

The importance of research

IN 2004, members of the Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences (FOPS) decided that an undergraduate research project should be offered as an elective course to motivate students to think 'out of the box' and not study merely to pass examinations.

By doing research, students would become critical thinking individuals capable of formulating new ideas to serve society. Thus, a young lecturer at FOPS may begin his or her 'first research step' by supervising undergraduate projects. He can then build a portfolio of publications or research projects to enhance his academic excellence and career prospects, as well as contribute to the research culture at the faculty to reinforce the post-graduate programmes developed at FOPS.

This is very much in line with the Ministry of Higher Education's efforts to raise research culture in public as well as private Malaysian universities, with the introduction of the 2007 SETARA ranking scale whereby research activities represent one of three ranking criteria.

The first batch of students selected to do the course have completed their dissertations and responded enthusiastically when approached for input on



Pharmacy final year student, Khoo Zi Yu, together with his supervisor and mentor, Dr. Chin Jin Han during one of his research sessions.

their experience. Generally, the students agreed that when they started the Bachelor of Pharmacy programme at UCSI University in 2006, they had no inkling that there were other professions they could go into other than being pharmacists in hospitals or community pharmacies.

Undertaking the projects have opened their eyes to consider other professional fields such as law enforcement, industrial pharmaceuticals, research and academia. Their experiences not

only taught them to make critical observations and evaluations of laboratory experiments before drawing conclusions, but also taught them to cite other research findings found in scientific journals.

Khoo Zi Yu, Vun Vui Kiat, Teh Chie Chek and Wong Sue Zin all agreed that they have developed critical thinking and problem-solving skills as well as the ability to source for information through face-to-face interactions, library resources, and e-Journals and e-books posted on

the Internet.

Teh opined, "I thought I had a good idea and concept on the topic I had chosen. However, when I started doing the literature review, I realised that I knew nothing substantive at all about the subject!"

Thus, they were unanimous in agreeing that the course had exposed them to continuous self-assessment by having to maintain their respective personal portfolios throughout. While acquiring skills in the laboratory, they also learnt to source for chemical quotations, to budget for funds allocated per project, and to write project proposals.

Furthermore, they also learnt to prepare and deliver oral presentations, although Vun confessed to experiencing stage fright initially.

For Khoo, the whole exercise gave him an insight into how a research-based post-graduate degree would be like, while Wong was inspired to continue her studies in pharmaceuticals.

Above all, the students expressed their appreciation to FOPS staff at UCSI University, for exposing them to various pharmacy-linked activities such as industrial training, public health campaigns, community work, hospital pharmacy and the inculcation of the Problem-

based Learning (PBL) approach, instead of solely learning through formal lectures.

They felt the education they received at UCSI University had improved their organisational and communication skills, incalculated patient-centred approach in dealing with the public, made them more independent, responsible and better equipped to make decisions on their future careers instead of being confined only to community pharmacy or hospital jobs.

All the students acknowledged the invaluable guidance and advice received from their respective supervisors.

They greatly appreciated the knowledge and experience imparted to them and the 'personal touch' given by their respective supervisors, which they would not have had experienced otherwise. Vun said he felt privileged that his supervisor even phoned him personally to help work out his project issues.

Teh said he was grateful to both his supervisors for helping to develop his self-learning and problem-solving skills.

For more information on UCSI University's Pharmacy Degree Programme, contact their course counsellors at 03-9101 8880 or visit www.ucsi.edu.my/onlineenquiry/