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09 THINKING STRATEGICALLY FOR THE FUTURE

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USM received a total of close to 30,000 applications for full time undergraduate, distance and postgraduate studies this year. We could only accept 4378 students for the full time, undergraduate programmes this 2015/2016 academic session, of which 100 medical students are at the KLE Belgaum India campus, and 115 are pursuing Diploma in Nursing at the USM Health Campus in Kelantan.

Of this total, 2968 students have registered at the Main Campus in Penang, 673 have registered at the Engineering Campus in Nibong Tebal, Penang and 737 are registered at the Kubang Kerian, Kelantan Health Campus. An additional 334 students have been accepted under a special bottom billion category determined by socio-economic criteria – a substantial increase compared to three years ago. USM has also accepted 54 students as pioneers of its 3-year Bachelor of Science (Hons.) (Housing, Building and Planning) (Architecture) off-shore programme conducted at Polytechnic Port Dickson (USM-PPD), Negeri Sembilan.

Congratulations to the USM freshies. I hope that you students will transform yourselves in these 4 or 5 years to achieve the aspirations of the university, society and the nation in becoming useful citizens and leaders of tomorrow who are able to drive excellence in all areas of national development.

This university has all the facilities and mechanisms for you to achieve such aspirations, however it is up to you to get the best out of what we have to offer, as your future lies in your own wisdom and ability to take full advantage of your time here, not only to become good followers but also to develop your full potential to be the best and compete on a global platform.

We should not be content to merely perform well at state or national level; we should look further afield to the world outside as the true test of our strength and ability whilst holding on to universal values of respect for all cultures, countries and diversity.

Now is the time to change, and use strategic thinking to overcome political and economic challenges in today's uncertain world which requires resilience in the face of such challenges.

A researcher from one of the world's leading universities had this to say about the importance of adapting one's strategy in facing the future: "...it is time for a change. Time to approach strategy in a different way and time to transform the process from a mechanical, analytical activity to something deeper, more meaningful, and far more rewarding for a leader." (Cynthia A. Montgomery, 2012. *The Strategist: Be a Leader Your Business Needs*. London: Harper Collins Publishers)

Strategic thinking and such strength of thought will ensure that we – whether as individuals or as an organisation – remain competitive and achieve success in the long run. Our success today is the result of such thinking, especially among our academics who strived to translate ideas and idealism into continuous action. A good example is our effort to remap the history of civilisation based upon archaeological findings in the Bujang Valley which indicate that we possessed a sophisticated pre-historic civilisation and this is supported by the discovery of remnants of ancient ships in the archaeological site. We are currently sharing our expertise not only locally but also globally.

Similarly, we strive to develop continuous collaboration with various institutions from around the world such as Japan, France, Pakistan and the United States. We are presently developing talent strength and capacity in Ageing Sciences with the world expert Nobel Laureate from Riken Institute, Japan; in weather surveillance, collaboration with Columbia University will enable us to detect early warning signs of impending weather-related disaster through our Centre for Global Sustainable Studies and even in the area of nanotechnology, our Institute of Nano Optoelectronics Research and Technology (INOR) is collaborating with the Nobel Laureate from the University of California Santa Barbara to develop technology for the future. These are just some examples out of many successful innovations that have arisen from the culture of knowledge development that takes place in USM.

All this is enabled by thinking strategically for the future and of course none of it was achieved in isolation. Strategic thinking that is strengthened through networking and co-operation has to be continuously developed. You need to be part of this networking and co-operation, especially as USM is striving to empower its student talent to be more self-directed and independent, as can be seen through the Student Council, NRIC, Convex and not forgetting the various Entrepreneurial and Artistic programmes carried out in the campus. Such empowerment is carried out based on the principle of trust so that you will appreciate the freedom and autonomy given to you. Of course, freedom and autonomy is given in tandem with accountability, and is not absolute freedom which is a utopian ideal far removed from reality.

USM offers many opportunities for nurturing talent. We have special funds to assist in research, and also programmes such as APEX Scholar which affords the opportunity to explore your potential to the global level, *Pimpin Siswa* which develops your personal strengths and many other similar programmes.

The question remains as to how you as students can develop strategic thinking for a successful future, and develop your talent/capacity to become future leaders. Whether you will observe the process of knowledge generation and development from the attitude, interest and passion of the

lecturers and researchers, and emulate and idolize them as an important part of the available networking and strategic linkages to be continuously developed.

As an APEX and world class university, many of our lecturers are leaders in global academic organisations, indicating that their expertise is recognised, acknowledged and shared, and that they are sought after as strategic partners and in fact our scientists and thinkers are among the best in the world.

During the Malaysia's Rising Stars Awards ceremony held in Langkawi on 3rd September organised by the Higher Education Department (JPT) through the Malaysian Citations Centre (PSM) with the cooperation of Thomson Reuters (TR) – to acknowledge and promote Malaysian researchers and scientists who have frequently cited scholarly journal articles which are indexed in the international Web of Science database, seven of the 14 recipients for the award winners were from USM.

So how can our youth participate and contribute to the various efforts including among the ASEAN or even the global community? USM has successfully brought together strategic partners from various nations through the Asia-Pacific University-Community Engagement Network (APUCEN) which is currently assisting the victims of the Nepal earthquakes. Not forgetting, we were also at the forefront, volunteering aid and assistance to the victims of the floods that occurred at the end of last year.

All USM students need to play a role to ensure that they are able to think strategically in developing their own talent capacity for the future. Do not waste your time in useless pursuits that will only create problems for yourselves and others; on the contrary, try to make meaningful use of the love and opportunities available to attain excellence and success, and resilience to face future challenges and competition. The university offers many opportunities and avenues for success, it is up to you to decide how far you will take advantage of these opportunities and avenues.

Let us be united in heart and soul in developing a glorious and commendable future for ourselves, the university and the nation by mastering knowledge to ensure that our lives today are much better than they were yesterday. Idealism is important in the pursuit of knowledge; however the right attitude and realistic actions are far more important to ensure success. Let us all become one big family that preserves the good name of our Tower of Knowledge.

* Adapted from the Vice-Chancellor's address during the Majlis Sambutan Siswa Lestari 2015-2016 at the Dewan Tuanku Syed Putra on 2 September 2015.

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