Nilai U gets foreign fencing coach
Soft Skills to boost career prospects
Diploma in Automotive Engineering programme launched

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I have always maintained that a university is more than a place where students go to obtain paper qualification. It is where new friends are made and life-long bonds are forged. New experiences, new ideas and tough challenges need to be overcome – this is what I believe should constitute varsity life. It is all about developing your character before your status as an adult in a new environment.

Here at Nilai University (Nilai U), we have long recognised the importance of providing various opportunities for students to experience new things that will challenge students to broaden their horizons. The addition of an array of soft skills will definitely stand them in good stead once they enter the job marketplace.

Last year, Nilai U was named as ‘Pusat Sukan Tumpuan – Fencing’ by the Ministry of Education. In an effort to promote this niche sport and unearth the next generation of sporting champions, the Ministry has equipped us with some of the best facilities in the land for fencing. We can now boast of having a highly experienced coach from France to help with these intended targets. Not only will the coach be in charge of the national fencers (who converge at our campus for training), he will be involved in programmes to promote this sport. I urge all students to grab this opportunity, as lessons are being offered at a great discount (compared to private lessons). More importantly, I sincerely believe having fencing skills on students’ résumé will certainly help them stand out in the crowd.

Prof Datuk Dr Megat Burhainuddin
Vice-Chancellor

This issue highlights the fact that enrolling at Nilai U is more than just the pursuit of paper qualifications. The administrators have gone to great lengths to provide various exciting and fun opportunities for students to learn new skills. What I would like to stress here is for all students to make full use of these opportunities as they undoubtedly will enhance your curriculum vitae. Take my word for it, prospective employers are always looking for that something extra.

This message must also be relayed to parents who sometimes worry that their children are not paying enough attention to their books. To this end, I would like to underline that the teaching and learning process at Nilai U extends beyond the traditional confines of classrooms. Much thought had been given on how Nilai U can augment the students’ varsity experience, which in turn will impact and enrich their lives for years beyond graduation.

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Moving Forward!

Students can opt for automotive engineering diploma at Nilai U.

“You can learn the relevant mechanic skills as an apprentice but there really is no substitute for higher education,” Ravichandra Kunugali Rangappa declares emphatically. The programme co-ordinator for the Diploma in Automotive Engineering at Nilai University (Nilai U) was keen to stress the many benefits of enrolling in an institution of higher education. “Yes, I know some school leavers and their parents might think they can go work as an apprentice at a workshop, learn a trade and get paid for it as well. But there is really no comparison.”

Firstly, Ravichandra points out the career opportunities available to unqualified mechanics. “They will be stuck at the same level unless they are very good and have the necessary finances to open their own garages,” he explains. “Those with paper qualification will be starting at a different point altogether and also have greater opportunities for promotions.” The key difference is that a student enrolling in Nilai U’s Diploma in Automotive Engineering programme is being trained to be an engineer, not mere mechanic. The pathway to a successful career is clearly defined by the set of skills that they have earned from their university. Graduates from this programme will be able to apply to large automotive companies for jobs in a variety of areas besides foreman - parts management, service supervisor, and even sales and marketing. “The fact remains that large organisations will demand formal qualifications and the pathway towards promotions is defined by this. A diploma is a good starting point and it will also allow students to garner credit exemptions into other engineering degree programmes,” he says. (Students will be able to go straight into the second year of the Degree in Mechanical Engineering programme at Nilai U).

Secondly, students will undergo a number of life-changing experiences at university which will make them more marketable. For instance, at Nilai U, students will have various opportunities to learn valuable soft skills. These include signing up for modules such as Dale Carnegie’s Skills for Success and Outward Bound’s Survival Skills. “Having great communication skills and ability to work in a team is something all employers look for,” Ravichandra stresses. “Do not forget that the medium of instruction at Nilai U is in English which is another key factor.” Ravichandra explains that large automotive companies will regularly have training sessions and technological updates, which will primarily be in English. “These companies will want employees who can understand the latest technological advances. It is very likely that the information will be in English,” he explains. “Do not under estimate the importance of English and communication skills, in what is perceived to be a very hands-on and technical occupation.”

