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# A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO UNIVERSITY CURRICULUM: UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SABAH

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## **Abstract**

In this era of globalisation, most university curriculum requires new sets of settings and arrangements. Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) is no exception. Multi-disciplinary, academic degree-granting programme in UMS have been designed for students and faculties as the basis in ensuring a harmonious existence within and outside the campus. Most of the curriculum in UMS is designed to promote the understanding of universal values and traditions consistent with the quest for global peace and human solidarity. UMS not only provides knowledge, practical experience and skills for scholars and practitioners involved in conflict resolution but also play its role as a peace builder; giving humanitarian and economic assistance. To bring about peace and harmony amongst students of diverse religious and cultural backgrounds, UMS has two components: one is the orientation-training programme for all the new students and the other is the year-round practical training, character building and curriculum development programmes. This paper examines how the forces of globalisation have transformed its curriculum and raised new challenges to our existing institutions in promoting peace and intercultural harmony among students and staff alike.

**Keywords:** Curriculum, Harmony, University, Peace, Malaysia

## **Introduction**

Malaysia is a multi-cultural, multi-religious country. The state of Sabah in particular, thrives in its ethnic diversity, multi cultures and beliefs. The appealing cultures of its multitude of ethnic groups add dimension to the livelihood of this state.

Today, we are living in a borderless and globalise world. The global economy is becoming competitive and increasingly dominated by information and communication technologies (Carroy, 1995). This scenario has instigated institution of higher learning to have new and holistic approach in the academic curriculum. The establishment of Universiti Malaysia Sabah, the ninth public university in the nation play a significant role in creating an educated, skilled and highly motivated workforce, with moral and ethical values (Zainodin Jubok & Kasim Mansur, 2003)

## **Background of UMS**

Since its inception in 1994, University Malaysia Sabah (UMS) has been growing and developing progressively. In the rapid pace of globalisation and in line with the University's motto "Strive to Excel", the university aspires to become a quality university of world class standing. The excellent achievements all along is the result of concerted efforts of all parties concerned in ensuring that UMS could develop as planned.

In boosting Malaysian's educational excellence, UMS has come a long way. UMS started in 1994 with very limited resources. We have just reached another milestone when we celebrate her 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary, which began last year on the 24<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2003 (Mohd. Yusof Kasim *et al.*, 2004). Being the ninth public higher institutions to be built in the nation, UMS's vision and mission had been to look for opportunities for economic development of Malaysia to attain Vision 2020 towards the status of a developed country.

The main focus of UMS is to impart knowledge & skills besides instilling the attitudes to the students and encourage the understanding of global context in academic strategies. The main role of UMS is to produce a competent workforce equipped with the skills, knowledge, attitude and behaviour to meet the demands of the high-technology era (Abu Hassan Othman, 1997). In that respect courses in Applied Science and Technology, Information Technology, Electronics, Engineering, Biotechnology, Manufacturing and Communication are being expanded.

**Table1: Student Distribution from State of Origin (2004)**

States of Origin	Number of Students		Total	Percentage (%)
	Male	Female		
Perlis	35	37	72	0.52
Melaka	86	171	257	1.82
Negeri Sembilan	133	206	339	2.4
Terengganu	109	294	403	2.85
Pahang	138	293	431	3.05
W. P. K.Lumpur	198	247	445	3.15
Pulau Pinang	272	352	624	4.42
Johor	254	486	740	5.24
Kedah	295	470	765	5.42
Kelantan	250	526	776	5.49
Selangor	320	556	876	6.2
Perak	364	587	951	6.73
Sarawak	646	1025	1671	11.83
Sabah	2,072	3,313	5,385	38.13
Foreign	144	244	388	2.75
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>5,316</b>	<b>8,807</b>	<b>14,123</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: UMS, Students Affairs monthly reports, 2004

### **Curriculum**

In general, peace and harmony studies programme is one of the elective courses offered in many universities throughout the world and Malaysia is no exception.

Malaysia is multiracial and shoulders the responsibility of maintaining racial harmony. In line with the goal the UMS curriculum has been designed to uphold this aspiration. UMS believes strongly that racial harmony is the root of peace and prosperity in the nation. One of the basic principles of the charter of the curriculum adopted and implemented in UMS is that of the dignity and equality inherent in all human beings.

The core of the undergraduate and graduate curriculum are the classes offered at the school level, which are developed and integrated into unified and cohesive programs of study. Peace and harmony oriented curriculum takes into account many factors including:

- specific plans for student integration

The main objective of this programme is to decorate society with generosity, kindness, mercy, forgiveness, self-sacrifice, mutual co-operation, love and affection. **The primary concern of the orientation of the curriculum in UMS is to produce highly skilled human resources, possessing a high degree of creativity, compositeness and resilience.** In term of teaching, interactive teaching and participatory approach is applied by UMS to produce and inculcate the spirit of co-operation among students. Such approach helps mould a sense of belonging in term of confidence building and build the capacity of the individual to attain optimum self-potential to succeed.

