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MALAYSIA

Enhancing Employability Initiatives: Malaysia Experience¹

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ABSTRACT

Graduate employability has been a global concern for all higher education sectors. The Malaysian higher education system is no exception. Currently, the country is experiencing a major education overhaul through the implementation of the National Higher Education Strategic Plan, which was officially launched in August 2007. The above plan delineates the strategic thrusts and critical agendas to enable our tertiary institutions to achieve world class status and at the same time support the national need for quality human capital. Notably, the first focus of this strategic plan puts emphasis on the development of human capital with first class mentality. This paper will share initiatives undertaken by the Malaysian government to enhance graduate employability. A case of a university in Malaysia will be presented to demonstrate how such initiatives are embedded into the university curriculum. These initiatives can be broadly summarized under three themes: academic, co-curricular activities, and industry link. The presentation will conclude with issues and challenges faced in implementing these initiatives.

INTRODUCTION

Expectations of higher education (henceforth HE) have changed remarkably due to the global market changing environment and the changing landscape of HE. At the same time, the increase global market competition demands that HE equip graduates with more than just the declarative knowledge in specific domains but also the functional skills or work readiness skills to prepare graduates for the world of work. Thus, graduate employability has been a global concern for all higher education sectors, whereby HE is expected to revitalize the learning environments to suit current job demands. HE is expected to foster learning outcomes that are valued by the employers. The Malaysian HE system is no exception. Building on the premise that HE should provide rich environment to encourage student engagement and to stimulate complex skills, this paper will share some of the initiatives undertaken by the Malaysian HE to enhance graduate employability. A case of a university in Malaysia will be presented to demonstrate how such initiatives are embedded into the university curriculum. These initiatives can be broadly summarized under three themes: academic, co-curricular activities, and industry linkages. The presentation will conclude with issues and challenges faced in implementing these initiatives.

Redefining Graduate Employability

Employability is often defined as "...a set of achievements- skills, understandings and personal attributes- that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy." (Yorke & Knight, 2003, p.7). However, this definition is inadequate when we view individuals as an investment in human capital development. Afterall, what is the purpose of

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university education? Are we preparing university education for 'useful' knowledge or for knowledge for its own sake? (Newman, 1947, cited in Levin, 2000). With the increasingly challenging economic situation, HE may have succumbed to capitalist consumerism, focusing on the vocational education that emphasizes 'usefulness'. Kirp's (2000) observation on American universities echoed the following:

"While the public has been napping, the American university has been busily reinventing itself. In barely a generation, the familiar ethic of scholarship-baldly put, that the central mission of universities is to advance and transmit knowledge-has been largely ousted by the just-in-time, immediate-gratification values of the marketplace. The Age of Money has reshaped the terrain of higher education. . . Gone . . . is any commitment to maintaining a community of scholars, an intellectual city on a hill free to engage critically with the conventional wisdom of the day."

Has university education become a test for employment? How can we strike a delicate balance between this useful knowledge and philosophical knowledge, i.e., the cultivation of mind? "The idea of a university" has been immensely debated since the middle of the 19th century. McVeigh (2002) in his critical analysis of Japanese higher education forewarned educators about the consequences in allowing HE system to be too influenced by the corporate world. HE ought to strive to retain the quintessential feature of a university, i.e., being a center of excellence. It follows then, that if the philosophical education is good, it must be 'useful' too. This concept of usefulness bodes well with employability. Our views of employability should concern the opportunities afforded for the development of complex learning skills that enable graduates to be resilient, knowledgeable and ethical human beings. In recent years there seems to be global consensus about the importance of graduate employability due to the increasingly competitive and volatile graduate employment market, especially during this economically challenging period. Thus, HE is challenged to provide opportunities to advance the frontier of knowledge and yet useful to the market.

Methods of Embedding Employability

To strike a balance between useful knowledge and philosophical knowledge, employability has to be associated with 'good learning', i.e., learning experiences that support co-construction of knowledge between learners and the environment. Since learning cannot simply come from direct instruction alone, HE should provide a stimulating environment that fosters learning as a collaborative journey. Years of concerted effort at all levels are needed as it takes beyond classroom level to enhance employability. HE is expected to maximize graduates career potential while they are on campus. There are several ways in which HE may be able to incorporate employability into the existing curriculum: employability through the whole or the core or the related modules within the curriculum, and employability through work-based learning. The former concerns curriculum development and/or reform, and the later concerns the university-industry linkages. The HE in Malaysia has afforded both opportunities as evidenced later in this presentation.

NATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION STRATEGIC PLAN (NHESP)

The main aim of Malaysian HE is to produce professionals for nation building and also to provide facilities for the knowledge advancement through research and consultancy services. Currently, Malaysia has 20 public universities to cater for the diversified needs of the citizens, business and industry, and about 600 private higher learning institution that cater for the varying needs of the nation.

Currently, the country is experiencing a major education overhaul through the implementation of the National Higher Education Strategic Plan (henceforth, NHESP). In 2007 and 2008, the NHESP and National Higher Education Action Plan (henceforth, NHEAP) were launched respectively intended at transforming the higher education in Malaysia. The above plan delineates the strategic thrusts and critical agendas to enable our tertiary institutions to achieve world class status and at the same time support the national need for quality human capital. Notably, the first focus of this strategic plan puts emphasis on the development of

human capital with first class mentality. Among other things, the plan aims to produce graduates who are knowledgeable and competent in their academic fields and at the same time possess living skills. Graduates are expected to be able to transfer knowledge into practice; innovative and possessing critical thinking and problem solving skills; multilingual and able to communicate effectively; technology savvy; possessing good values and able to contribute to the wellbeing of the society, nation, and the global community; and possessing the necessary generic (soft) skills required for the employment market.

Graduate unemployment recorded a special mention in this action plan. The plan has provided for a Graduate Training Scheme under its critical agenda. One of the initiatives under NHESP is the exchange programme where top students are given the opportunity to spend a minimum of a semester in selected top foreign universities to enrich their learning experience.

COUNTRY RESPONSE TO UNEMPLOYMENT

The Establishment of the Graduate Employability Division

In an effort to enhance graduate employability, the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia (MOHE) has responded to this growing unemployment trend among tertiary graduates by focusing on the following programs: internship, apprenticeship, finishing schools and entrepreneurship. In early 2009, a graduate employability division was set up in the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) under the project management office (PMO) to facilitate the Thrust 2 of the Strategic thrust of the NHESP, i.e., pertaining to graduate employability and materialization. The division aims to foster activities to ensure that graduates:

1. Obtain suitable job
2. Become very enterprising and able to create jobs
3. Have high competencies
4. Have added values in terms of soft skills, as needed in the job market.

The number of graduate unemployment almost doubled from 2000 to 2004. An estimated 42,500 graduates were unemployed in 2000; the number had increased to 68,000 and 74,182 in 2003 and 2004 respectively (<http://www.psptn.net/caps/graduateemployability/default.aspx>, retrieved April 1st 2009). Concurrently, all institutions of higher learning (henceforth IHLs) have made special provisions for the inclusion of employability skills in the teaching and learning process. Feedback from industry players is also encouraged to reduce the gap between graduate job-seekers and employers. This continuous feedback is essential for HE to ascertain the kind of gap and provide appropriate interventions.

The Establishment of the Malaysian Qualifications Framework (MQF)

Universities respond to unemployment issue by modifying existing curriculum to meet the demand of current labour market. More dialogic discussions are taking place between the industry and the university resulting in the development of new courses and teaching methods.

On November 1st, 2007, the Malaysian government established a new entity, the Malaysian Qualifications Agency, known as MQA. This newly established entity is basically a merger between the National Accreditation Board (LAN) and the Quality Assurance Division (QAD). Being responsible for quality assurance of higher education for both the public and the private, MQA comes up with the Malaysian Qualifications Framework (MQF) and this instrument acts as the reference point for the criteria and standards for national qualifications. The MQA is responsible for monitoring and overseeing the quality assurance practices and accreditation of national higher education. Apart from the above responsibilities, other functions of MQA are to: “develop standards and credits and all other relevant instruments as national references for the conferment of awards with the cooperation of stakeholders; facilitate the recognition and articulation of qualifications; and maintain the Malaysian Qualifications Register (MQR).” (<http://www.lan.gov.my/eng/introduction.cfm>). With a vision to be a credible and internationally recognized higher education quality assurance body, it is

hoped that MQA will benefit the Malaysian higher education, in general, and the development of human capital, specifically. Its mission is purely to inspire the level of confidence of its stakeholders through best practices.

