

Get ready for university

EASING IN: Making the transition from school to tertiary institution

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AFTER striving hard in secondary school, successful applicants to universities will soon enter the next chapter of their lives.

Attending university marks a milestone — one is no longer considered a schoolboy or girl, but a young adult in pursuit of a future that will be realised through a process of knowledge acquisition of the academic and non-academic.

University differs from school in many ways and it is up to the individual to make the transition a smooth one. It helps for first-year students to know what lies ahead.

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia deputy vice chancellor (students and alumni affairs) Professor Datuk Noor Aziah Mohd Awal said undergraduates have more freedom to do things on their own, there are fewer rules at university and students are expected to make their own daily schedule as well as keep up with academic work. Some also face the challenge of living in hostels that involves the sharing of common facilities and tolerating certain behaviours.

Noor Aziah listed communication skills, teamwork, time management and tolerance of other cultures and religions as key skills in order to thrive on campus.

"University is where we polish students in all areas — not only in academics but also leadership, volunteerism and sports. Students who open their hearts to new things will find it enjoyable. At university, we not only motivate to produce products or solve problems but also nurture leaders. Students must grab the opportunities to excel and achieve their dreams and, in order to do so, they must open their minds to learn and make mistakes while moving forward and flying higher and higher," she added.

To the list of traits, Universiti Teknologi MARA director of students' development Dr Mohd Bahrin Othman added self-confidence and being able to take risks as well as having professional ethics and moral values.

"University students should enjoy co-curricular and extra-curricular activities on campus. Problems arise when they fail to adapt to the new environment, resulting in them feeling the pressure and becoming stressed with campus life.

"Be motivated to try something new. Acquire knowledge not only in class but also through everyday life. Students should always be as smart in class as on the street," he said.



Noor Aziah Mohd Awal



Yeong Siew Wei

Sunway University vice chancellor Professor Graeme Wilkieson said to ease into campus life, it is important for students to make full use of the orientation period.

"All our students attend an orientation programme where they are briefed on campus life and how to manage themselves, as well as the differences between school and university. We provide tools to manage time and hold talks on financial planning.

"We have taken steps to create a strong sense of community in our student residences and will be offering more social activities there."

COPING WITH STUDIES

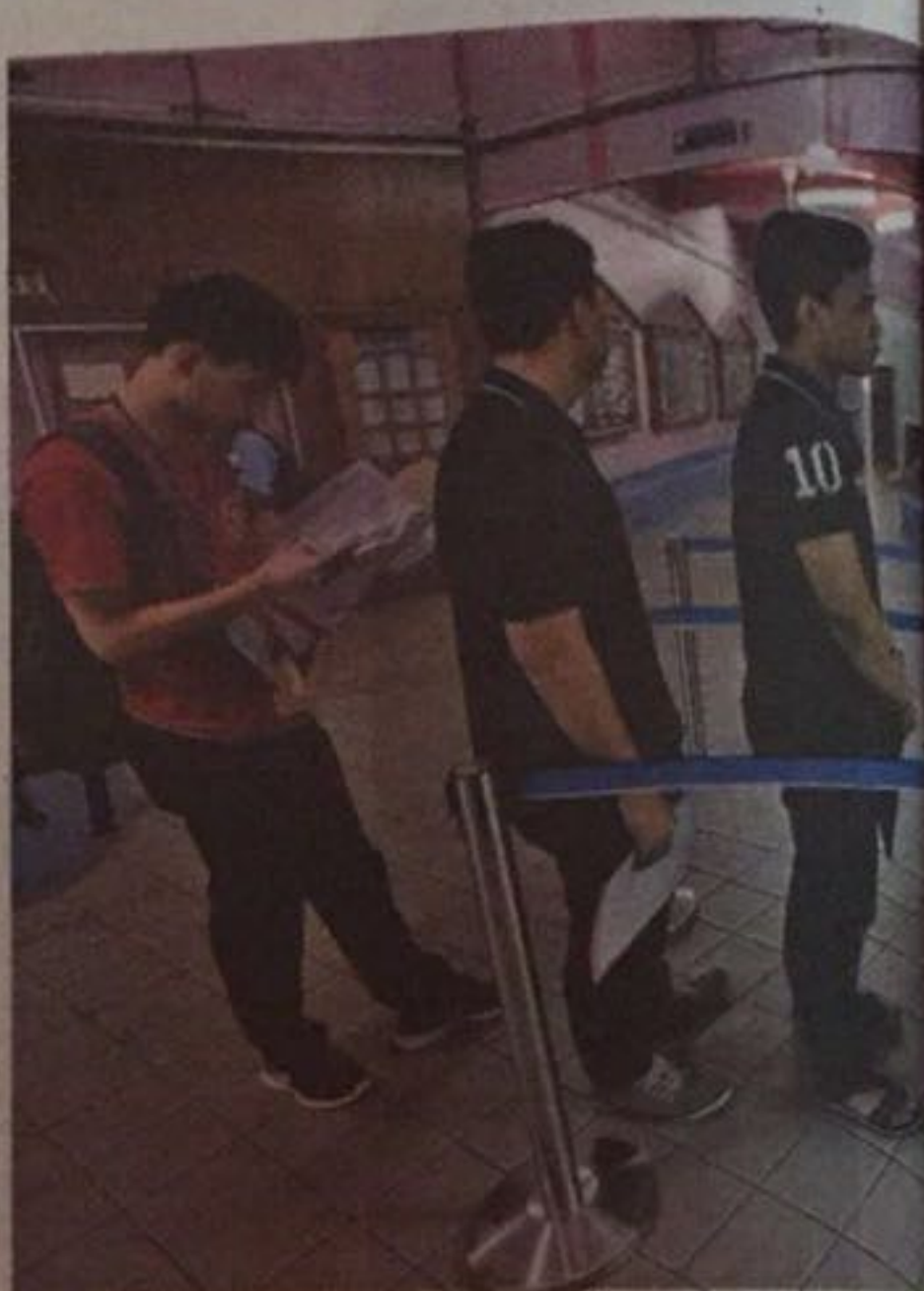
Some students, who did not do well in secondary school, blossom at university. But others, who excelled in school, founder at university.