Thirdly, the standard of learning facilities at Nilai U has been furnished to degree level. Ravichandra is confident that the laboratories and workshop facilities are among the best for this area of study in the country. “We have spent vast amounts to equip the labs and workshops to ensure students have a unique learning experience,” he points out. For instance, there are simulators where lecturers can create hypothetical scenarios for students to analyse and find solutions to. Nilai U has also invested heavily in legitimate software such as Solidworks and Ansys to allow students to gain the necessary know how in these essential areas. “Very few institutions can match Nilai U in terms of the facilities,” he stresses. Furthermore, students will be enjoying a varsity experience in a full-fledged university and not at a technical college. The melting pot environment with various clubs and societies will also help build character.”

Ravichandra says that this programme should appeal to petrol heads as well as those who are analytical and are not afraid to get their hands dirty. Malaysia is the biggest car market in Southeast Asia. Hence the career opportunities are unlimited as more cars hit the road each year. Plus, the diploma is internationally-recognised, allowing students to seek their fortune abroad. “This two-and-a-half year programme really does open up many possibilities. With an in-built three month internship tagged towards the end of the programme, diligent students should have no problem securing a job in a market which is constantly growing,” he smiles. “Come visit Nilai U and see for yourselves the facilities that we have for this programme. I am certain you will be impressed.”
Solid Foundation with Soft Skills

Nilai U provides extra modules to improve students’ soft skills in an effort to improve their marketability.

"It’s one thing for interview candidates to claim they have the requisite soft skills and quite another to back it up with a certificate from a well-known organisation, specialising in that field," declares Dato’ Dr Megat Butaimon, Nilai University (Nisda) Vice-Chancellor. "Communication, teamwork, grooming and personal etiquette – these are just some of the soft skills which students here will get to learn and improve upon."

Dr Megat was speaking after signing a Memorandum of Understanding with Chapter One Sdn Bhd for the latter to deliver classes on grooming and personal etiquette. Chapter One Sdn Bhd runs a long and extensive group of organisations which have been carefully selected by Nilai U administration to add value to the students’ overall experience. These include internationally recognised organisations such as Dale Carnegie and Outward Bound.

These added value modules are very much in line with Nilai U’s philosophy of Entrepreneurship. Dr Megat is quick to emphasise this by saying that students will not just be leaving with academic qualifications at the end of their tenure here. "They will also be equipped with all the life and social skills which we hope will make them not just dynamic employees who are highly sought after but also model citizens who will make positive contributions to their respective societies," he explains. "Degree students of Nilai U have to complete a total of 130 credits, including four mandatory university modules in subjects detached from their core fields of study. Hence they are given choices on a variety of topics such as Ethics, Critical Thinking, Entrepreneurship and Public Speaking (please visit www.nilai.edu.my for complete listing)."

Dr Megat is also keen to add that apart from enhancing their marketability, many of these modules are extremely fun. The most obvious example would be the Introduction to Golf which is run by the Mouna Golf School at the nearby sister company Nilai Springs Golf and Country Resort. "Where else does a university provide students with the opportunity to learn a new sport which also acts as a useful business networking tool?" he enquires. Judging from student feedback, the Introduction to Theatre and Acting is another module which is hitting all the right notes. This module is designed to build confidence, improve communication skills, build team players and, most importantly, cultivate an appreciation of the arts in students.

"Students who tried this module will have to stage a play all on their own – write, produce, direct and act. I have met students before and after they joined this module and have seen their personalities transform for the better. They are certainly more confident and even the shy reluctant characters come out of their shells," smiles Dr Megat.

He also points out that Nilai U runs a Fencing programme under the purview of the Ministry of Education, with the aim of promoting this niche sport as well as to unearth the next generation of champions. "Where else can you find a university which provides the facilities for this training?" he asks. "We have even engaged a coach from France to train our national fencers who are studying here (on scholarship) and students who are interested in taking up this sport," he says.

The Dale Carnegie Skills for Success and Outward Bound Survival Skills modules are also very popular with students. The former appeals mainly to the Business studies students as it’s closely related to them regarding corporate conduct. " collegiality who want to stand out from the crowd are advised to register for this module. Dale Carnegie is world-renowned and a certificate of completion from them will embellish any resume," says Dr Megat. He also firmly believes the weakening programme which puts students in the wilderness in the Outward Bound module in Lumul is designed to nurture leadership skills as well as to encourage them to think on their feet and beyond their comfort zones. "As they say When the going gets tough, the tough gets going. This Outward Bound module will turn them into stronger characters," explains Dr Megat.