All programmes of studies in all the Malaysian Universities are currently undergoing a curriculum review process. Generally there are three important elements in the MQF:

1. To ensure that the structure of the programme fulfills the number of credits allotted for each MQF level.
2. The emphasis is on the learning outcomes. With a paradigm shift from teacher-centred to learner-centred, the use of student-centred learning (SCL) activities is given strategic importance that requires an instructor to prepare the learning outcomes based on the eight learning domains namely: knowledge of discipline areas; practical skills; social skills and responsibilities; values, attitudes and professionalism; communication, leadership and team skills; problem solving and scientific skills; managerial and entrepreneurial skills; and finally, information management and lifelong learning skills. In addition, the course learning outcomes are tied to the cognitive, affective, psychomotor, and the soft skills elements.
3. The calculation of the student learning time (SLT). The calculation is not only based on face-to-face interaction between students and instructors but also include students' self-study time. SLT includes all learning activities ranging from sourcing for information, preparation for lectures and tutorial, discussion with peers, completing assignments and projects to the preparing for examinations.

The registration of academic programmes in the MQR will not only help all Malaysian Universities to obtain more students enrolled at the university, but also, to ensure the process of continuous improvement and accreditation by a certified professional body. Consequently, in achieving such recognition, the universities will minimize unemployability among the graduates as there will be more demand for such graduates who have completed their studies from a reputed higher learning institution.

Tracer Study

A further evidence of the country's growing efforts to address employability is the development of the tracer study. Each year since the year 2004, the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) conducts studies on new graduates at the point of their graduation day. The study aims to provide a picture of graduate employability, graduate job market, job trend and job mobility. Historically, the National Graduates Tracer Study was first initiated and coordinated by the Economic Planning Unit (EPU), Prime Minister Department in 2002. However, from 2003 to 2004, the study was taken over by the Malaysian Ministry of Education (MOE) before it was later passed to the Ministry of Higher Education.

The tracer studies using online system called SKPG I was introduced in the year 2006 and in 2008, MOHE has moved one step further by making another new online system referred to as the Graduates Follow-up Tracer Study (SKPG II). The latter, which is an extension of the first study, was developed to conduct surveys on graduates who have completed their studies for more than six (6) months, while, the former, was mainly to get information on the job status of new graduates at the time they attend their degree awarding ceremonies. Both study systems were developed because the MOHE is always concerned and committed to continually improve the standards of higher education in the country. In general, the information gained from this study is useful to the government and higher education institutions in formulating effective policies and planning pertaining to human capital development. Specifically, the outcome of the study can also be used objectively by graduates to develop their career, based on facts and evidences.

Since 2002, the tracer study has been officially placed under the responsibility of the University Teaching and Learning Centre (UTLC). UUM has participated in every tracer study conducted since then. In general the findings have helped the institution to shape its academic curriculum, facilities and services provided for the students.

As a whole, the Minister of Higher Education, **Dato' Seri Mohamed Khaled bin Nordin** opines that "the Graduate Tracer Study has proven to be an effective method in

getting accurate and quick inputs for the purpose of ensuring the human capital produced by higher education institutions are at all times relevant and are able to meet the ever changing demand of the job market.” (<http://202.186.86.252/kspgv/en2/members/login.php>)

Enhancing Generic Skills

Generally various stakeholders have pointed that Malaysian graduates lack generic skills (Asma & Lim, 2000; Quek 2003), notably English language proficiency, communication and team-working skills (Shuib, 2005). The MOHE has responded to this issue by enforcing the generic skills module to be used by all IHLs beginning 2007. In 2006 the module was prepared by a taskforce led by the then deputy vice chancellor of academics and international affairs of University Putra Malaysia (now the director general of Department of Higher Education) that prioritized seven elements of soft skills deemed important in gaining employment:

1. communication skills (CS): ability to express ideas clearly, effectively, and with confidence, both in writing and speaking, verbal and non-verbal.
2. critical thinking and problem solving (CTPS): the ability to identify, analyze, justify and evaluate the problems in various situations, and the ability to initiate and expand ones' thinking process and creativity in solving problem.
3. team-working skills (TS): the ability to establish good rapport and interact with other people to achieve ones' goals, and the ability to understand other people's needs, and expectation among members in a group.
4. leadership skills (LS): ability to understand the basic theories of leadership, and the ability to lead others.
5. lifelong learning (LL): the ability to solicit and manage the relevant information from various resources, and the ability to accept new ideas and keen for new knowledge.
6. entrepreneurial skills (KK): the ability to identify opportunities in business and the ability to plan, explore, and evaluate opportunities.
7. moral and professional ethics (EM): the ability to perform duties and responsibilities professionally, and the ability to analyze the impact economically, socially, and morally.

MOHE has published soft skills module (Modul Kemahiran Insaniah Untuk Pengajian Tinggi Malaysia, 2006) for use of IHLs in Malaysia. They have developed a taxonomy delineating the “must have” and “good-to-have” generic skills for undergraduates. The “must have” elements signify the minimum exit requirements expected from university graduates. Thus, all IHLs in Malaysia must strive to ensure these “must have” generic skills be infused directly or indirectly into the existing curriculum. It is hoped that by embedding generic skills into the existing curriculum, we can have improved matches between graduate job-seekers and employers.

Finishing Schools

The Finishing School is presently a final professional development course for final year undergraduates to upgrade their personal abilities and business needs before they can be confidently deployed into a real world. Finishing school programme is an example of the career development programmes that are aimed at enhancing university students' soft skill. This programme was launched at Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) in 2007 as part of UPM's structured co-curricular activities. The programme was designed specifically for final year students and will focus on two critical areas which are communication skills and professional writing. The medium of instruction for this course is English and the programme is conducted based on 70 percent practical work and 30 percent theory. The assessment for this course will be on four aspects which are attendance, participation, presentation, and written work. The programme is part of students' preparation for workplace. The impact of this course is yet to be known as the programme has just started recently.

THE UNIVERSITI UTARA MALAYSIA INITIATIVES: A CASE

Situated in the northern region of Peninsular Malaysia on a 1,061-hectare campus Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) is the sixth public university in Malaysia. Set up on 16 February 1984 UUM was formed to develop and excel in management education.

ACADEMIC INITIATIVES

MQF Training and Active Learning Initiatives

As a leading Malaysian management institution of higher learning, UUM drives to live up to the new MQF requirements. To ensure that staff members are aware of the needs of the MQF accreditation process, a series of training were conducted by the University Teaching and Learning Centre (UTLC) beginning March 2007. Simultaneously documentation is rigorously prepared to ensure the domestic system adhere to the MQF guidelines.

UUM recognizes the need for academics to unlearn their philosophy of teaching and learning and how it can be constructively aligned to the ever challenging demand of the education and training in the 21st century. Thus, beginning 2005 UUM via UTLC has developed a series of continuing professional development workshop to promote the use of active learning such as project based learning and case study in teaching. These teaching approaches will allow UUM to align professional working knowledge and the program learning outcomes. By doing this, UUM aims to build capacity for enquiry-based learning among its students.

Self Development Group (SDG)

Recent studies into postsecondary educational outcomes have found student engagement to be an important predictor of student success and measure of institutional quality (Kuh, 2001, 2007). These student engagement theories promote the idea that students who put forth time and energy into worthwhile educational activities will grow academically and socially (Gonyea, 2006). In their book *Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education*, Chickering and Gamson (1987) identifies seven indicators of student engagement: student-faculty contact, cooperation among students, active learning, prompt feedback from faculty members, time on task, high expectations, and respect for diverse talents and ways of learning. While student engagement measures the time and effort student put into their academic work, student growth also depends upon the quality of experiences and opportunities offered by a university.

