

# From Harvard to Hollywood

**A** PART from affirming UCSI's status as one of Malaysia's foremost universities, the rating placed the university alongside some of the world's leading institutions that finished in the same tier.

While such developments are encouraging, UCSI's true measure of success has always revolved around the achievements of its students.

This has been the trend for almost three decades and the university recorded more milestones when Cherish Chong Chiu Wern and Nurul Aina Abdul Ghani recorded personal firsts at Harvard and Hollywood respectively.

While achievement is something both of them share, their stories could not be more different. Chong is realising her potential in research while Nurul Aina bested the competition in a global music competition.

## From Grey's to Harvard

From being fascinated with TV shows such as *ER* and *Grey's Anatomy* to being selected for a research year in Harvard University, Chong has come a long way.

She recently completed the second year of her Doctor of Medicine programme at UCSI University (UCSI). She is now spending a year in Boston under Harvard Medical School's Global Clinical Scholars Research Training Programme.

During her time at Harvard, Chong will be involved in cutting-edge research under the tutelage of Professor Dr Gordon H. Williams who leads the Hormonal Mechanisms of Cardiometabolic Injury Programme at Harvard's Brigham and Women's Hospital.

"I'm definitely looking forward to make a contribution," said Chong.

"Harvard is at the forefront of research and I'm sure this exposure will help me in my aspirations to be a clinician-scientist.

"I'd like to thank UCSI University for making all the necessary arrangements. UCSI went out of the

way to prepare me for this and I've received a tremendous amount of support."

The first contact with Harvard was initiated by UCSI's vice-chancellor and president, senior professor Datuk Dr Khalid Yusoff, one of the country's foremost cardiologists and researchers.

His collaborations with renowned researchers from Harvard, Duke, Sydney, Melbourne and McMaster universities enabled UCSI to propose several students for the intercalated research year. The students were then interviewed by Prof Williams and Chong made the cut.

She revealed that during her interview, Prof Williams did not ask her any academic-related questions. Instead, the questions focused more on her independence and critical thinking skills.

She believes that her calm demeanour and clear communication helped her edge out the other candidates. As a shy person, she credits participating in UCSI activities for helping her step out of her shell.

As the daughter of retired teachers, her research dreams were also made possible with the funding she received from UCSI University Trust.

The support from UCSI also came in terms of preparing her for her research work in Harvard. In the weeks leading to her departure, she was given extensive lab training by the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences' experienced staff.

Speaking from Harvard where she currently is, she points out that the extra lab training was invaluable – she has no problems coping with the research work

assigned to her thus far.

UCSI University vice-chancellor and president senior Prof Khalid said such collaboration provided invaluable opportunities for students and staff to be engaged in the pursuit of knowledge at its cutting edge.

"For the past few years, much emphasis has been given to research," he said. "This, in general, is great but let us not do research for the sake of it.

"Regardless of the field, research should focus on pertinent matters that ultimately benefit humanity."

## A rising star

Like Chong, Nurul Aina is living the dream.

A student of UCSI University's Institute of Music, she has won numerous singing competitions but her biggest break happened when she became the first Malaysian to

win the World Championship of Performing Arts 2014 (WCOPA).

The only international competition for aspiring performing artistes, the WCOPA is dubbed the "Olympics of the Performing Arts" and is held in Hollywood, California, annually. The competition has launched careers for many musicians, including Jed Mandela.

Nurul Aina beat 15 other hopefuls to be among the two singers to represent Malaysia at the competition. This was no mean feat as she also edged out Astro's *One in a Million* winner and other experienced singers.

Describing the competition as "tough", she did not expect to win – more than 200 vocalists took part in the competition in Hollywood and only six countries would make it to the grand finals.

Despite the odds, her powerful and effortless rendition of Houston's *I Have Nothing* captured the hearts and minds of the judges and she was crowned as the 2014 Senior Grand Champion under the Vocalist of the World category.

With a smile, Nurul Aina reveals that while she is happy with her win and helping Malaysia make its presence felt in Hollywood, she wants more.

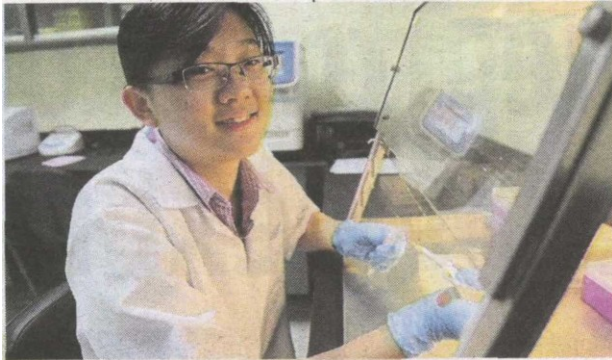
"I want to be someone who writes songs that will end up in textbooks. I want to inspire people

to study my songs," she said.

■ To know how you too can achieve in your chosen field, visit

its Open Day on Dec 20 and 21 (9am to 5pm) at UCSI University, KL Campus (South Wing), Taman Connaught. Or visit the UCSI

University website at [www.ucsi-university.edu.my](http://www.ucsi-university.edu.my) or call 03-9101 8882 / [www.ucsiuniversity.edu.my/onlineenquiry](http://www.ucsiuniversity.edu.my/onlineenquiry)



UCSI University's second year medicine student, Chong, is currently undergoing a research year at Harvard.



Currently studying at UCSI University's Institute of Music, Nurul Aina credits the numerous performances and masterclasses for her confidence on stage.