### **Co Curriculum**

**The integrated students programmed which was implemented since 1986 by the Malaysian government has also been continuously implemented in UMS. This program serves as an orientation to the co curriculum in the university.** Co curriculum which is part of the requirement in obtaining their degree is paramount to the students' achievement not only in term of academic excellence but also in moulding patriotism, national integration and racial harmony. It has been the tradition in campus for students to participate or organize various co curricular

activities both inside and outside the campus areas. These activities perhaps contribute tremendous impact to both parties where university students is brought to the doorstep of rural villages and outside communities.

**Table 2: Student Co curricular Activities: 1998-2004**

Type of Activities	Frequency	Percentage
Social Service – Off Campus	29	23.38
Social Service – In Campus	22	17.74
Cultural Show	13	8.87
Annual Dinner	14	11.29
Expedition and Recreation	18	14.52
Sports	10	8.06
Seminar and workshop	14	11.29
Leadership Seminars and workshop	4	3.23
<b>Total</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: UMS, Students Affairs monthly reports, 2004

All students' co curricular activities have been geared to take joint and separate action in co-operation with all parties in the society. Main agenda of the co curricular activities is to promote and encourage universal respect for and observance of human right and fundamental freedoms for all, without distinguishing race, sex, language, place of origin and religion.

Co curricular activities conducted by the university have many advantages. The main focus of these activities is leadership training and awareness on the importance of teamwork. As shown in Table 2, for the past eight years there were 124 activities organized by the student's body.

**Table 3: Level of Activities**

Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Residence and Schools	41	34.7
University	40	33.9
District and State	33	28.0

National	3	2.5
International	1	0.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: UMS, Students Affairs monthly reports, 2004

At this juncture, most of the co curricular activities are being organized at both schools and university level, which comprises 68.6 percent.

In 2002, UMS formed the UMS-Outdoor Development Centre (UMS-ODEC) with the main objective of cultivating intellectual, physical, social and emotional development through outdoor and experimental learning programs. UMS believes firmly that ODEC can play its roles in promoting and disseminating knowledge to help building through good quality programme and services. The program is also aim to build social skills, community spirit and upholding self-potential to cope with the reality. UMS-ODEC provides a variety of adventure-based experimental learning programmes to discover their true potential, to understand the real meaning of teamwork and to test their skills in leading and managing people in a 'real world' situation Besides co curriculum activities, efforts are consistently being initiated to boost the resilience of students through subjects like Islamic Knowledge, moral and ethical education..

### **Interfaith studies**

The interfaith studies accent the common belief in the dignity of man and in the peaceful pursuit of spiritual objectives. Never in this time of almost universal upheaval, is it so important to understand that peace in itself cannot be the final goal, but peace with love and social justice as a prerequisite to a new and more humane civilization for all mankind.

Interfaith Studies offered in UMS are designed to give the student an overview of the world as it actually is, and in such a context as to show what needs to be done, aside from matching violence with violence and terrorism with terrorism. UMS Islamic unit (established in 2002) plays an important role in maintaining

peace and harmony in campus. The main function of this unit is to educate UMS students, staff and the faculty members and mould their character and behaviour with strong Islamic personality. The ultimate aim is to achieve the noblest development of an individual as the servant and vicegerent of the Creator through the dissemination of true knowledge, based on virtue of manner, quality and excellence so that the students in particular become worthy human beings and the future role model for the next generation.

The administration of university never permitted for the registration of societies/group based on race, religion or states. However, there is freedom to practise one's own religion with no financial assistance from the university. In fact incentives are allocated to activities that involve all races, religion backgrounds.

### **Collaboration**

The collaboration of UMS with other institutions of higher learning is another area to strengthen the cooperation and understanding between institutions (CCIR. 2003). The purpose of having memorandum of understanding with other institution of higher learning locally and abroad is to contribute towards nation building. A major step forward has been taken in recent years to further strengthen existing ties with these institutions of higher learning. UMS, by virtue of its motto "Strive to Excel" is currently actively promoting collaboration through education, science and culture to promote the free flow of ideas to further strengthen universal respect for peace and harmony (Zainodin Jubok & Kasim Mansur, 2003).

### **Conclusion**

Current solutions to the world crisis, by using military conquest and the continuation of present unfair economic policies had widened the gap between the rich and the poor. It prolonged human suffering and contributed to the ever mounting and frightening uprising among the world's masses. For that matter UMS's holistic approach to university curriculum is a must. UMS believes that the



more interaction and participation, the more opportunity there is for the student to learn, understand and love each other.

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