Nilai University

Explorer

Issue 3: 2015

Nilai U Appoints New Vice-Chancellor

- Indian Cultural Society - a hive of activity
- Atomic Jaya: A Blast of a Show!
- Spotlight on High Achievers

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I am extremely proud to be appointed Vice-Chancellor of Nilai University.

This is my second stint here as I served as Vice-President (Academic Affairs) from 2005 to 2013, giving me a unique insight into the many factors that make Nilai University such a special institution. To be welcomed back so warmly by the many who I have worked with earlier makes it feel like a homecoming.

Nilai University has made impressive progress since it was established as a College in 1997. The first cohort of students joined us in 1998 and we enrolled our first batch of international students in 1999. In the same year we won the state and national level landscape awards. In 2003, we won the MARTRADE Industry Excellence Award (Services) from the Ministry of International Trade and Industry. In 2007, we were granted University College Status, and in 2012 we were upgraded to become a fully fledged university. Even from the onset we were ranked as a Setara 5 (Excellent) university by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA). This was reaffirmed by the MQA in 2013.

We have made our mark not only in academic excellence but also in co-curricular activities. In 2013, the Ministry of Education made us a Centre of Excellence in Sport (Pusat Sukan Tumpuan). We were among the first private universities to be so appointed. Our designated specialisation is fencing, and to ensure we meet the trust placed on us we have appointed an Olympian from France as our in-house fencing coach.

It is a hallmark of Nilai University to provide our students the opportunity to gain enhanced certifications from renowned organisations, not only in the professional fields of accounting, human resource development, culinary arts and hotel management and chartered secretary status but also in such key areas as communication skills and corporate etiquette.

A student’s university experience is determined not only by what goes on in the lecture rooms; it is shaped by their entire experience at the university. I commit to improve the ‘Total Student Experience’ of our students. To that end I shall work with my colleagues and the student body to continually improve every aspect of that experience.

We shall make Nilai University ever more renowned for the education, care and service it provides its students.

Together we will take Nilai University to even greater heights.

I hope you will join me in this journey.

Prof Dato’ Dr Sothi Rachagan
Nilai University Vice-Chancellor

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It gives me great pleasure to introduce our new Vice-Chancellor in this issue. No stranger to Nilai University, Prof Dato’ Dr Sothi Rachagan served as Vice-President (Head of Academic Affairs) before his return. He was behind many of the projects that had been regularly highlighted in these very pages. These include the Future Leaders Camp, Total Student Experience concept as well as bringing on board, veteran thespian Mona Maniam to run the Theatre and Acting module.

You can be assured that many more similarly exciting projects are in the pipeline and we will endeavour to bring them to you in glorious technicolour! In the meantime, we hope you will enjoy this issue.

R Bala
Editor
bata.chanran@nilai.edu.my

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Next Intake: October 2015

FIELDS OF STUDY @ NILAI U
- Accounting  ●  Agricultural Management  ●  Aircraft Engineering
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Learning A Trade

School leavers have a chance to learn a new trade at super low commencement fees at Nilai U.

"Most people would not hesitate spending RM100 on a meal. Believe it or not, you can spend the same amount and actually learn how to prepare a fancy, restaurant-quality meal yourself," explains Edward Felix Joseph, Acting Dean of the Faculty of Hospitality and Tourism at Nilai University (Nilai U). He was referring to the Diploma in Culinary Arts programme and the new loan scheme which allows students to commence their higher education at Nilai U with just RM100 payment (the rest being financed by a loan with a local bank. For more details, please go to www.nilai.edu.my).

Edward has been at Nilai U for more than a decade and can often be found at the university's on-campus formal dining restaurant, Flamme, casting an eager eye on the presentation of the dishes being prepared by the students as well as offering constructive criticism on the taste. "I know it's all the rage to emulate Gordon Ramsey and give amateur cooks an earful. But I try to be encouraging as these are youngsters, just starting out on their culinary journey," he says. "I am a teacher, not a TV host looking to boost ratings. My duty is to help the students develop and give them the necessary encouragement for them to do better." However, he does point out that to prepare students for the realities of a functioning kitchen at peak hour, the lecturers who take the practical sessions in the kitchens will not shy away from giving students a hard time if they slack off or do not put in the necessary effort.

