

Strategic SWOT Analysis for Advancing PG Student Society in Universiti Teknologi Malaysia Session
2023/2024

*(Strategik Analisis SWOT Bagi Menambah Baik Persatuan Pelajar Pascasiswazah di Universiti
Teknologi Malaysia Sesi 2023/2024)*

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ABSTRACT

The Postgraduate Student Society (PGSS) plays a significant role in representing postgraduate (PG) students in Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM). However, there is a need to advance PGSS to another level to improve the overall working system in PGSS. Hence, SWOT analysis is a great tool to identify noteworthy current conditions of PGSS. Results show that diverse team, strong support from faculty and the university, and well-organized training programs are the key strength points. Weaknesses involve stress and mental health issues, poor time management, and weak leadership with no succession plan. Opportunities lie in connections with other PG students, while threats include financial constraints and complex program applications. To address the weaknesses and threats identified, potential solutions include providing mental health support services, physical wellness programs, time management workshops, and leadership training. Additionally, external threats like financial constraints can be mitigated by applying for external funds and industry collaboration, while improving marketing strategies can enhance student engagement. Overall, PGSS UTM would need to maintain and preserve the existing qualities while addressing the concerning issues.

Keywords: SWOT analysis; PG students; Student society; Leadership

ABSTRAK

Persatuan Pelajar Pascasiswazah (PGSS) memainkan peranan penting dalam mewakili pelajar pascasiswazah di Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM). Walau bagaimanapun, terdapat keperluan untuk memajukan PGSS ke tahap yang lebih tinggi untuk memperbaiki sistem kerja dalam PGSS. Oleh itu, analisis SWOT adalah alat yang baik untuk mengenal pasti keadaan terkini PGSS. Hasilnya menunjukkan bahawa dengan pasukan yang pelbagai, sokongan kuat dari fakulti dan universiti, serta program latihan yang teratur adalah kekuatan utama. Kelemahan termasuk masalah tekanan dan kesihatan mental, pengurusan masa, dan kepimpinan yang lemah tanpa pelan penggantian. Peluang terletak pada hubungan dengan pelajar pascasiswazah lain, manakala ancaman termasuk kekangan kewangan dan permohonan program yang kompleks. Untuk menangani kelemahan dan ancaman yang dikenal pasti, penyelesaian yang berpotensi termasuk menyediakan perkhidmatan sokongan kesihatan mental, program kesihatan fizikal, bengkel pengurusan masa, dan latihan kepimpinan. Selain itu, ancaman luaran seperti kekangan kewangan boleh diatasi dengan memohon dana luaran dan kerjasama industri, manakala peningkatan strategi pemasaran dapat meningkatkan penglibatan pelajar. Secara keseluruhan, PGSS UTM perlu mengekalkan dan memelihara kualiti yang sedia ada sambil menangani isu-isu yang membimbangkan.

Kata kunci: SWOT analisis; Pelajar pascasiswazah; Persatuan pelajar; Kepimpinan

INTRODUCTION

The postgraduate (PG) students in Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) are represented by the Postgraduate Student Society (PGSS), which was established in 2012 that consists of UTM and faculty's level monitored under the School of Graduate Studies (SPS), UTM. The main objectives of establishing PGSS are to foster human capital, networking, support and resources among PG students. The committee members of PGSS are selected through a voting system by PG students in each faculty and generally serve a one-year term, after which an Annual General Meeting (AGM) is held. PGSS would need to organize various programs to enrich the PG community in UTM. Overall, PGSS UTM excels with the organization of these programs, which proves the capability of PG students under the PGSS. However, there is a need to advance PGSS to another step that can improve the overall working system in PGSS. To achieve this goal, the Strengths (S), Weaknesses (W), Opportunities (O) and Threats (T) analysis can be employed to address the concern. SWOT analysis can give a quick insight into the overview of performance, decision-making and feasibility study (Mohd Mokhtar et al., 2022). For instance, Mahfodz (2023) conducted an in-depth SWOT analysis via surveying university's student leaders to formulate the successful strategy. However, from the best of our knowledge, few studies on SWOT analysis have been conducted to evaluate the PG student society. In this study, several current members of PGSS conducted the SWOT analysis and way forward for the first time to improve PGSS and provide examples to other student societies as guidelines.

