

COVER STORY

Be a volunteer

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THIS year's Higher Education Ministry agenda, Redesigning Higher Education, once again stressed on the importance of volunteerism among undergraduates at the university or college-level.

In delivering Amanat 2017, Higher Education Minister Datuk Seri Idris Jusoh said volunteerism is gaining popularity among undergraduates, who take part in programmes under Yayasan Sukarelawan Siswa (YSS) and Majlis Sukarelawan Universiti Malaysia (Maskum).

Last year, 220 students and leaders participated in the foundation's high-impact missions in Sabah, Sarawak, Asean and, for the first time, in Europe.

The foundation was established to create Icon Global Volunteer Student Leaders who are holistic in meeting global challenges. Students from institutions of higher learning in the country take part in its Student Volunteers movement which includes courses such as the Volunteer Leadership Development Programme; Green Summer Volunteer Campaign in Vietnam; Student Volunteer Mission to Ban Na in Thailand and Savanakheth in Laos, and Student Volunteer Mission at Malaysian-run initiative Kitchen at Calais to help refugees stranded between the borders of the United Kingdom and France.

The ministry also recognises Maskum's efforts to inculcate the spirit of volunteerism at national and international levels, especially in Asean. As of last year, 117,823 volunteers have participated in its programmes.

Idris said the involvement of undergraduates in volunteer activities can provide an ideal balance between academic achievements and the fostering of good values, positive behaviour, as well as developing skills such as leadership, communication and social interaction.

This is also in line with the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2015-2025 (Higher Education) which aims to produce holistic, entrepreneurial and balanced graduates through experiential learning.

To further instil the spirit of volunteerism into undergraduates, the ministry will implement a Gap Year programme at eight public universities to give undergraduates the opportunity to volunteer at government agencies.

The participating universities are Universiti Utara Malaysia, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Universiti Putra Malaysia, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia and Universiti Malaysia Sabah.

"The gap year allows university students to develop a holistic skill set, as they spend the year doing volunteer work or equipping themselves with entrepreneurship skills," added Idris.



Rokiah Omar

BALANCING APPROACH AND STRATEGIES

The participation of undergraduates in volunteer activities is necessary in building human capital which is balanced and comprehensive in every aspect.

Appropriate approach and strategies can help to attract more students, especially undergraduates, to engage in volunteerism.

University of Malaya (UM) Off-campus Student Management and Volunteerism Unit head S. Ramlee Shamsuddin said the culture of volunteerism on campus has existed since the establishment of the tertiary institution.

However, it was not placed under a unit —



We hope that volunteer activities can break down the wall of racism and attract more participation from various communities.

S. RAMLEE SHAMSUDDIN,
UM Off-campus Student Management and Volunteerism Unit head



Ian Hannibal Liang
Daniel Liang

"We hope that volunteer activities can break down the wall of racism and attract more participation from various communities. This unit will organise a humanitarian programme to Cambodia in April and three Chinese students will take part in this mission. During the flood relief mission in 2014, we attracted students of various races and also international students."

At the start of a new academic year, representatives from the unit tell fresh undergraduates the importance of volunteerism during Orientation Week.

"Volunteerism is a healthy lifestyle activity. We want students to take part in volunteer activities from the first year. This will boost morale, self-esteem and communication skills as they interact with various parties."



Volunteers from UM stacking donation items for the flood mission in the East Coast early this year.

residential colleges and student associations organised volunteer activities in the form of charity and social welfare programmes.

But in 2011, when Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak launched the iM4U programme, the culture of volunteerism became more organised at public universities, especially those with an iM4U Outreach Centre.

In UM, the Volunteers Unit is placed under the Division of Student Affairs to align activities under one roof.

"We have organised programmes to provide training for students to interest them in volunteerism. In addition to producing holistic and well-balanced students, we want them to be project leaders and give back to society."

The unit organises basic volunteer courses twice a year. It's a three-day off campus course which combines theoretical and practical aspects of volunteerism.

This unit, established in 2011, also works with Maksum, YSS, UM Volunteers Secretariat as well as non-governmental organisations and various agencies.



YSS Student Volunteers (in red T-shirts) with Malaysia Teesside University, Middlesborough, United Kingdom

MALAYSIAN UNIVERSITIES VOLUNTEERS COUNCIL

Year	Number of activities	Volunteers Involved
2013	550	94,390
2014	615	99,005
2015	705	99,850
2016	865	117,823

Source: Ministry of Higher Education