

NEWSFEATURES

UMS fits into future Sabah's plans and needs

UNIVERSITI Malaysia Sabah (UMS) fits snugly into Sabah's plans and needs for the future.

Because of the circumstances surrounding the realisation of setting up a full-fledged university in Sabah in November 1994, skeptics have trivialised UMS as merely a fruit borne out of a political quarrel between the State and Federal governments.

The Federal government established UMS because it was challenged by the Opposition to do so, its critics would say. And having done that, it has no serious intention to build UMS into an institution of any reckoning, not in the country nor in the region.

But all these Opposition rhetoric contrast sharply with the commitment of the policy makers and the university's administrators to attain the vision of making UMS a top-rated university in the country within 20 years with an estimated student population of 20,000.

"With the setting up with UMS in Sabah, it is hoped that it will become a catalyst university for national development, especially the development of Sabah in fields such as human resources development, business and economy, and socio-cultural development," said UMS Vice Chancellor Prof. Dato Dr Abu Hassan Othman recently.

Dr Abu Hassan talked enthusiastically about the future prospects of UMS and how Sabah, with its vast natural resources both on land and in the surrounding seas, can be developed into an international centre of learning in fields such as marine sciences and bio-diversity.

As if to counter the doubting Thomases, he pointed out that even in its infancy, UMS has achieved a unique distinction. "We are the first university to offer, from the very beginning, courses from matriculation, to undergraduate, post-graduate and doctoral studies."

UMS at present squats in a picturesque spanking new complex originally built to house the proposed Yayasan Sabah Community College. It has about 200 students doing their pre-U studies at three centres in the country - the previous Universiti Kebangsaan Sabah campus in Telipok, in Sabah, Maktab MARA, Kulim in Kedah and Sekolah Menengah Sains Johor; and 207 undergraduate students (about 40 per cent from Sabah) at its main campus overlooking the scenic Likas Bay and located a stone's throw away from the Yayasan Sabah Building, in suburban Kota Kinabalu.

UMS has also registered 19 post-graduate students pursuing their Masters degree, and five others preparing for their Ph.Ds.

"We are delighted that all 19 of those pursuing their Masters degree are from Sabah," said Prof Abu Hassan. "This alone proves that UMS opens up doors for Malaysians in Sabah to advance in the academia. It also proves that the students have faith in us."

UMS has, for starters, just three faculties - the School of Science and Technology, School of Social Sciences and School of Business and Economics.



Datuk Yong chatting with some of the students in the library.



UMS Vice Chancellor Prof Dato Dr Abu Hassan (right) briefing Datuk Yong recently.

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PERPUSTAKAAN
UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SABAH

Five Bachelor of Science (honours) degree courses are offered in the School of Science and Technology. They are in science and education, conservation biology, geology, mathematics and environmental science.

In the School of Social Sciences, students graduate with a Bachelor of Social Sciences which encompasses subjects like industrial relations, industrial psychology, organisation and communications.

Three degree courses are available in School of Business and Economics - Bachelor of Business (International Trade), Bachelor of Business (Entrepreneurship) and Bachelor of Economics (Economic Planning and Development).

Prof Abu Hassan said the number of courses to be offered will increase as intake grows and the university develops, and the structuring of the curriculum will take into consideration the attributes and special needs of Sabah.

"For example the thriving rainforests in Sabah may be a strong criterion for UMS to strive for excellence in pharmaceutical studies. The rich marine resources may provide rich grounds for promoting studies in the marine sciences; and places like Danum Valley and The Lost World (Meliaw Basin) are excellent for studies on bio-university," he enthuses. "There is so much potential here... and with political stability there is much that can be achieved..."

Another area which UMS is planning on is the provision of courses to produce graduate teachers in view of the current shortage of such teachers in the state.

"We are not just looking at producing learned scholars, but graduates, like those graduates teachers, who can go out and become part of the process of developing human resources."

According to UMS' projection, its 1996 intake will double that of 1995, steadily rising to 5,000 by the year 2,000, and on to 20,000 on-campus students in 2015. The groundbreaking ceremony for UMS' permanent campus will take place at the end of the year on a 900-acre site in Kuala Menggatal not far from the present temporary campus. It is envisaged that about RM1 billion would have been spent when the campus is fully developed.

"Our plan is to be able to hold our first convocation in our campus in three to four years," said Prof Abu Hassan, adding that branch-campus specialising in certain fields of studies may have to be set up in other parts of the state when the student population expands.

He said the establishment of UMS is perhaps "the best thing" that has happened to Sabah in a very long time.

"Just think of it," he implored, "20,000 university students in Sabah and thousands among them from out of the state. Think of the multi-faceted spins-offs economically, culturally and academically."

"Think of the hundreds of parents who will come to Sabah each year to attend their children's graduation. Think of the international seminars, workshops and conferences we can have to attract participants from all over the world. Think of all the prestige that will be brought upon Sabah in particular, and our country in general."

On the enrolment of Sabahan students at UMS, Prof Abu Hassan said there was no strict quota per se, and that the 40 Sabahan undergraduates were accepted solely on merits.

"We did not have a different set of (lower) entry requirements for Sabahan students," he said. "To think that we have done so is to belittle the academic potentials of students from this part of Malaysia."

Prof Abu Hassan said he was pleased to see the students from different states living and learning together harmoniously. (UMS requires all students to live on campus). "These are the younger generation Malaysians we count on to tear down territorial sentiments and grow up to be true Bangsa Malaysia." (By C C PUNG)

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