



Dato' Peter Ng

# The Pursuit Of Excellence

Since its inception in 1986, UCSI University has emerged as a front-runner in Malaysia's private higher education landscape.

By Hyma Haridas

**A**s one of Malaysia's first private universities, UCSI has long impacted the national higher education landscape, and continues to do so with its wide range of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes.

With about 11,000 students from 80 different countries, the University today is a thriving and vibrant

community of learning, committed to the further discovery and celebration of knowledge.

A testament to UCSI's contribution to society was its recent win of two prestigious industry awards – the Special Achievement Award at the Asia Pacific Entrepreneurship Awards (APEA) 2013, and the University

Precinct of the Year Award, at the recent World Sense of Place Awards.

The former honoured the contributions of UCSI's founder and chairman, Dato' Peter Ng, to Malaysia's higher education landscape; while the latter recognised the contribution of UCSI's campuses to their immediate communities in Cheras, Kuching, Kuala Terengganu and Bandar Springhill.

According to Dato' Peter Ng, it is the University's founding values of "audacity, integrity, perseverance and excellence" that have lifted the University to the heights it is today.

"We were audacious to dream big when we started off on a shoestring budget of RM2,000. We had a dream to be one of Malaysia's foremost private education providers and we never stopped believing. Today, we are there.

As for integrity, we made it a point to be above board in all our dealings. We wanted to walk the talk. How can a university instil integrity among its students if the institution itself has suspect moral standing? Perseverance really kept UCSI going in the early days. The road was long but we persisted in our mission to provide quality offerings and the University just grew and grew in stature.

Excellence sums up much of where UCSI is today – a leading Malaysian private university with more than 11,000 students from over 80 countries. With plenty of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, the University offers students a great student experience and an assurance that they will be able to achieve success in the working world."

In this interview with Smart Investor, Dato' Peter Ng shares his insights and thoughts about UCSI's successes, its values, and its plans for the future.

**Smart Investor (SI): The private education sector has grown tremendously over the past decade or so. How do you differentiate yourself from other competitors in the market?**

**Dato' Peter Ng (DPN):** We differentiate ourselves through the



constant innovation of our offerings. The University has always been known for its high scores in the area of industrial relevance, and our track record speaks for itself.

UCSI is the first university in Asia to implement a formal industrial training programme that required students to undergo internship each academic year. We went ahead with our Co-Op (Cooperative Education and Career Services) programme in the early days when the concept of internship was still unpopular. Today, virtually every serious education provider has work placement components in their syllabus.

UCSI is now forging ahead with its Praxis™ concept that seeks to provide students with unparalleled industrial exposure. With Praxis™ students will attain a solid grasp of fundamental workplace practices – and the underlying assumptions that make them work – at profitable in-house business centres. Much has been invested to realise this, and today, UCSI boasts a boutique hotel, a medical centre, a child development centre and a pathlab, among others, where students can apply their knowledge and learn from industry practitioners.

**SI: What are the benchmarks that your institution refers to in its pursuit for excellence?**

**DPN:** While UCSI is one of Malaysia's first private universities, we acknowledge that we are still a young varsity in terms of global standards and heritage. That said, we aspire to be counted among the best in time,

and we constantly seek new ways to improve.

While UCSI appreciates best practices from many leading varsities, Stanford University stands out as a role model we would like to emulate. Its graduates' talents and entrepreneurialism pioneered self-sufficient local industries that grew till the locale became known as Silicon Valley.

Stanford's faculty and alumni have gone on to found prominent companies like Google, Hewlett-Packard, Yahoo!, Nike and Sun Microsystems, among others. In the future, we aspire to impact the nation in the same way Stanford contributes in the United States.

**SI: What valuable lessons have you learned over the past few years, which have helped you become the award-winning institution that you are today?**

**DPN:** I've definitely learned many things over the years, but one of the more significant lessons is that Malaysia's different higher learning institutions can come together to find mutual benefit. As a "Blue Ocean Strategy" practitioner, I advocate such arrangements.

One working model is the Malaysian Centre for Tourism and Hospitality Education, better known by its acronym MyCenTHE. Comprising most of Malaysia's leading higher education providers and hotel schools, MyCenTHE seeks to realise Entry Point Project 10 (EPP10) of the

Economic Transformation Programme that seeks to build a tourism and hospitality education cluster in each state. This is necessary to supply Malaysia's fast-growing tourism and hospitality industry with the necessary human capital.

Another thing I have learned is that staff retention and development should be prioritised. It's always worth it to retain valuable and effective staff. At the same time, young people must be given the opportunity to shine. If they are good enough, they are old enough.

**SI: In terms of business, how do you foresee the year 2014? Will there be a change in business strategies moving forward?**

**DPN:** As far as UCSI is concerned, 2014 will be a period of consolidation and strengthening across all subsidiaries. We want to ensure each subsidiary is contributing positively to the coffers of UCSI Group with reasonable returns to investors. I'm glad that every company is showing positive performance. I don't foresee any major revamps but fine-tuning will be done and company structures may change to accommodate new strategies.

For UCSI University, we are eager to see how the new vice-chancellor, Prof Dato' Dr Khalid Yusoff, takes the University forward. He is a well-respected cardiologist and his research experience is second to none. We will empower him to bring his vision to fruition and we are confident that he will take UCSI to new heights. **SI**