "sustainability, continuity and the quality of higher



▲ Tan Sri Teo is concerned over the impact on the cash flow of PHEIs.

education," as lack of funds can affect the standard of resources, lecturers and infrastructure.

"Being thrust to do digital learning can be quite challenging for some institutions which are not agile enough nor have enough resources and technologies to turn their staff into online facilitators in teaching and learning," she said.

Lecturers and students must become equipped to do online learning effectively so that the programme learning outcomes are achieved, she added.

Prof Zita highlighted the substantial long-term investment needed to equip students and faculties to use digital technologies in learning and teaching, and to keep improving the systems. She remarked that there is concern about whether institutions have enough funding in this regard.

"Institutions should work together, sharing capacity, sharing resources, sharing good practices," she said, stressing that they should also collaborate to negotiate with the authorities to review regulations and charges.

Addressing a question on government stimulus, Tan Sri Teo mentioned the need for incentives like soft loans for PHEIs to invest in technology, special loan rates and tax incentives.

Prof Zita called for a strong national policy statement to support technology infrastructure for the higher education sector. She called for training grants to train the management and faculty in technology, while the PHEIs implement policies to boost their human resources and student development in digital skills.

On whether PHEIs can survive this crisis, Tan Sri Teo emphasised that institutions must keep investing in technology to improve Internet access and delivery to students, while government investment is also needed.

TIME FOR ASEAN TO ESCALATE REGIONAL TRADE LINKS

ASEAN needs to bolster its regional trading partnerships to help its member nations overcome the challenges they face due to the fallout from the Covid-19 pandemic on the global economy and supply chains.

Economist Tan Sri Andrew Sheng made the assertion in predicting that ASEAN, China, India and other East Asian countries will be the world's growth zones in the post-Covid era. They all have a modern infrastructure, a young and well-trained labour force, and are still open to trade, technology and innovation.

"This is a time for a private-public-partnership, particularly a regional partnership, to overcome the challenges before us," he said in an online lecture on 19 June 2020.

Tan Sri Sheng, Chairman of George Town Institute of Open and Advanced Studies, WOU, was speaking on *Post-Covid Economy: Thoughts on what China and ASEAN can learn from each other* in a webinar jointly organised by the China-ASEAN Business Association and Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman.

Predicting two to three years of slow growth in the world economy, he suggested that China and ASEAN commit to each other through open peaceful trade. He expects recession and the world economy to worsen this year, with the earliest recovery to happen in the second quarter of 2021 or third quarter of 2023.

He stressed that the global economic decline will not only affect growth of world trade but also hurt trade in emerging market economies (EMEs) like ASEAN. The most affected are small businesses, bringing huge job losses. In fact, the worldwide lockdowns could affect 2.7 billion workers in Asia, or 81% of global workforce.

The crisis could also cause an unprecedented cumulative fiscal deficit in G20 countries, prompting these rich economies to pull back their money from the EMEs. The EMEs would then face massive capital outflows, leading to trade collapses, rising poverty levels, and food and water shortages.

"China is still suffering from these," he said. "When China opened up after the lockdown, its domestic production started recovering but the international orders fell. The domestic retail trade has declined but it is now beginning to recover."

Supply chains of Southeast Asian countries have all been hit by the pandemic, particularly since China is a key hub of



Tan Sri Sheng predicts that ASEAN, China, India and other East Asian countries will be the world's growth zones in the post-Covid era.

ASEAN's global supply chain. However, Tan Sri Sheng noted that the US has begun to shift its production and imports out of China to ASEAN markets in light of the US-China trade conflicts and China moving up the value-added chain.

He said that to tackle the crisis, China is promoting domestic consumption, boosting agricultural production, reducing corporate burden and pushing the Internet Plus digital economy. ASEAN nations are following China's approach, he added.

He also pointed to rising costs and changes to services in the post-Covid economy. "We now need to be more nimble, more adaptable and more online," he said. However, the majority of workers globally are not prepared for the digital shift, and so governments must be willing to fund interim losses, subsidise the cost of the transition, and help train people to move to the digital age.

"Those who reform fastest will win; those who are slow will lose," he declared.

Responding to questions, Tan Sri Sheng stressed that with global supply chain disruptions brought about by the US-China dispute, diversifying trade focus to ASEAN is the right way to go.

GOOD MENTORING TO UPLIFT BODY AND PEOPLE

Listening, encouraging and guiding. These are among the attributes of one of the most crucial yet undervalued human functions that can bring untold benefit to an organisation - that of a mentor.

Two eminent panellists shared their astute and experienced views on this matter at a webinar on *The Role of Mentoring in Leadership Development* organised by the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) on 7 July 2020.