OBJECTIVE

- i. The objectives of this study are as follows:
- ii. To evaluate the SWOT analysis of PGSS UTM Session 2023/2024
- iii. To determine the way forward to advance PGSS UTM based on the SWOT analysis

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was carried out by the present members of the PGSS committee at UTM during the 2023/2024 academic year session. The authors are from two faculties in UTM: the Faculty of Artificial Intelligence (FAI) and the Malaysia-Japan International Institute

of Technology (MJIIT). The committee members' combined experiences, observations, and comments during their time on the committee served as the foundation for the development of the SWOT analysis. It draws attention to PGSS's internal and external strengths and shortcomings as well as the opportunities and difficulties it has in effectively serving and interacting with the PG community.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Strengths

PGSS UTM committee stands as a pillar of unity and support for the UTM PG community, consisting of diverse community members from various racial and academic backgrounds. The strength of the diverse committee enhances the ability of PGSS UTM in critical thinking, problem-solving and their professional skills for addressing the needs of a large student population. Besides, the dual operation structure (under faculties and UTM) of PGSS UTM also provides tailored support at the faculty level while fostering a unified community across disciplines. Another key strength of PGSS UTM is the variety of training and support programs organized with passion, dedication and excellent leadership. These programs provide essential resources for improving community engagement as well as helping students academically and professionally. By conducting PG Structured Course, Coffee Sessions, Compulsory Course, and other additional courses with the SPS, PGSS UTM aims to enrich all aspects of the PG academic experience. For example, PG Structure Course offered important skills in entrepreneurship, research, technical presentation, and career planning, while PG Coffee Sessions provided opportunities for students to have fruitful and motivating discussions with seasoned mentors and guest speakers, promoting personal growth and academic resilience. By providing these training and supports, PGSS UTM can significantly enrich and promote personal and professional development of PG students at UTM. Apart from the regular courses conducted by PGSS, two major programs were organized: the UTM 3 Minute Thesis (UTM 3MT) Competition and the 10th International Graduate Conference on Engineering, Science and Humanities (IGCESH 2024). The UTM 3MT Competition aimed to develop and refine PhD students' ability to effectively communicate their research findings and to represent UTM at the national level, while IGCESH 2024 brought together local and international PG students under the theme "Towards

Sustainable Futures: Innovations and Collaborations in a Changing World.” Both programs highlight PGSS UTM’s strength in organizing impactful and large-scale academic events.

Weaknesses

There are several obstacles involved in becoming a committee member of the PGSS, especially when it comes to time management, finances, and mental health. The committee members' stress and mental health are a major vulnerability. Increased stress and mental health problems might result from PG students' tough schedules and the severe academic demands they must meet. It is imperative to address this deficiency since committee members' well-being directly affects the society's capacity to operate. Another significant area of weakness for committee members is time management. Managing the pressures of society, personal and academic obligations can be quite difficult. Time management is one of the committee members' biggest areas of weakness. It might be challenging to balance the demands of society, personal responsibilities, and academic duties. Developing effective time management strategies and providing committee members with access to support systems may enhance their ability to fulfil their duties and provide information necessary to properly lead society. Furthermore, challenges in areas such as leadership development and succession planning must be addressed. Targeted initiatives and continuous improvement efforts can enhance the society's overall effectiveness and its ability to serve the PG student community. By addressing these weaknesses, the PGSS can become a more robust and supportive organization for all its members.

