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Tinta Alumni





From Pilah to United Kingdom: For The Love of Knowledge

Oleh
NUR AISYAH ATIKAH BINTI ALIZAN

Alumni UiTM Cawangan Negeri Sembilan
Kampus Kuala Pilah
aisyah.alizan@yahoo.com



EDITOR: DR. NOR'AISHAH ABU SHAH

Assalamualaikum fellow readers,

All praise and thanks are due to Allah for all that He has blessed me with. I am really grateful and happy to have been given the chance to share my story with everyone through this article.

In 2017, after finishing my Foundation in Science at UiTM Dengkil, my life took an interesting turn as I was destined to do my bachelor's degree in Biology at UiTM Kuala Pilah. It was the first time I had set foot in Negeri Sembilan. The campus is located in a small town tucked away somewhere in between Seremban and Bahau and is surrounded with nature, hence its name "The Green Campus". It was what my mother would have described as the perfect place to study because it meant there were no more distractions from city life like shopping malls and other forms of entertainment. I didn't know what to expect then, but looking back now, I wouldn't want to do my bachelor's degree anywhere else.

I had made one of the best memories in my life while studying at UiTM Kuala Pilah. Even now, I still remember the Negeri Sembilan dialect of the locals, how there will always be Ayam Masak Lemak Cili Api on the menu at Anjung Selera Perpatih and how a tad bit spicier every dish was in Negeri Sembilan. Participating in Pertandingan Kawad Kaki (PERKAD) with all the freshers during the first semester and having to train every single evening before the competition is definitely one of the bittersweet memories that will stay with me forever.

Ever since I was first introduced to the subject Biology when I was in Form 4, I knew instantly that it was my favourite subject. Because of that, choosing this course for my bachelor's degree was an easy decision for me. Indeed, UiTM truly lives up to its reputation in producing the best graduates. From my 3- year course programme, I was equipped with the essential knowledge and skills set that was required for an aspiring postgraduate student such as myself. This was of course only made possible thanks to the incredible and knowledgeable lecturers whom I was tremendously fortunate to know and learn from. During the course, I was able to explore through the wide range of disciplines in Biology which had helped me realise my growing interest for Molecular Biology and Genetics.



It is intriguing to think that our bodies function on a cellular and molecular level and how the uniqueness of each person is contributed by the genetic code that we carry in our DNA. For my Final Year Project (FYP), with the guidance of my supervisor Miss Sarah Shazwani Binti Zakaria, I studied the phylogenetic relationships of a cellulose-producing bacteria species called *Komagataeibacter* sp. This project was initially planned to be laboratory-based research, before COVID-19 led to the closure of labs and the universities, leaving us with no choice but to venture into computational research for this instead. This was done by retrieving 16S rRNA gene sequences of several species of *Komagataeibacter* from the NCBI Genbank website and analysing them using phylogenetics programs. Despite the challenges, Miss Sarah tirelessly guided me until the completion of this project. Alhamdulillah, things always seem to work out in the end.

I was then given the chance to join the Virtual Symposium on Sciences (VSoS) 2020 organized by the School of Chemistry and Environment, UiTM Kuala Pilah. It was my first time taking part in a conference as a presenter, though it was held online, the experience was unforgettable. Surprisingly, I had won the Best Presenter Award from my participation in the symposium.



The research experience that I gained from my FYP, together with my participation in the symposium that enabled me to communicate my research findings with others, had further strengthened my desire to pursue a research degree straight after completing my studies at UiTM Kuala Pilah.

The sponsorship programme called Graduate Excellence Programme (GrEP) by Majlis Amanah Rakyat (MARA) offers a convertible loan for students to pursue post-graduate degrees at the world's top-ranking universities. Alhamdulillah, after a few months of preparations and reaching out to potential supervisors from the universities listed as the Top 10 on the QS World University Ranking, expressing my interest in doing PhD, I had received a positive reply from one of the Associate Professors at University College London (UCL). Not long after, I received an Unconditional Offer Letter from the university, and I remember it being one of the happiest days of my life.

I graduated my bachelor's degree in Biology with a cumulative grade point average (CGPA) of 3.86. This meets the requirements of both the MARA sponsorship programme and the entry requirements stated by University College London, which I believe helped a lot in increasing my chances of getting in. Interestingly, to do a PhD in the UK, it is not necessary to have done a Master's degree first as long as you meet the qualifications of a bachelor's degree that is Upper Second Class which is equivalent to CGPA of 3.3/4.0 in our grading system.





On the 25th November 2021, with the intention of seeking knowledge for the sake of Allah, I boarded the plane that took me to where I am now, in the city of London, United Kingdom. It all still feels tremendously surreal to me, even today after a year had already passed. What used to be a dream or a prayer is now the reality that I am living in. I am now entering my second year of PhD here at the Institute of Healthy Ageing, under the Genetics Evolution and Environment (GEE) department at University College London (UCL). My research now is focused on finding the regulation of gene expression that is involved in the aging mechanism. The model organism that we use to study this is the fruit fly, *Drosophila melanogaster*. (Yes! You're right, it is that species we learnt about in our high school Biology textbook!) It has been a challenging yet exciting journey so far. It is a steep learning curve from here, there is undeniably so much more to learn, but I am all for it. Even when working in the laboratory sometimes gets a little too tiring, I still love what I do because I am learning something I am really interested in and that is what keeps me going.

Before I end this article, I would like to say that all good things start with a dream. Don't be afraid to learn something you don't know, and don't be afraid to wonder outside of your comfort zone if it means you get to grow from the experience. I really hope that everyone currently studying at UiTM Kuala Pilah will enjoy your time there as much as I did and will eventually find something that you are passionate about doing.

I would also like to use this opportunity to thank all my lecturers who have helped me reach this far in life. Especially Allahyarham Dr Rosli Noormi, who was a caring and attentive Academic Advisor who always made sure everyone in his group did not lose sight of our goals as a student.

He also strongly supported those who had the intentions of continuing their studies at the post-graduate level and assisted with the application process. I will never forget the kindness and virtue he had shared with us, and I believe we were the lucky bunch to have known him during the time that he was still with us. May Allah grant him a place in Jannah, Amin.

My deepest gratitude also goes to my FYP supervisor Miss Sarah Shazwani Binti Zakaria for being the best supervisor I could have asked for. I would not have made it to where I am now without your support.

I would also like to thank Madam Faikah Binti Ismail, my amazing Neurobiology lecturer, for giving me this opportunity to share a little bit about my time as a student at UiTM Kuala Pilah.

Lastly, I would like to thank my lovely parents for giving me unconditional support to pursue whatever it was that I had passion for and for believing in me. They have set good examples for me, and it is always thanks to their prayers that I remain blessed in this life.

Thank you for reading this far. I really hope this short story about my journey will benefit the younger students who are reading this and will somehow inspire you to go after your dreams no matter what it takes.