UUM responses to this challenge via six credited Self Development Group (SDG) courses. The SDG taps on the seven effective educational practices (Chickering & Gamson, 1987) that help define a university's contribution to the actual educational experiences of undergraduates. Applying the concept of mentoring, a lecturer and his 'disciples' will meet for 14 hours each semester for six consecutive semesters. Six modules were developed to guide SGD activities:

1. high touch communication
2. thinking skill
3. personal financial planning
4. volunteerism and patriotism
5. management ethics
6. entrepreneurship

The SDG which is conducted in English aims to improve learners' English and other generic skills that could help maximize their potentials for employability. The small group discussion provides students the space to grow and mature with their mentor,

CO-CURRICULUM INITIATIVES

The Role of UUM Co-curriculum Center

A structured co-curriculum activities as part of the academic programs in UUM has existed since the earliest days of the University. Just as students' classroom experiences are coordinated within the framework of a management university, so are the varieties of the co-curriculum courses offered.

While the academic curriculum and the co-curriculum address different developmental needs, together they provide a cohesive, well-conceived experience to ensure that UUM students will be well prepared to meet future challenges.

Specifically, the objectives of the co-curriculum program in UUM are as follows:

1. To supplement the university's curriculum that aims at providing a balanced and all round education to all students with the view of producing graduates of caliber.
2. To instill leadership qualities among students with the emphasis on discipline, team work and organizational skills.
3. To foster cooperative spirit and racial integration.

Various continuous efforts have been made to improve and strengthen the co-curriculum structure at Co-curriculum Center, UUM. Presently, there are about 75 co-curriculum courses offered which are categorised into groups or units such as Leadership, Music, Visual Arts, Self Defence, Media Technology, Agro-Business, Living Skill, Mechanics Corps, First Aids, Community Services, Sports and Recreation (such as golf, horse riding, paramotor and water sport), Entrepreneurship, Police Volunteer Corps and Reserve Officer Training Unit (ROTU).

The wide range of co-curriculum activities on offer encourages not only the development of individual talents but also the important skills of teamwork and cooperation, positive attitudes, self discipline and commitment. Active participation in this credit-bearing co-curriculum activities provides indispensable opportunities for UUM students to cultivate a very much needed soft skills. This in turn would be very useful in enhancing their employability when they finish their study.

Amongst the co-curriculum courses offered at UUM, ROTU and University's Police Volunteer Corps need special mention. For students who successfully completing this course, a special attention will be given by the hiring body if they choose to join the military service or the police force. This is also true for other uniform groups such as Red Crescent Society, St. John Ambulance, Fire Brigade and Civil Defence Force.

UUM'S LINKAGES WITH INDUSTRY

The sophisticated needs of customers and stakeholders in today's markets require graduates who will be potential employees, to be well-informed with the current market developments and be conversant with the industry practices, products and services. Prospective employers often look for graduates with certain attributes that match with their industry requirements. These attributes are primarily the "soft skills" such as the ability of oneself to express thoughts clearly; which could be gauged from his or her communication and presentation abilities; leadership, decision making, teamwork, negotiation and selling skills and job knowledge.

The strategies used by UUM to increase the employability of its graduates are (i) by harnessing the "soft skills" of the students through an industry-based "experiential learning" program and (ii) to create an on-line platform to "market" the graduates to the potential employers. The two strategies are being carried out successfully through partnership and collaborations with the industry players. In this section of the paper, let's see the success stories of UUM on three cases:

Online Practicum Student Placement (OPSP)

OPSP allows companies to register, view available students for industrial training by academic programmes they undertake, select potential students for training according to their preference (e.g. academic results, race, language proficiency, hometown, co-curricular activities), and confirm the selection of students electronically through the Internet within minutes. Due to its potential impact on UIL management of the industrial training, OPSP receives the Malaysia Civil Service Innovation Award in 2007 (AIPA 2007). Figure 1 below shows the industrial training management process that has been computerized and integrated into OPSP.

The D' Graduates

A well received and popular D'graduate programme is the online reality show that is aimed at identifying a star graduate (refer to figure 2). In this event, students are competing between each other by showcasing their talents in a series of assignments and business simulations. Participants are assessed in terms of individual performance as well as their ability to work in a team in solving business problems. Soft skills such as communication skills, leadership, attitude, positive mindset, and confidence are some of the attributes that are taken into consideration in the assessment. This event was jointly organized with private company, MyPath Sdn Bhd, in collaboration with several corporate organizations including Star, Jaring, International, Horne Penang, and MIRC.

