

Multi-disciplinary degree to prepare for working world

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THE demands on graduates entering the working world are different today.

Other than recruiting those with deep and specialised knowledge, employers are also on the lookout for employees who can hit the ground running, solve problems on the fly and multi-task. They want those who are versatile, resilient and eloquent, have multi-disciplinary knowledge, and the list goes on.

And these are the traits that Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) aims to mould in its undergraduates.

The university's newly-unveiled Bachelor of Science in Liberal Studies (BSLS), which will commence this September (the first semester of the 2018/2019 academic year), has what UKM terms as a future-focused curriculum — one that is cross-disciplinary with flexible study structure.

Conducted by its Pusat Citra Universiti, the degree exposes students to solid multi-disciplinary lessons in humanities, natural sciences, social sciences and the arts, subsequently allowing them to pursue diverse careers ranging from manufacturing, tourism, human resource, finance and takaful; all the way to logistics, communications and public service.

UKM Vice-Chancellor Professor Tan Sri Dr Noor Azlan Ghazali outlines the uniqueness of the BSLS programme.

"The norm is when a student enrolls in a degree course, he will go straight into a specific field of study. The four-year BSLS programme has a different approach.

"You tell us what you want to be, and we will guide you to your goal.

That means our role is more focused on helping students realise their dreams.

"In this programme, we no longer have too-rigid borders, but can craft a degree that cuts across faculties," said Noor Azlan.

To illustrate this, he gives the following example: "Say a student wants to enter the halal food industry, there is the halal, food science and marketing components to study. He can pursue all three components in one degree programme. The faculties teaching the components will sit down with the student to enable him to complete that degree."

The BSLS is born out of Pusat Citra Universiti's general studies programme.

It is in line with the Higher Education Ministry's recommendation for UKM to incorporate liberal studies and multi-disciplinary education in its programmes.

The university management had set up a task force to carry out research and workshops in 2012, roping in multinational companies, small-and medium-scale enterprises, government agencies, non-government organisations, students and lecturers for feedback.



Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia freshmen taking their oath during orientation week. Today's market demands require graduates to have a solid multi-disciplinary preparation.

Among the areas of discussion was the main attributes that every student should have.

As a result, the university came up with four compulsory courses for — Basic entrepreneurship and innovation, Islamic and Asian civilisation, Ethnic relations and soft skills — which they must pass.

There are also Citra Education courses under six domains, which students from all faculties can choose to take.

The six domains are ethics, citizenship & civilisation; language, communication & literacy; quantitative and qualitative; leadership, entrepreneurship & innovation; science, technology and sustainability; and, family, health and lifestyle.

"For other degrees, students have been taking these courses as components of their programme in the last four years.

"But this year, the courses are to be taken as part of a degree programme for students enrolled in BSLS.

"It is a 'buffet' programme. You enter into a guided 'buffet', where you decide on the courses you want to take, and we come and coach you," said Noor Azlan.

The BSLS is a "2u2i" (two years university and two years industry) programme that takes four years to complete. Each student will be guided by an academic adviser.

The first year is focused on completing 30 credits of compulsory courses, which include data analysis and management, as well as the Pusat Citra Universiti courses, said centre director Professor Dr Khaidzir Ismail.

For the second year, students will focus on an area of specialisation that fits their personal and career goals.

"Students will undergo a psychometric test



Noor Azlan Ghazali



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KHAIDZIR ISMAIL
UKM Pusat Citra
Universiti director

before choosing a major, and will be assigned a mentor. We have chief executive officers coming over to give talks to provide students exposure on various businesses and industries," Khaidzir said, adding that Pusat Citra Universiti will be coordinating the logistics and scheduling with faculties.

During the third year, students will undergo community or industry-based training.

"There will be several industrial stints to expose students to working life in companies or communities," said Khaidzir.

In the final year, students will undertake an industry-based project, community-based report or produce a thesis.

Khaidzir said five per cent of the BSLS programme involves exams, presentations, pitching and competitions.

Twenty-five per cent is face-to-face learning and the main component of 70 per cent is self-study through independent projects, field studies, laboratory learning, e-learning, problem-based learning and experiential learning.

Noor Azlan said the entry requirement is very flexible.

"You can enrol with any of the following qualifications: Sijil Tinggi Persekolahan Malaysia, matriculation or a diploma. We are also opening this programme to international students," he said, adding that there are 100 seats available.

He believes universities have to change the way they conduct their degree programmes to suit market demand.

"I see this as the shape of degree programmes in the future. There will not be anymore teaching of courses and knowledge that are narrow.

"As for the first batch of BSLS students, we will look after each one like a newborn and guide them," he said.