They were Prof Dr Lily Chan, Chief Executive and Vice Chancellor of WOU, and Dr Emma Kruse Vaai, former Vice Chancellor of the National University of Samoa. The webinar was moderated by Prof Asha Kanwar, President and CEO of COL.

Prof Chan emphasised on her leadership style of going to the ground to talk to everyone in the organisation so as to bring them on board in a productive way. "Mentoring is listening, trying to ask questions that would give them a different view and a different context," she said. "It is not about pointing fingers when they cannot do a job well."

Dr Vaai underscored the importance of leaders assuming responsibility for mentoring people under their watch. She highlighted the value of being kind, showing appreciation, and acknowledging people's strengths and capabilities so that they can work motivatedly as a team.

There were numerous eager questions from participants. One query was on strategies that can be used for effective mentoring. Prof Chan replied that a leader should listen and encourage. "Mentoring is not about giving them a solution," she said. "It is to talk to them so that they open up to you.

Then you know their weaknesses, what is bothering them. And you slowly nudge them out of that thinking, and give them alternative ways to consider their situation."

On the role of trust in mentoring, Dr Vaai responded: "You must make sure they trust you to give the advice, and you also trust the mentee to do something based on what you bring to the table." She said one should mentor by giving subordinates new thoughts and new hope. "Confidentiality is important because you are trying to get through without them feeling ashamed about things," she said.

"As a leader, you must have a good team, and your own sense of concern and responsibility permeates the whole institution. When you make everybody feel valued, they are encouraged to do well, both for themselves and the institution," she added.

On women mentoring, Prof Chan shared how her mother was her most important mentor during her formative years, and that her early life was also shaped by strong women at school and college.

Dr Vaai said the mentor must consider the different people and their strengths, and make them work together. "Listening, choosing your words wisely when you are speaking to people and trying to get the message across, and also giving them an opportunity to express their thoughts and views," she said in listing some vital traits.

As parting advice, Dr Vaai said: "Have a strong sense of responsibility for yourself and others, and care." Prof Chan added: "Listen. Contextualise what you've heard into your own decision, and be responsible for your decisions."



▲ Prof Dr Lily Chan



▲ Prof Asha Kanwar



▲ Dr Emma Kruse Vaai
(Photo source: Samoa Observer)

PROF ZORAINI FORETELLS 'SILVER LINING' TO THE WORLD

One may think that WOU's global engagement has been heavily curtailed due to the ongoing health concern but that certainly has not been the case. Over the past few months Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic & Educational Technology) Prof Zoraini Wati Abas has had a busy schedule addressing international audiences online.

Aptly enough, she remarked at a webinar on *Digital Pedagogy in the 21st Century: Opportunities and Challenges* on 25 June 2020 that the Covid-19 pandemic offers a silver lining for advocates of 21st century learning.

It however entails educators having to switch to remote learning, she said as a keynote speaker of the forum organised by India's Rajiv Gandhi University. Digital pedagogy relates to the use of digital technologies in teaching and learning.

She said more courses will be offered online in the 21st century as the world moves increasingly towards technology-based learning like Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) and open educational resources (OER).

She cited examples of pedagogy-technology integration, such as Google Classroom, YouTube, Facebook Live, Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Google Meet and Kahoot. "Pedagogy-technology integration should result in student engagement. Student engagement is key to student success," she stressed.

As a panellist at the EduTech Asia Virtual 2020 conference themed *Challenges and Opportunities of Online Education* on 25 June 2020, she spoke about the predicament traditional universities in Malaysia faced when forced to quickly undertake remote teaching, "They realised it was not that easy to teach online as it is about pedagogy first. You must know what you want to do, and then use the right technology and platform to organise and support your pedagogy so as to achieve the course learning outcomes."

WOU itself had some 1,000 different classes that had to be converted immediately to totally online. "Many tutors were overwhelmed by the technology because they were not used to engaging students online," she said.

The tutors learnt by doing trial runs and undergoing training on how to use Microsoft Teams, she added. Also, some students access and listen to remote tutorials using smartphones, which are not very conducive, as they do not have suitable digital devices or WiFi at home.



At another webinar organised by the Mauritius Institute of Education on 26 June 2020, she spoke during a session on *ODL Disrupted: Adapting to the 'New Normal' in Higher Education*. Here she highlighted the challenges tutors face in switching to remote online sessions. She said the 'new normal' in open distance learning (ODL) entails a new culture of learning, a new mindset, and issues like learning design, assessment, equity, connectivity, affordability and mobility (learning on the go).

Prof Zoraini was also a panellist at a webinar organised by the Slovenia-based Open Education for a Better World project backed by UNESCO on 2 July 2020 where she shared about open education in Malaysia.

