

## Where leaders are made

**Datuk Dr Noor Hisham Abdullah**  
Health director-general  
Doctor of Medicine, 1986  
Masters of Surgery, 1994

ALSO an alumnus of UKM is the man leading the country's fight against Covid-19 and the one Malaysians are tuning to every day for updates, health director-general Datuk Dr Noor Hisham Abdullah.

Dr Noor Hisham, who has been director-general of Health since March 2013, is also currently the senior consultant surgeon in Breast, Endocrine and General Surgery at Hospital Putrajaya.

He began his career as a house officer at Hospital Kuala Lumpur in 1988 upon graduating. After obtaining his Master of Surgery in 1994, Dr Noor Hisham became a general surgeon at the Hospital Kuala Terengganu. He went on to specialise in endocrine surgery and trained at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital at the University of Adelaide in Australia and the Royal North Shore Hospital in Sydney in 1997.

In 1998, Dr Noor Hisham became the head of breast endocrine surgery at HIKL and in 2002, he moved to Hospital Putrajaya to become the head and senior consultant breast and endocrine surgeon there. In 2008, he was appointed Deputy Director-General of Health (Medical) until 2013 when he became the Director General.



Liew first cut his political teeth as a student leader in UKM.

## Days of activism

**Datuk Seri Liew Tiong Lai**  
Transport Minister (2014-2018)  
Health Minister (2008-2013)  
Bachelor of Science (Nutrition), 1986

My student days in UKM were memorable ones. I had developed an interest in politics and the campus environment gave me the opportunity to be involved in student activism.

Although Chinese students were a minority in UKM, we organised ourselves and made ourselves strategic, and that became the deciding factor in the student elections. Through the Chinese Consultative Council, a body representing the Chinese students, we became very influential on campus.

We fought for better canteen food including halal Chinese food, better library facilities, availability of books and newspapers in more languages including Chinese and even held the Moon Cake festival, or Pesta Tanghulu, at the main Dewan Tun Abdul Razak Hall for the first time.

It was a good training ground for me in developing bargaining skills and appreciating moderation and consensus building.

UKM has a big campus and it was almost impossible to move around without your own transportation. I had a red Yamaha which made it easier for me to move around campus and to Kajang.

I was given the Remedial Science faculty although I had applied to do medicine in UKM. Science there were very intense and I had to work hard.

In later years, many of my UKM friends lamented me, saying I did not become a doctor but became the Health Minister.

I remembered staying at Kalamun house, Kamisa 1, a dilapidated house, which was surrounded with rats in the morning. It was on the bridge of a hill and very stinky.

UKM allowed us to know more about different races. It made me understand and appreciate the different cultures better.

We literally practised how to play and sleep together.

Most of us came from outside Selangor and UKM provided us opportunities and help.

UKM is also very special to me because I met my future wife, Liew Lay Ann, on campus. She was a chemical engineering student. We met during our study time in Japan under the government's Jalink and Jalink Plus.



Dr Noor Hisham (second from right) at his convocation in 1988.

## Aim high, work hard

**Datuk Seri Dr Sabin Samitah**  
Chief Executive Officer/Director General, Inland Revenue Board  
Bachelor of Science (Geology), 1983

All a young lad coming from a rural area in Sabah, I was very happy entering UKM, Hospital for better access to education, to improve myself and contribute to the community when the time comes. I had big dreams of better opportunities to improve myself and to prove that my background will not hinder me from being successful in the future.

I was a very social and

active student. I was a student representative and active in the Student Council and represented my faculty in football.

One of my best moments in UKM was meeting with then Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Student Affairs) Tan Sri Dr Mohamed Yusoff Mohamed Noor as my faculty's student representative to voice out our grievances on the lack of facilities on campus and issues surrounding the welfare of students. I believe the meeting was a rare opportunity and helped shape my leadership as well as communication skills.

UKM taught me many lessons on life and dealing with challenges head-on. It taught me that nothing substitutes hard work, and with the right attitude, passion and determination, we can achieve far beyond what we envisioned. The leadership skills I gained in UKM has been beneficial in helping me steer the Inland Revenue Board today.

Keep inspiring future generations, nurturing potentialities, which is UKM's motto. Always remember, it is not how you started, but what matters is how you end.

Keep going your best and you become the best. Happy 50th Anniversary UKM!



Sabin entered UKM with dreams of working towards a better future.

# The best of times

Proud UKM alumni reflect on how their varsity experience shaped their characters and careers.

**Datuk Seri Wong Chun Wai**  
Group Advisor, Star Media Group  
Bachelor of Arts, 1984

THOSE seeking to pursue their tertiary education in the 1980s would tell you just how competitive it was, because there were only five public universities in Malaysia then. For non-Malays, with the affirmative action policies in place, it was even more difficult to get a place. And private universities were the stuff of fantasies.