To further underline Nilai U’s commitment to provide students with every opportunity to learn and mature into dynamic, young citizens, the institution is also proud to host and organise the Future Leaders Camp and 1World Culture events. Both are designed to give students better understanding of their fellow students and also to learn more about the pressing topics of the day, such as ‘Gender Equality’ and ‘Cultural Understanding’.

The key message is that a Nilai U education will give students much more than mere paper qualifications. "We prepare students for life," as Dr Megat puts it succinctly. "We do everything to ensure that we have kept our promise to the parents that we return their children in better shape than we received them," he says. "If any other institutions offer such choices or opportunities for students to grow and mature into young adults equipped with the right skills, knowledge and values, that is why Nilai U has Enrichment For Life as its motto."
Nilai U keen to promote Fencing
French fencing coach expounds the value of the sport in relation to higher education.

"Almost all high grade fencers are doctors, engineers, architects or some other professional," states Steve Gaby, who is the recently appointed fencing coach at Nilai University (Nilai U). He makes this point to underline the strong link between the sport of fencing and higher education, citing that many national fencers come from institutions of higher education. "This is because it is a sport that requires strong mental attributes to go along with the physical requirements, I would say that it is one of the most mentally challenging sports. Everything happens very quickly and fencers need to be alert, focused and disciplined to compete at the very highest levels," he explains. He also says that traditionally the sport also encourages values such as honesty and respect for the opponents. It is highly recommended by child specialists as useful in helping children develop their co-ordination and other motor skills. "That is why fencing is known as the sport of kings though I like to think of it as the king of sports," he smiles.

Nilai U has been named as centre of excellence for the sport of fencing under the purview of the Ministry of Education (Pusat Sukan Tapisan – Fencing). Under this programme, Nilai U has set up a training centre equipped with all the necessary facilities that will allow more students to take up this relatively expensive sport at minimal costs. These facilities are also of a high enough standard for it to become the training centre of choice whenever national fencers prepare for regional, national or international tournaments. Currently, there are three national fencers pursuing higher qualifications - Andrew Mok Vern-Han (Bachelor in Business Administration), Adam Nathlyn Undi-Moh (Foundation in Science) and Joshua Koh H.J. (Diploma in Agricultural Management). Having such facilities on campus has allowed them to prepare thoroughly whilst continuing with their higher studies.

Gaby hails from Ales en Provence, close to Marseille and was the Director of Sports for the Municipality of Thiens (also known as the City of the Knife). He says that he had always fancied coming out to Asia to further the development of the sport. He firmly believes that the future of fencing is in Asia and points to the achievements of South Korea and China as proof. "The fencers here in Malaysia have the right attitude and are willing to learn and train hard. That is the most important thing for me," he says, whilst revealing that he had turned down higher offers in other countries to come to Nilai U to be part of the Ministry of Education's initiative to promote the sport.

The affable Frenchman acknowledges that fencing is a niche sport and a very technical one at that but is planning to introduce beginners to the sport. As is the simplest of the three weapons classifications, Gaby says that fencing has many benefits apart from the obvious physical exercise. "If you watch fencing on TV, you will notice that everything is lightning fast. Thus fencers need to be able to anticipate every move and be able to think fast. Needless to say, the training will require focus and discipline, even if a student is taking it up as a leisure sport," explains Gaby. "These values will only benefit these students when they transfer such qualities into their studies." Gaby goes on to say that having fencing on a person’s resume would certainly impress prospective employers as it marks out these individuals as ‘different’, disciplined and dedicated. He also notes that the spirit of fencing imbues participants with a strong sense of confidence which can only work in their favour.

Plans are already afoot for staff to learn from this master of the sword. It is hoped that Nilai U staff will be able to continue teaching the finer points of fencing to students after his tenure has ended. He says, “Already the fencing training centre is gaining interest from students in the sister company Nilai International School and staff from the various subsidiaries of the Nilai resources Group. We are set to launch the introductory beginners’ programme in February and the quota is almost filled,” he smiles. "I am excited to be part of spreading the love of this sport to a whole new audience."

Nilai U firmly believes in providing students with ample opportunities to learn new skills which will aid in their character development. Aside from fencing, students have the opportunity to sign up for Milaune Golf School’s Introduction to Golf and Carnegie’s Skills for Success and Outward Bound’s Survival Skills.

- Centre for the Pusat Sukan Tapisan (Fencing) in Nilai University.
- Bruno Doby (centre) takes charge of practice session to introduce the sport of fencing to students at Nilai U.
Back To School!
National fencer enrolls in Nilai U to benefit from foreign coach.