Nilai U's Faculty of Hospitality and Tourism has been in operation since 2003 and also offers Diplomas in Tourism Management and Hotel Management. Pathway to a BA (Hons) in Business and Hospitality Management is also available. Edward, however, is keen for the moment to talk about the Diploma in Culinary Arts programme. "Once upon a time, being a cook or chef may have been seen as a last chance saloon for students who did not achieve good grades in SPM. This is no longer the case as many parents are now aware of the career opportunities available to properly trained and qualified chefs," he says. Apart from hotels, restaurants, caterers and cruise ships, students who graduate from this programme can find employment in sales and marketing or research and development labs of food producers as well as being brand ambassadors (with requisite experience).

"I used to hear people say that being trapped in a hot kitchen is a hard way to earn a living. Compare that to being in an Emergency Room as a healthcare professional or a technician in aviation industry responsible for the safety of hundreds of crew members and passengers. I'd like to think being a chef is less stressful and infinitely more fun," Edward surmises. He is at pains to point out that the programme at Nilai U has a good balance of theoretical and practical skills. Students are taught to prepare a great number of dishes in a variety of styles in the training kitchens while they learn how to balance the books in the classrooms. "We teach students how to prepare good food. But that won't be useless if they do not know how to procure raw materials at competitive prices and how to manage a restaurant," he states. "Having the right business acumen is essential in this line of work."

In order to help faculty members keep students updated with latest industry trends, Nilai U is partners with the Malaysian Food and Beverage Executives Association (MFBEA). The organisation gives input on the syllabus and also keeps students updated on latest industry trends. For instance students are informed of the latest fads and trends in coffee-drinking circles. Students who successfully complete their programme will also receive enhanced certification from MFBEA which will be very useful when job hunting as it will indicate to prospective employers that these students have gone through the necessary training and are in touch with latest industry trends. "Chances are the prospective employer may even be a member of MFBEA, which will certainly help the student's prospects," exclaims Edward.

"But truth be told, the Diploma in Culinary Arts programme is as difficult as any other. It will require plenty of hard graft and perseverance. What differentiates it from other programmes is the fun factor. I can honestly say students in my faculty have the most fun simply because I believe fun is an essential factor in the preparation of great food. This is how great chefs come up with unique dishes and are able to dish out a fresh twist on traditional items," highlights Edward. He points to the many cooking and bartending competitions that his students are involved in annually and the way they prepare for these is testament to the fun factor. "Trust me, students wouldn't go through hours of practice if it wasn't fun," he says.

"I have always believed that if you can cook well and have a piece of paper to back this up, the world is your oyster as it is a skill that is highly valued no matter where you go," says Edward. "That's not bad for a RM100 investment."
It was the Bomb!

Students in Nalai U’s Theatre and Acting module put on an ambitious staging of Atomic Jaya.

“It was a case of if the students could cope with a play of such magnitude, not just the length, but the presentation of such political and topical issues,” explains tamestemper Maro Maniam, who co-ordinates the Theatre and Acting module at Nalai University (Nalai U). He was referring to the end-of-term play staged by his pupils, but unlike previous years where students were expected to write, direct and produce the play, this year Maro decided to throw down the gauntlet and challenged his charges to stage the billing political satire written by Hishamuddin - Atomic Jaya.

In previous years, students would usually stage three or four short vignettes to highlight what they had learned from the course but this year, they would have to perform all the lines for the full-length play which featured plenty of lengthy monologues and even longer monologues. On the night, in front of a packed President Hall, the students delivered their lines with a cold confidence of stage veterans and were able to elicit laughter from the audience with some of the punchlines at the Malaysian habit of stereotyping.

Original scripts were not totally discarded as there were three other vignettes on show - The Umbrella, The Mole, The Mariner, and The Chance of Life. In keeping with previous years, finally, and violence resonated its thematic climax in the first two plays while students got to showcase their瑕疵tone and vocal skills in The Chance of Life. Maro had always maintained that the real measure of a performance is not in the fancy props or even faithful delivery of lines, but whether the audience reacted positively. On that count, it would appear their reading of Atomic Jaya as well as the original script certainly mer the laughter and applause’ quotient.

Nalai U degree students are required to complete four additional modules divided from their core field of study. Choices include subjects as diverse as Ethics, Anthropology, Public Speaking, and courses by well-known organisations such as Dale Carnegie and Outward Bound. The aim is to expose students to a different challenges which will equip them with the requisite soft skills that are very much in demand in the employment market today; for instance, students who have undergone the funded Theatre and Acting Module will have learned valuable communication and teamwork skills, not least the ability to perform in front of a crowd. Most alumni who have undergone this module will attest, their fear of public speaking evaporated after undergoing Maro’s programme. Both international and domestic students speak of growing confidence when using English in a public forum.