In 1980, I had just completed my Higher School Certificate (now Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia) and began working at The Star in Penang. Six months into the job, I received an offer to study at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM).

When I attempted to locate UKM, I couldn't pinpoint Bangi, Selangor, home to the main campus.

UKM was born from the aspirations of Malay nationalists to uphold Bahasa Malaysia as the language of knowledge and instruction.

The student population was predominantly Malay, with Islamic Studies a compulsory course for every student. UKM was a whole new experience for me in many ways but I wasn't apprehensive at this new environment. I was prepared in some ways, as I had studied Malay Literature and Islamic History in my Sixth Form. I enjoyed it, which surprised many non-Malays.

Although I was the last batch of HSC students schooled in English, I could write essays and do my academic work in BM, and even take part

actively in debates and seminars. We received marks for speaking up.

But I had to make some adjustments. On my first day at Kamisa E hostel, once renamed, Kolej Aminudin Baki, I walked into the canteen to buy a drink - like other beach boys in Penang - only to be politely told that there was a dress code on campus.

But I settled well in UKM. The National University of Malaysia spent my mind and eyes, in many ways. The selection of instruction at UKM was not although reference books were in English.

I've lost track of the notes in the freezing Tun Sri Lanang Library, which is one of the largest in Malaysia.

In my pursuit of knowledge, I met and studied under many distinguished Malaysian top scholars, including the late Fadzil Noor, Dr Harun bin Dr Jeno Juswan Juswan, Nuzaimi Latiff, Prof Dr Siti Zaharah Ismail, Dr I. Ramasamy, Kamruddin Isahak, Dr Harold Cross, Dr Heng Pak Seng and Dr Graham Scott.

But UKM wasn't merely about getting a degree. It was about forging friendships, too. Many friends of UKM have become distinguished members of the workforce. Datin Seri Law Teng Kai was a Transport Minister. Datuk Seri Dr Mohamed Mustafa Ibrahim was Director-General of the Higher Education Ministry and then's senior lawyer Datuk Seri Jababero.



Wong in his room at the Kamisa E hostel.

Mohamed Yusoff, who is now my fellow moderation advocate and a columnist with The Star.

With politics always present in campus, it was not just the students who were influential. Sociology professor, Dr Ting Choo-Peh joined the MCA and eventually became an MP and minister.

At the office, our unofficial UKM club comprises chief content officer aka editor-in-chief, Esther Ng, sports editor Rajes Paul, Metro desk news editor VP Sujata and Scribble business chief Sarban Singh.

Though deserving, there are simply too many alumni names to list here, especially those in my New UKM 80s club group. But you know who you are, and the things we did in UKM together, the memorable ones and the ones we choose to forget.

Studying in UKM has been a privilege and honour for me. Happy 50th Birthday UKM!

For more alumni stories, turn to Page 10 and go to [thestar.com.my](http://thestar.com.my)



## Headstart in journalism

**Esther Ng**  
Chief Content Officer, Star Media Group  
Bachelor of Arts (Hons), 1992

WHEN I was offered a place as an undergrad in UKM, I was ecstatic!

It was the late 1980s, I was 20 and getting a place at a public university was a big deal. There were all of five institutions to vie for and almost no private universities to fall back on.

We studied hard for STPM for that lean chance of making it to university.

Although UKM was just a 50-minute drive from my parents' home, I saw it for the first time on Registration Day.

My university stood proudly in the middle of sparse land, surrounded by jungle. It brought me right back to Earth. Orientation Week was another eye-opener. There were so many rules, including a strict dress code that I found repressive but had to comply to. Thankfully, this was lifted after Orientation.

In UKM, I made friends, and lifelong ones I will keep in touch with. We were of all races and from all over Malaysia. I did Anthropology and Sociology and Political

Science (which UKM is renowned for) and Communications.

My course mates VP Sujata and Sarban Singh (now my good friends and colleagues) will attest to the privilege of being taught Political Philosophy by the famous Dr Harid Cross, who was our Political Science dean.

It was priceless studying International Relations when Berlin Wall fell in 1990-1991. We studied the event as it unfolded.

Like it or not, we learnt to speak up during tutorials and present papers on political subjects.

Yet, we never forgot to have fun, such as hiking at the notoriously "haunted" UKM Ferngarden one weekend though there were no paranormal encounters.

My honour's year was the most memorable and also the busiest.

Being Journalism undergrads, we produced our varsity paper, Nadi Bangi. I was Editor-in-Chief of the fourth edition of the paper in our final year, an experience I hold dear. We also spent four months working as journalists in a media company as part of our practical training.

So you can say it was at UKM where I began my career as a journalist.

Looking back, it was not love at first sight but I left an enormous piece of my heart in my alma mater. Happy 50th, UKM.



Ng (right) and Sujata visited UKM's campus.