She explained how WOU initiated its OER policy, set up an OER repository and developed its OER-based course materials. She also touched on Malaysia's open education policies and the micro-credential courses launched by the Ministry of Higher Education in 2019.



◀ Cheah expounds on the challenges in the preschool industry in the wake of the pandemic.



◀ Some of the participants.
▶ WOU academics attend the online talk.



TURN CHALLENGES TO OPPORTUNITIES, ECCE PLAYERS URGED

Preschool administrators were recently given some much-needed and timely encouragement on successfully running their centres again in the wake of the closures and restrictions due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Cheah Eng Khoon, advisor to Persatuan Guru Tadika Malaysia (PGTM, Malaysian Preschool Teachers Association) delivered two talks to share how operators and principals can cope under the current circumstances by turning challenges, including costs incurred by the crisis, into opportunities.

The sessions were organised by WOU's School of Education, Languages & Communications in collaboration with PGTM. Catered to those in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) industry, they were held as part of the Covid-19 Wellness series and in conjunction with Teachers Day on 16 May 2020.

Cheah spoke about *New Opportunities for Preschool Operators and Principals* and *New Era of Teaching and*

Learning for Preschool Teachers in relation to the pandemic. The presentations were streamed live on Zoom to 623 participants, of whom 235 attended the first session for ECCE principals and operators, and the rest attended the second for preschool teachers.

He suggested that to survive, persevere and sustain themselves, the practitioners should strive to acquire digital pedagogy knowledge and skills to help develop innovative online teaching and learning methods.

He however cautioned that the role played by each stakeholder affects the sustainability and viability of the industry. He urged the teachers, principals and operators to remain positive, maintain their passion for education and be ready to start anew.

He concluded by calling on participants to seize every opportunity to continue learning in the face of the turbulent global environment, as lifelong learning is key to remaining relevant and competitive.

PROVIDING EFFECTIVE ONLINE TEACHING TO YOUNG CHILDREN

As the trend to move formal education online becomes more imperative and widespread, even little children are being increasingly impacted. This leaves preschool teachers facing a huge challenge in making online teaching not only fun, but also effective and conducive for young minds.

According to educationist Dr Tan Saw Fen, the key to successful online teaching for preschoolers is planning. Preschool teachers are encouraged to keep the needs of the children in mind when planning and developing lessons for them.

Dr Tan, a lecturer with WOU's School of Education, Languages & Communications (SELC), stressed on the importance of this principle in a classroom during her online public talk on *Creating Meaningful Online Experiences for Young Children*. The event on 4 July 2020 was organised by SELC and attended by some 60 preschool teachers across the country.

Dr Tan spoke about the ARCS model - an abbreviation of Attention, Relevance, Confidence and Satisfaction - for effective online teaching.



▲ Dr Tan is a lecturer with WOU.

Noting that children tend to have a short attention span, she said preschool teachers must try different technological tools, such as the Pear Deck and Jamboard applications, to gauge the children's attention. She added that there is a need to relate the lessons to the children's experiences. For example, mathematical problems can be built around their play activities or other interests.

Touching on confidence, Dr Tan pointed out that the teacher must move from simple to complex for effective online teaching. The children must be provided the opportunity to succeed and give timely feedback.

On satisfaction, she explained that creating motivation from within and offering rewards help to promote positive behaviour among the children in a classroom.

WOU ACADEMIC STANDS OUT AS 'SUPER TEACHER'

While a teacher may be passionate for his vocation, a true measure of one's dedication is often reflected by service rendered beyond the professional workplace.

WOU senior lecturer Lalitha Ramasamy, who is with the School of Business & Administration (SBA), actively seeks to use her educational talent to help the less privileged students, particularly of the Indian community.

Her recent outreach earned her a 'super teacher' award from the Youth Bureau of the Malaysia Hindu Sangam's Batu Kawan branch in conjunction with the Teachers Day celebration this year.

Lalitha became involved with the Batu Kawan community when she participated in a programme called IMPAK which stands for 'Ibu Bapa Memastikan Peningkatan Akademik Anak'. The programme was organised by the Tamil Foundation Malaysia. IMPAK is based on a similar programme named 'Parents Assuring Students Success

(PASS)' in the United States which draws on the talents and energies of parents to assist teachers in raising educational standards of their children.

Elaborating on IMPAK, Lalitha said, "The Foundation held the programme for parents of Tamil schoolchildren to expand awareness on the importance of the parents' contribution towards the educational development of children."

As a volunteer for IMPAK, she attended sessions to train trainers conducted by the Tamil Foundation. "I learned to lead discussions, listen effectively, make accurate observations and help participants to link training to their role as parents," she said.