Opportunities

Involvement in PGSS also opens up exposure to international education and cultures. The benefits offered by PGSS are the students will receive up-to-date information on available study abroad programs, application processes and deadlines. They will have the chance to connect with peers who have previously studied abroad, as well as with international students and alumni, gaining insights and advice. Besides, they will have the chance to connect with peers who have previously studied abroad, as well as with international students and alumni, gaining insights and advice. Moreover, engaging in study abroad programs can enhance their resumes, gaining the upper hand in job opportunities as their exposure to different cultures, as students ought to develop a broader worldview, enhance

their language skills, their ability for study completion and gain confidence from the different environment (Bhatt et al., 2022). PGSS is also responsible for access to workshops, seminars and training programs, which give input and are beneficial for the students. PG students are usually associated with their independence, which has a tendency to isolate and suppress their stress (Adu Henaku et al., 2024), causing late completion (Amani et al., 2022) and some choose to discontinue their studies (Ajjawi et al., 2020; Larcombe et al., 2022). Thus, by organizing and participating in the PGSS programs it gives them an outlet to connect with other students by broadening their prospects, sharing their struggles and experiences, and eventually finding solutions. This also opens up opportunities for students to develop and launch new ideas and projects. By gaining teamwork and support through program participation, it also results in a healthy and vibrant research environment, which may contribute to early study completion (McCray & Joseph-Richard, 2020).

Threats

However, to improve and better serve PG students of UTM, some of the threats faced by PGSS UTM need to be identified. Resource constraints caused by university policies might be the main challenge hindering the effectiveness and growth of the society. For instance, limited financial support, human, or material resources can prevent the society from organizing large-scale events or activities for the benefit of PG students. Funding support by the university is of utmost importance to cater the costs of speakers’ honorarium, transportation fees, and meal allowances for participants during events. Moreover, human resources referring to the committee members of PGSS UTM are also significant in keeping the society running actively throughout the year. Without the manpower leading the student society, it will be impossible to turn great ideas into real events, enriching PG students’ lives at UTM. Besides, the complicated system and application process required prior to organizing an event also pose a threat to PGSS. Being one of the societies under the umbrella of UTM, PGSS is bound to adhere to the regulations and systems of the university. Therefore, in order to organize an event, there are a number of processes or steps to be taken before, during, and after the activity. For instance, application in the UTMACAD system, submission of various documents, and reports. After application, it takes some time to be approved, which affects program management. Also, PG students have packed schedules filled with attending classes and seminars, doing experiments and research, writing

papers, and joining conferences. Thus, with their busy schedules, they might not have the leisure to participate in co-curricular activities such as society activities, leading to low participation rates in events organized by PGSS UTM. As a student society, the importance of students' engagement in events is known as the most

essential element to achieve its goals of supporting the professional growth of students. Therefore, in order to improve engagement and reach out to a wider audience of PG students, more promotion should be done at the faculty and university level.

Summary of SWOT analysis

Several key points from the SWOT analysis, by each category, can be highlighted in Table 1.

TABLE 1. SWOT analysis for PGSS UTM

SWOT	Key points
Strength	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Diversity in team members 2. Highly support from Faculty and UTM level 3. Well organized various training, courses and programs.
Weaknesses	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Stress and mental health issues 2. Poor time management 3. Weak leadership and unprepared succession plan
Opportunities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Connection with other PG students 2. May join various programs offered by PGSS
Threats	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Financial and resources constraint 2. Complex program application 3. Poor student engagement

Way Forward

Based on the SWOT analysis, the weaknesses and threats categories need to be addressed to advance PGSS UTM. Table 2 below shows the potential solutions.

TABLE 2. Potential solutions on threats and weaknesses

W/T	Key points	Potential solutions
Weaknesses (internal)	1. Stress and mental health issues	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mental health support service 2. Physical health and wellness program
	2. Poor time management	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Time management workshop 2. Supportive team members
	3. Weak leadership and unprepared succession plan	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Leadership program 2. Structures succession planning
Threats (external)	1. Financial and resources	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Applying for external fund 2. Collaboration with industry
	2. Complex program application	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Simplified UTM ACAD system
	3. Poor student engagement	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Collaboration with department in UTM 2. Improve marketing strategies

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the SWOT analysis and way forward that were studied by the current members to improve PGSS UTM had been conducted. Overall, PGSS UTM is a significant student society specifically for PG students to connect, collaborate, access support systems and gain various resources. Though the existence of PGSS UTM is important, there are some aspects that can be improved. Hence, the SWOT analysis is a great tool to highlight noteworthy key points to understand PGSS UTM better. Also, to increase organisational effectiveness, boost student participation, and guarantee the continuation of successful projects, future PGSS members can use this study as a basis for strategic action planning.

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