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University-industry partnership: A new dimension in post-graduate studies

By G. Lokesh



A decade ago, students would have been hard pressed to make a decent choice to pursue post-graduate programmes locally, unless they were in public universities. True, by then, the nation had already opened up its border to foreign universities to run their programmes locally. But the choices were still limited.

Not anymore now. Students of today are confronted with a string of choices when it comes to making a decision to do a post-graduate degree locally, either with a local

university or a foreign university present in Malaysia. The choices can even be bewildering.

At the same time, another interesting dimension to the post-graduate studies is the active collaboration with the private sector. Increasingly, institutions of higher learning in Malaysia have forged partnerships with corporations in their quest to make their graduates more relevant and marketable.

In the recent past, two examples of university-industry partnership were the

International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) and MIMOS laboratory launch and IBM Malaysia-Multimedia University (MMU) partnership in the area of mainframe computing. Such partnerships are a perfect avenue for students – both undergraduates and postgraduates – to hone their skills and deepen their understanding.

'For you to be a researcher, you need a sound thinking capability,' says Taranjeet Singh from Hewitt, an international human resource outfit, with a strong presence in Malaysia.

Hence, such university-industry partnership can play a pivotal role, he stresses.

Sound partnership

In October, IIUM and MIMOS launched a Cyberspace Security Lab, marking a new beginning for cutting-edge research in information security in Malaysia. Located at the IIUM Campus in Gombak, the IIUM-MIMOS Cyberspace Security Lab is an outcome of a memorandum of agreement (MoA) signed between IIUM and MIMOS a year earlier. The collaboration was initiated especially to promote human capital development and enhance research and development (R&D) capability.

Among others, the laboratory will focus on investigating and developing new cryptography protocols, conducting frontier experiments to realise end-to-end ultra-secure communications, and to offer postgraduate programmes in the field of information security.

'The aim is to ensure the joint laboratory becomes the centre of excellence in Information Security for Malaysia,' explains MIMOS' Senior Vice President (Technology Realisation and Operations) Abdul Aziz Abdul Kadir.

How do the post-graduate students benefit from this venture? In a statement,

IIUM Rector Professor Datuk Syed Arabi Idid said: 'Our experts from the Science faculty, Information and Communication Technology faculty and Engineering faculty, especially in the fields of conventional and non-conventional cryptography, optoelectronics, telecommunication, mathematics, network security, nonlinear optics and experimental physics, will collaborate with IIUM's post-graduate students and MIMOS researchers to ensure the success of the lab.'

The applied research activities undertaken jointly by IIUM and MIMOS researchers are expected to result in the development of ultra secure encryption key management, indigenous encryption algorithms and hardware encryption modules.

Students will benefit from the high-tech environment. The IIUM-MIMOS Cyberspace Security Laboratory is equipped with state-of-the-art facilities and equipment including an optical table with automatic pneumatic levelling system; measurement equipments; optics and electronics devices; test equipments; an air shower and electronic benches to support the experiments and related projects.

Established in 1983, IIUM houses students from more than 90 countries. Its Faculty of Engineering was set up in 1994 and currently offers Bachelor, Master and PhD programmes in the area of Mechatronics, Aerospace, Automotive, Biotechnology, Communication, Computer and Information, Manufacturing, and Materials Engineering. The university's College of Engineering has active research

groups like MEMS (Micro Electro Mechanical Systems) and NEMS (Nano Electro Mechanical Systems), Precision Engineering and Micro Machining groups.

IIUM's collaboration with MIMOS is certainly an appropriate move as MIMOS is Malaysia's leading applied research corporation in information and communication technologies aimed at growing globally competitive indigenous industries. It pursues exploratory and industry-driven applied research through multi-stakeholder smart partnerships with universities, research institutes, government and industries with a focus on frontier technologies.

At the current juncture, MIMOS' applied research areas, based on real-world trends, are cyber space security, encryption systems, grid computing, communication technologies, micro systems MEMS/NEMS, advanced informatics, knowledge technology and micro energy.

Way forward

On its part, IBM Malaysia recently announced strategic partnerships with MMU to help increase knowledge on mainframe computing. The idea behind the partnership is to address the skills shortage in mainframe professionals, both locally and globally. 'IBM seeks to incorporate innovation into practical learning. We want to make learning and talent building easy and accessible to everyone. We also hope to plug the gaps in the supply of knowledge workers by collaborating with industry players and academia,' notes IBM Malaysia Managing Director Ou Shian Waei.

The initiative will give MMU students and members of Share/Guide access to world-class educational material on mainframes. Under the partnership, IBM Malaysia will offer 20 Share/Guide members a 100% subsidy on selected courses and examination fees every year.

At the same time, students and lecturers from MMU will benefit from access to IBM mainframe projects and training sessions on mainframe architecture and technology, as well as the incorporation of these modules into their undergraduate and postgraduate curricula. MMU students will also be able to tap into related R&D projects. Both MMU students and members of Share/Guide will also be able




Taranjeet: One needs a sound thinking capability to be a good researcher

access the online curriculum at the IBM mainframe e-learning website.

'This strategic partnership will ensure our students become employees who can contribute to the development of the industry and the nation,' says MMU president Prof Datuk Dr Gauth Jasmon. 'This is in line with our objective of being a world class university that pursues cutting-edge research by harnessing state-of-the art ICTs.'

Besides partnerships, another area of growth for post-graduates studies is the entry of even more players into the world of Malaysia's higher education sector. In the recent months, students intending to pursue some sort of advancement in their business studies would have noted the entry of Manchester Business School (MBS) which was recently set up at the Sunway University College.

Here, working adults can think about securing an internationally reputable MBA without taking a career break. The schools' MBA Worldwide has a 15-year track record, blending self-study with face-to-face residential workshops held in one of six destinations worldwide, namely Hong Kong, Jamaica, Malaysia, Singapore, United Arab Emirates and United Kingdom.

The combination of an increasing industry-university collaboration and the proliferation of post-graduates programmes make it an exciting time for executives and senior managers who are bent on continuing their learning curve by pursuing a structured educational programme. 



Abdul Aziz: The aim of the joint IIUM-MIMOS laboratory is to drive Malaysia into becoming the centre of excellence in Information Security