Each semester sees an increasing number of applicants for this funded, text-book free module, indicating its growing popularity. And that more students are hearing of the positive impact this module have had on previous alumni, already, some students in the audience were leaning towards thinking aloud as to which play the next batch of students would be asked to tackle. Given that the fear has been set pretty high by this term’s students, whatever play is to be staged next, future cohorts have their work cut out for them.

The Theatre and Acting module is part of the administrator’s plan to provide the ‘total student experience’. This is where student satisfaction is measured from beyond the classrooms, taking in facilities, extra-curricular activities and availability of specialty-designed courses such as the Introduction to Theatre and Acting.

Students from the Theatre and Acting modules get to touch with their dramatic side for the end of term play.

▲ Scenes from the end-of-term play in which students are graded by course co-ordinator and veteran director, Maro Maniam.

▲ The thunderous applause of students that greeted the cast signalled a job well done.
Nilai University appoints new VC
Former Head of Academic Affairs returns as Vice-Chancellor.

"The Total Student Experience is a concept which I am fully committed to and hope to deliver to all students at Nilai University," proclaims Prof Dat’i Dr Sohith Rachagan, who was installed as Nilai University’s Vice-Chancellor from 1 May 2019. The Total Student Experience is a concept which is delivered not just by what is taught in the classrooms but includes various other factors such as campus facilities, extracurricular activities and opportunities to learn new skills. Dr Sohith is keen to implement this concept at Nilai University (Nilai U) as he firmly believes that today’s discerning students (and their parents) are looking for more than just paper qualifications when they enrol in an institution of higher education.

Dr Sohith first joined Nilai U in 2005 as Vice-President (Head of Academic Affairs) before leaving to join Perdana University as Vice-Chancellor in 2013. He has now returned to continue the many projects that he had started during his tenure at Nilai U, believing that the university has the wherewithal and expertise to deliver through the tough market conditions faced by private higher education. "Nilai U is part of a group of Nilai Universities with strong financial credentials. There is property development which is doing very well and was instrumental in developing the township of Bandar Saujana Nilai," he said. The group also has a five-star hotel (Nilai Springs Resort Hotel) and a golf club (Nilai Springs Golf and Country Club), he added. Alongside Nilai U, there is now an international school (Nilai International School), further strengthening our educational credentials.

The veteran academic also firmly believes that Nilai U, having been established in 1997, has successfully carved out a niche for itself in the education landscape. "This is in no small part due to highly specialised programmes such as the Diploma in Aircraft Maintenance Engineering, which Dr Sohith was instrumental in helping set up in 2008. The Aircraft Maintenance Engineering programmes have shown that niche courses can be very successful and attract high number of applications if the institution backs it up with requisite teaching facilities," he says, highlighting the purpose-built hangar with two aircraft that is on Nilai U campus.

One of the projects that Dr Sohith is most proud of is the Future Leaders Camp (FLC), which he helped to initiate in 2016. "Working with the relevant government ministries, the aim was to host a seminar that would help breed capable, dynamic young leaders from all socioeconomic and racial institutions of higher education. The FLC is now part of Nilai U’s academic calendar and affects many potential young leaders from all over the country to participate." This is something which was lacking in private institutions. "I believe we have a duty not just to the stakeholders to turn a profit, but also to society at large to produce graduates who will not just be diligent workers but potential leaders who can make a positive impact on their respective communities," he stressed.

Dr Sohith was also actively involved in developing a soft skill "toolkit" for Nilai U students during his first tenure. "From close discussions with our industry partners, head hunters and prospective employers, the lack of soft skills such as the ability to communicate were among the main problems affecting fresh graduates," he says. "We thus sat down and addressed the problem by providing Nilai U students the unique opportunity to learn from experts such as Malaysia Golf School Dale Carnegie and Outward Bound. There is even a hugely popular Theatre and Acting module which was made possible when Dr Sohith roped in his old classmate, famed theatreman Marie Marami, to conduct lessons. He has plans to introduce more modules designed to make Nilai U graduates even more marketable. This is no mere marketing gimmick; we have seen tangible results with students gaining work placements in areas such as public speaking, corporate etiquette and career confidence. Our industry partners have given positive feedback on the demure and polished manner of Nilai U students who have been hired. We aim to do this even better and extend the same opportunities and services across all schools/units within the Nilai education group."