“You are nothing without paper qualifications. You will be forced to work in physically demanding jobs and will be treated like a labourer,” warns Adam Nicholas Lindbichler. He should know as he started working straight after SPM and recalls doing various odd jobs at construction sites among other things. However, being a national fencer allowed him an escape route whereby he has been coaching younger children in this niche sport.

The 24-year-old who hails from Kota Kinabalu, Sabah recently made the brave decision to ditch his job to pursue higher education. He has enrolled in Nilai University’s Foundation in Science programme with a view towards gaining a degree in mechanical engineering. “Having had first-hand experience of working without formal qualifications, I knew it was important that I do something to improve my CV,” he says. “When I found out that Nilai U had employed a foreign fencing coach of international repute, I knew that this was the place for me.”

Nilai University (Nilai U) was named a ‘Pusat Sukan Tumpuan – Fencing’ by the Ministry of Education last year and has now become the de facto training base for national fencers preparing for regional and national tournaments, making use of the top-notch facilities. Adam is one of three national fencers at Nilai U’s campus. “Being on a campus that allows me to keep up my training while I study is absolutely ideal,” he declares. Adam recently won bronze in the men’s Sabre event at the Brunei International Open.

Adam admits that it was hard to leave his coaching job but recognises that he will learn more from the French fencing coach at Nilai U. “Bruno Goby is a much respected figure in the fencing arena and I could not pass up the chance to train with him,” he confesses. “I hope to become a better fencer under his tutelage. I am also thinking of being a coach or umpire when my fencing career is over.”

Adam says although he is the oldest student in his class, he is thoroughly enjoying his varsity experience. “Mingling with students again and studying is a great feeling,” he says. “I have already advised all my classmates about the importance of getting a degree in order to have a decent career.” As for getting back in the groove as a full-time student, Adam says he is taking everything in his stride. He says that training with a tough, no-nonsense fencing coach from China during his younger days strengthened his mental fortitude. “The training sessions were really tough. I even broke down in tears and quit many times. But each time, the coach would come to my house and walk me back to the training centre. I am eternally grateful that he did not give up on me as I have learnt so much from this sport,” he admits sheepishly.

At the moment, Adam along with his national fencer cohorts are busy helping Coach Bruno promote the sport on campus. He has gotten many of his classmates to sign up and is pleased to announce that the quota for the beginners programme is almost full. He strongly urges more students to pick up fencing for a variety of reasons. “First of all, fencing teaches you key lessons in maintaining focus. Secondly, discipline will become second nature to you. Thirdly, speaking from personal experience, fencing does imbue participants with a greater sense of confidence,” he outlines. “Once you have stood in front of a crowd while an opponent tries to jab you with a sword, nothing really fazes you. You will also become very good at reading body language.” Given Adam’s steely determination, a trait which helped him crack the Top 100 ranking at the World Championship in Italy three years ago, it would certainly be no great surprise if he successfully completes his studies with exceptional grades.

Nilai U offers students plenty of opportunities to earn enhanced certifications from professional organisations and to sign up for modules which will enhance their soft skills. Among the soft skill modules on offer include Dale Carnegie’s Skills for Success, Outward Bound’s Survival Skills and Muno Golf School’s Introduction to Golf. For more information, please go to www.nilai.edu.my or search for ‘Nilai University’ on Facebook.
A New Direction
Scholar finds new impetus after switching focus from engineering to business studies at Nilai U.

“I had my heart set on engineering after SPM or may be even pursue a pilot’s license but all that changed when I was advised by my sponsors that my aptitude tests indicated I was more suited to business studies,” declares Ahmad Thaqif Afnan Ab.Ijah. The youngest of three siblings and former students of SMK Jalan Empat, Bandar Baru Bangi, confessed that Additional Mathematics was his Achilles heel. “I find Add Maths very difficult to understand and perhaps, it is best that I have switched my focus to business. In engineering, I’d have to face those difficulties every single day.”

The 19-year-old says that the primary reason for opting for Nilai U was the peaceful ambience of the campus. “I am easily distracted and my mother wanted somewhere away from entertainment centres,” he says, noting the other option presented to him by his sponsors was surrounded by shopping malls. “Even though that option was only five minutes from his home, his mother wanted him to move beyond his comfort zone. ‘My mum knew that I wouldn’t study hard if I was at home and I suppose she wanted me to learn how to be independent!’ After visiting both campuses, his mother made it quite clear she preferred Nilai U and he concurred.