This is because the academic demands at each institution are different, said HELP University vice president and Faculty of Behavioural Science dean Dr Goh Chee Leong.

"A key difference is that undergraduates need to take charge of their academic work.

"Secondary students are spoon-fed by tuition teachers. Workbooks and guidebooks help them prepare for examinations. At university, all these support systems are taken away. Students need to figure out a lot of things for themselves," he added.

"For example, at university, students have to find the knowledge they need for exams and assignments



First-year undergraduates collecting keys to their hostel rooms.



Registration day at university marks a new chapter in life.

from books, academic journals and the Internet while discerning whether these sources are reliable.

"They have to understand complex theories and ideas, and then analyse and apply this knowledge to case studies and real-life problems."

There needs to be change of mindset too. "In school, the focus is on preparing for exams. In university, students should be focused on preparing for a career. The approach is more long-term. It's about acquiring the skills and knowledge to succeed in their chosen profession."

Be prepared for more higher order thinking which includes analysing, synthesising and applying the knowledge gained.

Students need to take charge of their own academic progress at university. "Most students know how

to plan a schedule. The challenge is developing the self-discipline to keep to it."

SELF-MANAGEMENT

Living away from home means that students must become more independent. If not well-managed, it can cause stress and affect academic performance.

To cope with this, UCSJ University senior counsellor Megala Chandira Sakaran offered a few tips.

"Students should build social connections at the university from the start while keeping in contact with family and friends from home. Always maintain a good relationship with coursemates and lecturers," said Megala.

Make a conscious effort to break out of comfort zones as well as devel-



Briefing for students during orientation week.

op a positive mindset when faced with challenges.

"Keep in mind the resources available on campus such as shuttle buses and facilities like laundry rooms and clinics as these will make the transition away from home easier.

"If you need help, don't be shy to ask friends, lecturers, seniors and the staff. Students should develop confidence and focus on personal growth, and do not compare themselves with others."

UCSJ University deputy vice chancellor (student affairs and alumni) Associate Professor Dr Yeong Siew Wei said students should set priorities and prepare a to-do list.

"Stop procrastinating and don't wait until the last minute. Students must also take a step back sometimes and try to find out the reason why

they are procrastinating — are they afraid of the work?"

"Break down a task into smaller parts so that it is not so intimidating and then complete each section," said Yeong.

"Recognise time wasters such as the handphone, Facebook and WhatsApp. Switch them off or avoid them. Do not be distracted from studies."

Yeong also highlighted the importance of managing finances.

"Differentiate between needs and wants. Don't try to keep up with the Joneses. Set a budget and plan expenses."

This article is the first of a four-part weekly series which includes topics such as preparing for university, study skills and extracurricular activities on campus.



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