Prijor to joining Nilai U, Dr Sohith had served as Dean of the Faculty of Law at University Malaya and Regional Director for Consumer International. He holds a PhD in Social from the University of London as well as a LL.M from the University of Bristol. He has been named as president for both the ASEAN Law Schools Association and International Association for Consumer Law.

"I believe we have a duty not just to the stakeholders to turn a profit, but also to society at large to produce graduates who will not just be diligent workers but potential leaders who can make a positive impact on their respective communities."

Prof Dat’i Dr Sohith Rachagan
Nilai U Vice-Chancellor
"It wasn’t just my mother. But my aunts and grandma also got in the act when I told them I wanted to be a nurse," says Michelle Foh Ming Yee, a final year student in Nilai University’s BSc (Hons) in Nursing programme. "They warned me that this was a very difficult and stressful profession." The 22-year old who hails from Miri, Sarawak also says that having scored 10As in SPM, her folks had wanted her to apply to medical school or even consider accountancy. But the gregarious young lady had made up her mind that she really wanted to be at the frontline of healthcare. They finally relented when her exemplary results landed her a High Achiever Scholarship from Nilai University (Nilai U) which covers 100% of the tuition and accommodation fees.

"I wanted to be in an exciting profession where things are happening. I really did not want to be desk bound, which being an accountant would have entailed," explains Michelle. "As for being a doctor, I was keen to be involved in the healing of patients up close instead of visiting each patient for a few minutes each day. As a nurse, we are closely involved in the healing and recovery process of patients. Let me just say this, there is no better feeling in the world than when you help another human being recover."

Of course, the monetary incentive is also worth considering. Many students are already aware of the lucrative salaries being offered to experienced nurses abroad. Michelle is also quick to point out that in many countries which are popular emigration destinations, nurses are among the top ‘wanted’ professionals. "Being in a high demand profession does underline how important we are to healthcare. Nurses are indispensable. We are the life blood of any hospital and are the ones who ensure that everything is working smoothly," she says proudly.

As for an exciting career, her stints in various emergency rooms and ICUs during her internship has confirmed what she already knew all along. Nursing is a demanding profession but offers plenty of drama and excitement on a daily basis. "How many jobs out there truly deal with matters of life and death? I take great pride in that I am helping save someone’s life every time I go to work," she highlights.

With her ability to lift the morale of the patients in the hospital ward with her never ending smile and cheerful nature, Michelle’s bedside manner would seem a natural fit for the job. "Students who are considering applying to nursing must do so because they have a genuine desire to help the sick and the infirm. One cannot be motivated by money alone, as that would only lead to frustration and unhappiness," she states.

Michelle is keen to highlight the many benefits of applying to Nilai U’s nursing programmes (which include a diploma option). Firstly, she points out that Nilai U has some of the best teaching facilities for nursing. "We are lucky to be able to hone our skills on the human patient simulator, which is the state-of-the-art ‘living’ mannequin. Nursing students can practice CPR, administering medication and even their bedside manners with the mannequin. This is a very expensive piece of equipment that allows us to practice our skills in a controlled environment, something which cannot be done in real-life emergency scenarios," she explains.

Secondly, Michelle is quick to credit her lecturers whom she says are very experienced and are very keen to share their knowledge with the students. Thirdly, Nilai U is a multi-discipline institution which allows for a full ‘university’ experience unlike studying in a dedicated nursing college. To enable more students who aspire to take on the Nursing profession, now there is a further financial incentive as students can commence their nursing studies at Nilai U with just RM100 with free accommodation. All other fees such as registration and resource fees are waived, which allow for savings of up to 30%.

"What more can students ask for? I would advise all those who have the necessary grades to grab this opportunity and check out the nursing programmes at Nilai U. It is an affordable option that allows for a rewarding career as a healthcare professional," she says, while flashing that winsome smile.
Set to Soar

Sarawakian high achiever believes that hard work is essential if students are to succeed in aircraft maintenance engineering programme.

