

International Postgraduates @ UniMAP

The first international student to register at UniMAP (formerly KUKUM) was Muhammad Iqbal s/o Muhammad Hussain from Pakistan who registered for the PhD programme in Manufacturing Engineering in February 2005. The number then increased to 5 by the end of that year. Undoubtedly, it was not easy for a relatively new university located way up north to satisfy students who came from different cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. A lot of constraints had to be overcome in the initial stage of the students' arrival, especially in assimilating them into the Malaysian way of life.

Up till June 2009 the number of international students in UniMAP has increased to 53 where 30 are enrolled in the PhD and 23 are doing their master's degree. The year 2008 saw one international student awarded the Doctor of Philosophy in Manufacturing Engineering and another awarded the Masters Degree in Mechatronics Engineering.

Most international students in UniMAP hail from Asian countries such as India, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Thailand and Myanmar. Some are from countries in the Middle East and Africa like Iraq, Jordan, Syria, Algeria and Nigeria. With such a large presence, these students have formed their own community in UniMAP and try their very best to adjust their cultural lifestyle to the new environment in Perlis. Even though they come from different cultural and socio-linguistic backgrounds they are very much interested in learning the custom and tradition of the local communities, especially Bahasa Melayu. For example, Zainab Khalil from Iraq and Maung Maung Soe from Myanmar are interested to learn Malay language for better communication with the local people. This should help them accommodate themselves with the local students.

Life for international students in UniMAP is not much different from that of international students studying in other universities in Malaysia except that they are not exposed to the hectic lifestyle of big cosmopolitan cities like Kuala Lumpur, Johor Bahru or Penang. Life in UniMAP, and Perlis in general, is dictated more by the natural environment, friendly community, and lower cost of living compared to other cities in Malaysia. Those who are quite used to a hectic lifestyle might not find it easy to adapt but for those who love peace and tranquility then UniMAP is the right university for them to pursue their studies.

Most higher degree students have never been to Malaysia or Perlis and they opine that UniMAP is a suitable university for them to study and to gain new experience. According to Omar Kareem from Iraq *"I have been studying here more than 2 years and I believe that Perlis is a good place to study without any diversion"*. Another student from India, Hariharan said *"It is simple and calm, no traffic. The people are very nice and really helpful, but the weather is hotter compared to other places"*.

The international students also involve themselves in various festivals and cultural activities like the International Students Carnival, International Cultural Night & Food Festival. They also partake in celebrating Hari Raya in UniMAP and attend wedding festivals of the various communities.

It is hoped that with the presence of the international community in UniMAP we can know more about the culture of various countries and respect the diversity that exist between us. The expertise and experience that they have are a valuable source of reference and guidance. As a country that is rich in custom and cultural heritage we are always deferential towards others and respect the differences that exist. Albeit being a university ensconced in a small state up north, UniMAP is able to blossom into becoming a competitive academic and research center and able to entice international students to come and pursue their studies here, thus promoting UniMAP and Perlis in total.