Lalitha then conducted IMPAK trainings herself for parents of pupils from SJK (T) Ladang Batu Kawan. "It was a rewarding experience and I encourage everyone to participate in educational and community outreach programmes."



▲ Lalitha recognised as 'super teacher'.

ACCOUNTING GRAD ACES CIMA A-STAR PROGRAMME

Accounts executive Imm-Marie Ong, 37, of Butterworth, Penang, is overjoyed to pass the CIMA A-Star, becoming WOU's first success story for the renowned programme under the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants.

CIMA A-Star is a unique pathway for one to become a holder of the Chartered Global Management Accountant (CGMA) qualification. Ong sat for the CIMA Strategic Case Study (SCS) examination in February 2020 and obtained sterling results in April. She then successfully applied to become a member of CIMA.

She is thankful to WOU's support in becoming a CIMA chartered accountant. "It opens up a huge range of exciting roles inside and outside of finance," said Ong. She believes the credential will help her land senior business positions like financial controller and chief financial officer. "I can use my accounting skills to analyse numbers and help drive the company's profitability," she said.

Ong had graduated with a Bachelor of Business (Hons) degree in Accounting (BBAC) from WOU last year. She chose BBAC since she loves numbers and because of job prospects as accounting is needed to manage the finances of a business.

"I enjoyed the practical applications of math from the courses," she said. "I can apply the skills to my career, such as being able to perform calculations quickly." She also picked up strategic thinking and long-term planning skills, adding, "I can offer advice and business solutions to help companies improve their operations."



A PASSION TO HELP OTHERS WITH MANAGEMENT PSYCHOLOGY

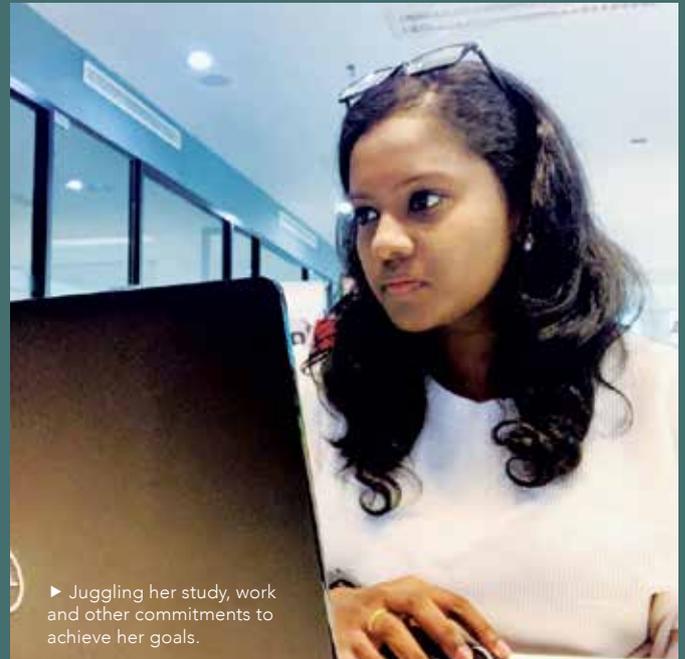
With her heart set on serving people, education counsellor Sugganya Prem Krishnan Murty took up the Bachelor of Management (Hons) with Psychology (BMPS) programme at WOU in July 2016.

She has since found that the courses in the programme have provided her with significant insight and expertise in line with her interest in the training and development of people. The courses have taught her about leadership and managing individuals and organisations. "I learnt how to improve my working relationship, identify my team's talents and skills, how to manage stress, find solutions, and how to create change in work and society."

Sugganya will complete her studies this July but does not plan to stop there. She now wants to pursue a Master's degree in Management Psychology.

She is currently a postgraduate education counsellor at Taylor's University. Prior to that, she was an education counsellor at WOU from August 2017 to December 2018. She is involved in several community organisations like the Royal Commonwealth Society of Malaysia and Malaysian Indian Youth Council.

Her academic venture at WOU began when she found the University's flyers in a letterbox and duly enrolled in BMPS. With various other commitments she usually leaves studying to late nights. She juggles her many responsibilities by applying the "simple principle of focussing 100% on what I am supposed to do at that very moment".



► Juggling her study, work and other commitments to achieve her goals.

Sugganya is passionate about achieving her life goals and contributing to society. "I set realistic targets for what I want to achieve and work towards it. I often reward myself with a good holiday, food or things I like after I achieve something."

She credited her family and best friends for motivating her to complete her studies. She also gave a thumbs-up to the flexible learning at WOU which enabled her to network with fellow students from different workplaces.

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