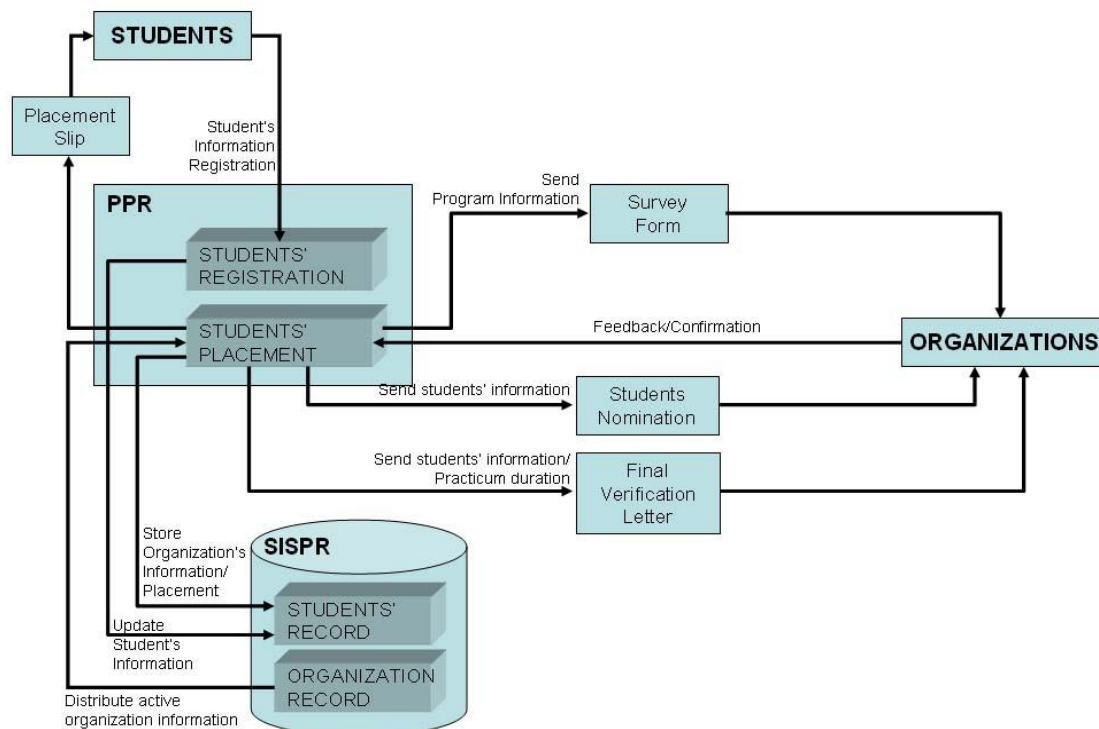


Figure 1: Detail Flow of Industrial Training Management Process in OPSP



Figure 2: Main Page of the D'Graduate Online Reality Show

UUM-PRIBUMI Investment Camp (UPIC)

A program called “UUM-PRIBUMI INVESTMENT CAMP 2008” was designed as an industry-based “experiential learning” to harness the soft skills of the graduating students. This program is a collaborative effort between UUM and two industry partners: the Persatuan Remisier Bumiputra Malaysia (PRIBUMI or the Association of Bumiputra Remisers and Airgate Media Networks Sdn. Bhd. (the system provider on the stock market). UUM is presented by the College of Business and the University Industry Link.

A total of 76 UUM students participated in the program as part of their final year practicum or industrial attachment program. The mode of operation encompasses 3 stages: 1) investment and trading competition 2) leadership and personal skill developments and 3) 3-month attachment trainings with investment houses and corporate bodies.

The students went through a 3-week intensive training on the mechanics of financial markets using the facilities in the Trading Room. As far as it is known, UUM is the only university in Malaysia that has built a trading room. In between the sessions, participants were also exposed to various self-development programs that develop their personal skills. The activities include market report presentations, team –building, communication and identification of one’s strengths and weaknesses for specific job alignments. In other words, students’ skills and personal attributes are identified and match with jobs suitable to such personalities and skills. All those training were conducted in UUM.

From UPIC 2008, we obtained amazing results in terms of personality transformations. Participating students can then talk freely, gained poise and confidence and ready to assume leadership roles. The practical trainings plus the renewed confidence enable the students to gain better job knowledge and techniques practiced by the industry.