“Physics and maths! Those are two key subjects, students must excel in if they want to succeed in the aircraft maintenance engineering programme,” explains Benjamin Ting Shyr Shiuian. The 18-year old native of Sibu, Sarawak, is in his second semester of the Diploma in Aircraft Maintenance Engineering programme at Nilai University (Nilai U). Having had a taste of the syllabus of this extremely popular programme, the former student of SMK Methodist, Sibu is keen to stress to future applicants that they must be strong in two key areas - physics and mathematics. “To understand how a plane functions, students must possess an innate understanding of the laws of physics,” he counsels. “The lessons here also involve a large amount of calculations and students must be confident of their mathematical abilities, otherwise they are going to struggle to come to terms with the programme.”

He admits to having been fascinated with flying machines since young and it was a no-brainer for him when it came to choosing a suitable course post-SPM. Having scored 11As in SPM, Benjamin was offered the High Achiever scholarship at Nilai U, fully covering his tuition fees. While he may have scored As in both mathematics and physics in SPM, he is taking nothing for granted. He has approached his studies with the same meticulous care and discipline that allowed him to score those exemplary grades. “Actually, I think I may even be studying harder than before because it’s a totally different ballgame at university compared to secondary school. There is no spoon feeding and you are ultimately responsible for your grades, course work and exams,” he says. “I am learning to be more focused and even more disciplined than before. Being independent is not a luxury but a responsibility!”

At this early stage of the programme, Benjamin singles out Basic Aerodynamics as his favourite subject as “it teaches you the fundamental principles of flight”. He, however, finds Electrical and Electronics components slightly challenging. “An airplane’s circuitry and wiring systems can be a bit daunting, as you can imagine, and the lessons can be a bit complicated. But I am enjoying it nonetheless, I just need to revise a little bit harder to get up to speed.” Given his academic credentials, Benjamin is well placed to share some study tips. “Always focus during lessons and write your own notes. Daily revision of the lessons will help you remember them,” he advises.

Benjamin also says that it is imperative that students wanting to study this programme have a strong grasp of the English language as the syllabus is taught entirely in the language. “Students need not worry too much as they will get used to it. If foreign students from countries that hardly speak English can cope with the syllabus, there is no reason why Malaysian students cannot adapt,” he says. “I cannot over emphasise the importance of English as students will also be sitting for the external EASA exams.” He is referring to the European Aviation Safety Agency B1-1 examination which is the starting point towards becoming a fully-licensed aircraft maintenance engineer. “This is the key qualification in this field and the reason why Nilai U graduates from this programme are highly sought after,” he explains.

His long-term plans include gaining a BSc (Hons) in Aircraft Engineering from Kingston University, UK by completing the one-year top-up programme at Nilai U. “In this day and age, I believe a degree is a minimum requirement if you want to succeed in today’s ultra-competitive employment market,” he says. Judging from his outstanding academic record, it would be no surprise if Benjamin completes his higher education with sterling results.

Students in Nilai U’s Diploma in Aircraft Maintenance Engineering programme will also undergo a six-month On-The-Job-Training stint with one of Nilai U’s industry partners (which include AirAsia, AirAsia X and Berjaya Air).
Spreading Indian Culture
Nilai U Indian Cultural Society with a whole host of events and activities.

Nilai University’s Indian Cultural Society (ICS) is one of the most active societies on campus. Regularly organising events highlighting various aspects of Indian culture and traditions, the ICS committee leads the way in the development of soft skills of students, which are important in today’s job market. The ICS has already, this year alone organised three major events. First was the internal Kabaddi tournament which was aimed at promoting this traditional Indian sport among today’s youth and also to encourage a healthy lifestyle. Second was the Ponggal festival which was celebrated in the shape of an inter-departmental contest for the cooking of the “sweet rice” and milk pot designs. Last but not least, was the Shiksaana camp where Nilai University students acted as mentors to scores of secondary school students, encouraging them to fulfil their potential and to stay true to their moral compass.

The competition was intense in the Kollam-making contest.

Ilai U’s ICS acted as mentors to secondary school students at Shiksaana camp.

ICS is instrumental in highlighting and celebrating the diverse nature of the campus’s cosmopolitan population.

Visiting Danish students try their hand at the traditional boiling of the milk pot as part of the Ponggal festivities.

The ICS plays a big role in encouraging traditional arts and culture among Nilai U staff and students.
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“I am very proud to be hired by one of the top corporations in the world. It would not have been possible without the help from my Nilai U lecturers who shared their own experiences of the corporate sector with students. Their help and advice certainly helped me prepare for life in the corporate world.”

Yee Yin Sinn
Nilai U Valedictorian for the Class of 2014 and currently employed in a blue chip IT company.

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Published by Corporate Communication Department of Nilai University.