

Beacon of education and effort

TAR UMT is a story of sacrifice, self-reliance and dedication, and proof that when you give back to society, you also reap the rewards of your goodwill.

IT has been a lengthy five-decade journey for Kolej Tunku Abdul Rahman to attain the status of a full-fledged university, but its new branding has changed the lives of over 300,000 alumni.

It started as a modest community college in 1969, then became a university college in 2013 and finally now, is Tunku Abdul Rahman University of Management and Technology (TAR UMT).

The story of TAR UMT is about the founders, the community and the students who have benefitted from this institute of education. It's a story of sacrifice, self-reliance and dedication.

But what tugged at my heart-strings most are the accounts of loan recipients who came from financially hard-pressed families.

Heart-warming narratives abound and one only needs to look through the many interviews that have been recorded.

There is Ilham Emir Mohamed Akif Emir, who enrolled in a multimedia design course around the time her parents had stopped working. She was given a loan, which she used to buy a laptop to help her in her course work.

Gan Wei Kang, who was studying

WONG CHUN WAI
newsdesk
@thestar.com.my



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for a degree in communications in advertising, was having problems getting a student loan, but help from the campus eased his course and living expenses.

Enrique Ng, who studied marketing, couldn't afford his first semester fees, so he had to work part time, but the loan lightened his burden.

Lai Kah Mun, who majored in information technology, and her sister studied at the college while their parents struggled to pay for their expenses, but the loan allayed their worries.

If there's a story of how so little could go so far, then that tale belongs to Thilaganathan Naidu, who did his A-levels at the then Kolej TAR (KTAR), and went on

to obtain a scholarship via the college to study at the Lingnan University in Hong Kong. However, his study loan was less than RM9,000 then, and yet, he made it go the mile.

In a video presentation, Thila, who now works as a financial analyst for Bloomberg, spoke of how the loan had helped him.

But what's most remarkable is that the repayment rate from this interest-free loan is almost 99%.

There's nary a complaint of outstanding or late payments, or worst, complete non-payment.

The maximum value of the loan award for each academic year is RM12,000 for foundation year students, RM10,000 for degree students and RM8,000 for diploma students. Students can use the loan to pay the university fees or for their living expenses.

Repayment of loans commences six months from the last day of the final examination for students who have graduated and must be settled entirely within seven years.

Over the years, the newly conferred university has produced close to 300,000 graduates: 45% in accounting, finance and business; 41% in science, engineering, tech-

nology and computing; and 14% in communication, design and social sciences.

His Royal Highness the Sultan of Selangor, Sultan Sharafuddin Idris Shah Al-Haj, and Tengku Permaisuri Selangor, Tengku Permaisuri Norashikin, attended a dinner on March 11 to celebrate TAR UMT's upgrade and student loan fund, which has raised close to RM23mil.

Also present at the auspicious occasion were TARC Education Foundation Board of Trustees chairman Datuk Seri Dr Wee Ka Siong, TAR UMT Board of Governors chairman Tan Sri Liow Tiong Lai, and TAR UMT president Prof Lee Sze Wei.

Alumni council chairman and Board of Governors member Tan Sri Chan Kong Choy pointed out that one of the donors is an alumnus who had received a RM1,000 loan as a student, but contributed a RM1mil loan fund in return. In the nicest sense, what goes around truly comes around.

From 53 student loan funds, TAR UMT now has a total of 119.

Since 1979, almost 15,000 loans, with a total value of more than RM57mil, have been disbursed.

TAR UMT is a success story for having produced national leaders, chief executive officers, business personalities, industry leaders and trailblazing entrepreneurs.

While TAR UMT and Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR) were founded by MCA and its leaders, politics has no bearing on what it stands for.

Politicians like Home Minister Datuk Seri Saifuddin Nasution Ismail from PKR, and DAP leaders like Penang Chief Minister Chow Kon Yeow, Seputeh MP Teresa Kok, Penang state executive councillor Chong Eng and Negri Sembilan state exco member Teo Kok Seong, studied at KTAR.

Kampar, where UTAR's main campus stands, remains a DAP stronghold although the academic and student population, as well as the business community, have benefited from the presence of the institution, an MCA initiative.

Ultimately, it's more important that Malaysia wins and benefits.

However, the hard work and dedication of the people who began the journey to build KTAR, TAR University College and now TAR UMT, must be recognised.

Let's give credit where it's due.