The second achievement is that out of the 76 students, 13 of them were shortlisted for another month of a comprehensive training that prepares them to sit for professional examination “Dealer’s Representative License” to become remisiers. 12 of them have passed the examination and have obtained the professional dealer’s license, issued by the Securities Commission of Malaysia. For these 12 students, they obtained 2 qualifications; their bachelor’s degree and professional qualifications from the Malaysian Securities Commission. With this qualification, one can easily pursue a career as a licensed remisier in Malaysia. Six of them are employed by RHB Investment Bank and the remaining six by

AmInvestment Bank. The remaining 54 students have secured employment as financial advisers and executives in corporate bodies. Through UPIC 2008, the 76 students have obtained employment within 6 months after they finished their studies (and before their official graduation day).

The success of the first pilot run has gained the confidence of the Ministry of Higher Education to award UUM-Pribumi-Airgate team a RM 3 million to introduce UPIC 2009 with 20 public universities. UUM has been entrusted by the Ministry to manage the funds for the 20 universities. UPIC 2009 is currently being held at the national level, with a gathering of the final 500 students selected from the top 25 students from each of the 20 universities. Many corporate bodies will be participating in this program and they will be offering job placements for these 500 students.

Apprentice Entrepreneurship Development Model - Co-operative and Entrepreneurship Development Institute (CEDI)

The CEDI-UUM apprentice entrepreneurship development model was based on the Consulting Based Learning for ASEAN SMEs (CoBLAS) which was introduced by a Group of Entrepreneurship researcher from Japan, Thailand, Malaysia, Cambodia, Laos and Indonesia headed by Profesor Takeru Ohe from Waseda University of Japan. The CEDI-UUM team has adopted and enhanced the model by focusing on three phases of entrepreneurship development which is comprised of:

- a. Self Development
- b. Business Exposure, and
- c. Industrial practical training (which also includes preparation for running a real business).

The Objectives of the program are as follows:

1. to train and expose student on a continuous basis during his/her stay in UUM on the issue of hands-on business management
2. to collaborate with a pre identified business entity to develop potential student entrepreneur
3. to take entrepreneurship as an alternative career choice for UUM student
4. to assist the country in developing more entrepreneur among the graduates

The three-year program is a tri-partite arrangement between UUM, Student and Business Entity. For a smooth implementation and monitoring of the program a joint working committee comprises representatives of UUM and Business Entity is being established.

In the **first phase** of the program the students are introduced to the following concepts:

1. the role of student, CEDI and Business entity in the program
2. the concept of entrepreneurship and the background information of all parties involved
3. basic business topics such as marketing, account, communication etc.

In the last two months of the first phase the students undergo a practical training at the business entity identified. During this session the students will have a hands-on exposure of what they have learned.

In the **second phase** the students undergo the following processes:

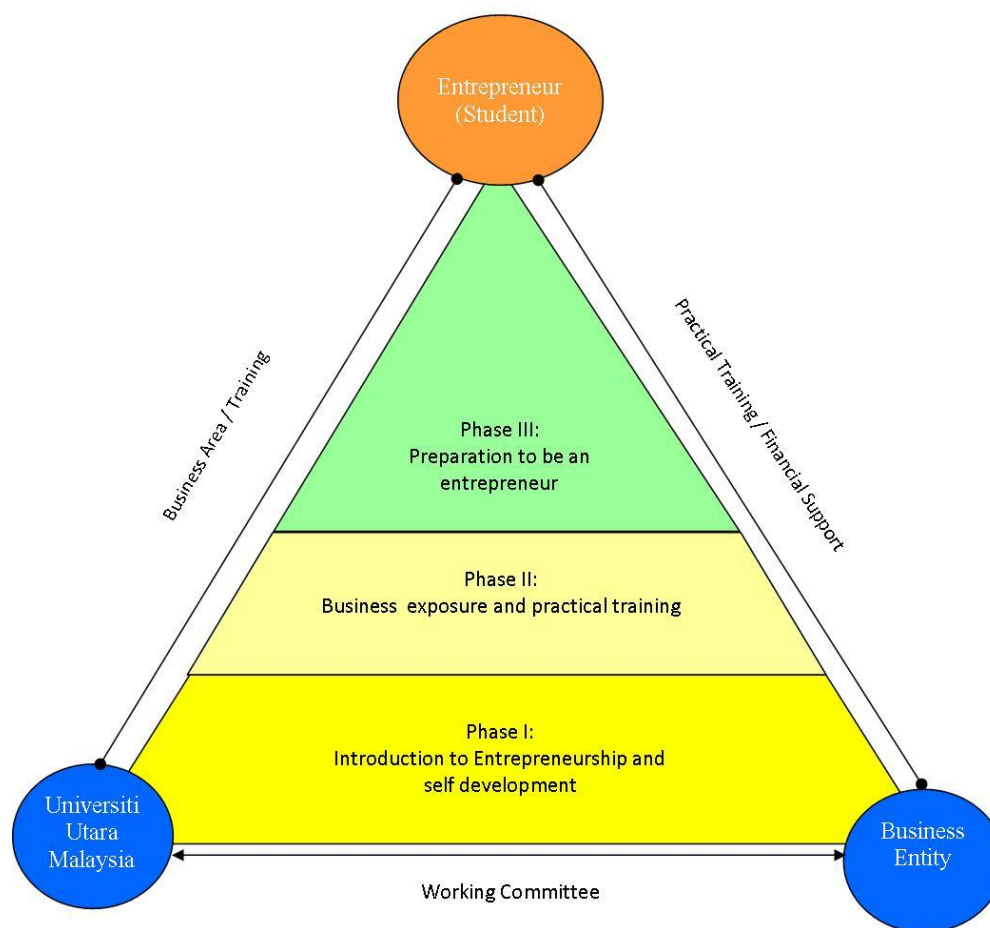
1. learn the process of business opportunity identification
2. register a business on campus under the supervision of CEDI
3. visit various businesses related to the Business Associates of the program
4. prepare and present a report of the second phase activities

In the **third phase** of the program the students:

1. undergo workshop conducted by business entity and
2. undergo a workshop on business plan
3. prepare and present a business plan
4. apply for a loan from Business Fund Provider to set up a business upon graduation

The overall outlook of the UUM entrepreneur apprentice model is as per the diagram below. As of March 2009, the apprentice entrepreneurship development program has involved two business entities including SME Bank and Bank Rakyat of Malaysia. The program has also involved 40 students from various disciplines of study at UUM.

CEDI-UUM Apprentice Entrepreneurship Development Model



CONCLUSION AND CHALLENGES AHEAD

The paper has presented various responses by HE in Malaysia in their efforts to enhance graduate employability, from academic initiatives to extracurricular and university industry linkages. HE has to make more explicit efforts to enhance graduates' generic skills to enable graduates to move self-sufficiently within the volatile labor market via sustainable employment. However, in doing so HE in Malaysia recognizes challenges in ensuring the success of these initiatives. Among other things, HE should address the following:

1. The increased diversity among undergraduates requires different interventions at various levels. Some skills require time to mature; thus, university must be able to address skills development in a progressive manner. There is no one size fits all solution to tackle any issue.

2. It is difficult to buy out academics' time for curriculum development or reform especially when rewards and recognition are significantly based on research and publication. To convince academics to give serious thoughts to employability is a huge task when their career prospect primarily depends on their research productivity. It is time for the university management to begin to address the various scholarship of teaching and due recognition is to be given to each accordingly.
3. Logistics to conduct active learning: university intake has doubled than expected in the last few years. Mass lecture is still abundant. With the kind of student background presently available (product of exam-oriented secondary schools) it is hard to expect active class participation. The challenge is to reduce the number of student-lecturer ratio and, thus, reducing the class size.
4. The decline in English language proficiency among undergraduates: Recognizing that English today is the language of knowledge, universities in Malaysia have to undertake remedial work to bridge the gap between post-secondary limited language and numeracy proficiency and university readiness skills.
5. Financing for co-curriculum activities: the needs to hire professionals as trainers in the various fields of co-curriculum activities demand a high cost allocation. Furthermore, the cost of conducting such activities is also increasing. This is particularly true for outdoors activities that require special skill such as kayaking, repelling and mountaineering.

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