Thus far, the well-spoken young lad is thoroughly enjoying his classes. He enjoys that his classmates comprise of peoples of different ethnicity from all over the world which allow him to learn about different cultures. “I am certain this will be a great benefit as I intend to study International Business. If this is what I want to do in my career, I must learn how to communicate and deal with people from all sorts of cultural backgrounds. This provides early training for me,” he smiles. He also points to an open and easy-going student culture where there is no division between seniors and juniors and is free to mix around without any sense of enforced student protocol, as is the case in public universities.

Thaqif applied for a scholarship from Yayasan Peneraju Pendidikan Bumiputera (YPPB) and after sitting for aptitude tests, he was offered two choices, including one to do Foundation in Business at Nilai University (Nilai U). The plan is to finish this one-year pre-university programme and go on to do the BBA (Hons) in International Business, also at Nilai U.

He believes that more Malay students should try opting for private institutions like Nilai U as it will allow them to improve their English. “If one is going to build a career in international business, there is no running away from the fact that your English has to be of a very high standard,” he explains. “The lecturers here are really good and are willing to patiently guide you along. Do not worry if your English is not so good, being in an environment like this will only help you improve.”

Ahmad Thaqif Afnan Ab.Ijah (Foundation in Business) says he chose Nilai U because the peaceful campus is ideal for pursuit of higher education.
Hunger for Travel & Adventure

Student joins Nilai U’s American Degree Transfer Program to satisfy craving for travel.

“I love travelling so much that I actually applied to be a stewardess after finishing SPM exams! But being called up for national service meant I couldn’t attend the interview,” recalls Sia Sim Mei, a former student of SMK Tun Mamat, Tangkak, Johor. However, her father saw the perfect opportunity for her to further her studies and to indulge in her passion for travel with Nilai University’s American Degree Transfer Program (ADTP).

The youngest of four siblings, Sin Mei initially entered Form VI to do STPM as a means to lighten the financial burden of her parents. But she found the science stream subjects extremely difficult and her parents decided to enrol her in Nilai University (Nilai U). Her two elder brothers had graduated from the Business Faculty, so her parents knew of the institution’s quality and reputation. Initial plan was for her to do the Foundation programme followed by a degree of her choice at Nilai U. But her father decided to stump up the cash for an overseas education and told her to enrol in ADTP. “I believe he did this as I have an aunt and cousins living in the States. They can help look out for me. Also, he knew I desperately wanted to travel, so he said to do both at the same time,” explains the 19-year-old.

Excited by this opportunity, Sin Mei has approached her studies with gusto, revelling in the wide choice of subjects available under ADTP. “One of the best things about ADTP is the wide array of subjects available. I am really enjoying the Introduction to Music module. It was something I would never have gotten to do in another degree programme and I find myself thoroughly enjoying the lessons,” she says. She is also looking forward to the Introduction to Golf module in the coming semester that all ADTP students undergo. Run by the Mizuno Golf School with lessons taking place at nearby Nilai Springs Golf and Country Resort, she believes it would be an extremely useful business tool later in her career. Sin Mei intends to pursue a major in Business Finance at either West Virginia University or University of Indianapolis - the former because of affordability of its programmes while the latter is where her aunt and her family live.

For the moment, she is reveling in varsity life, making plenty of friends from various countries and also serving as Clubs and Societies Assistant Moderator on the Students’ Representative Council. She is also active in the American Degree Program Organisation, Manga Club and the Chinese Cultural Society on campus, believing that a healthy extra-curricular résumé is as important as academic credentials. “There is little point in going to an American university if all I am going to do is bury my head in books. I believe employers favour those who have an overseas education because they believe students are more independent and mature. Extra-curricular activities help highlight a student’s social accomplishments,” she reasons.

“I would definitely recommend Nilai U to my friends and relatives,” she exclaims, pointing to the peaceful campus and its safe and secure accommodation as key factors. Of course, affordability is important and she says that the ADTP route is one of the most affordable ways to a Stateside education. “Studying abroad is very expensive and ADTP allows for huge savings. This factor alone should be enough to convince students to check out Nilai U,” she states.
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Yee Yin Sinn
Nilai U Valedictorian for the Class of 2014 and currently employed in a blue chip IT company.

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