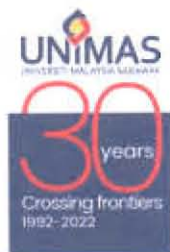




Cerita Perintis
PIONEERS' NARRATIVES

UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SARAWAK

Cerita Perintis
PIONEERS' NARRATIVES



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CONTENTS

pg iv ---- pg x

List of Abbreviations
List of Contributions
List of Contributors

pg xi ---- pg xiv

Foreword
Preface

pg 1 ---- pg 8

PREAMBLE

- UNIMAS in Brief
- UNIMAS' 1st Five Years

Chapter 1 pg 9 --- pg 18

THE BEGINNING

Chapter 2 pg 19 --- pg 32

WELCOMING LEADING SCHOLARS

Chapter 3 pg 33 --- pg 40

FRAMING IDENTITY

Chapter 4 pg 41 --- pg 52

ON TEACHING-LEARNING & RESEARCH INFRASTRUCTURE

Chapter 5 pg 53 --- pg 68

ON FACULTY PROGRAMME INNOVATION & MANAGEMENT

Chapter 6 pg 69 --- pg 88

ON RESEARCH & SERVICES

Chapter 7 pg 89 --- pg 100

STUDENTS LIFE

Chapter 8 pg 101 --- pg 128

CAMPUS HEARTBEAT

pg 129 --- pg 145

THE FOUNDING MANAGEMENT TEAM

pg 146 --- pg 147

UNIMAS' 1ST FIVE YEARS - KEY MILESTONES

pg 148

ACQUISITION & EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation of names of Faculties/Centres/Institute (original names at the time of establishment)

FRST	Faculty of Resource Science & Technology
FSS	Faculty of Social Sciences
FIT	Faculty of Information Technology
FE	Faculty of Engineering
FACA	Faculty of Applied and Creative Arts
FCSHD	Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development
FMHS	Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences
FEB	Faculty of Economics and Business
IBEC	Institute of Biodiversity & Environmental Conservation
IHCM	Institute of Health & Community Medicine
IDEA	Institute of Design & Ergonomic Application
IEAS	Institute of East Asian Studies
CLS	Centre for Language Studies
CTTC	Centre for Technology Transfer & Consultancy
CAIS	Centre for Academic Information System
CSD	Centre for Student Development

LIST OF CONTRIBUTIONS

1 The Beginning

How It All Began

Dr M Zawawi Ismail

The Tree Book

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Dr Hatta Azad Khan

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A Resort Campus

Dr M Zawawi Ismail

Pioneer No. 6

Ahmad Katang

Into the Corporate Mode

Japri Bujang Masli

A Dream Campus

Dr M Zawawi Ismail

2 Welcoming Leading Scholars

Once Upon A Time...

Dr Hew Cheng Sim

We're Moving, Again?!

Dr Zaidah Razak and Dr

Zahran Halim

From Mount Popa to

Samarahan Peat Forest

Dr Indraneil Das

Putting My Body Where My

Mouth Had Been

Dr Michael Leigh

Applied Arts?

Dr Hatta Azad Khan

A Momentous Stint at

UNIMAS

Dr Rajah Rasiah

Here I Am...

Dr Narayanan Kulathuramaiyer

She Said "YES"

Dr Mustafa Abdul Rahman

Journey to UNIMAS and into the
Wilderness of Borneo

Dr Balbir Singh

Back to UNIMAS with Love

Dr Souba Rethinasamy

3 Framing Identity

Thinking of the Logo

Dr M Zawawi Ismail

UNIMAS Gemilang

Mohd Fadzil Abd Rahman

The Regalia of UNIMAS

Dr M Zawawi Ismail

Inspirasiku

Dr Khairul Aidil Azlin Abd Rahman

UNIMAS Then – UNIMAS Today

Kamaliah Md Shahid

4 On Teaching-Learning & Research Infrastructure

The Buaya's Tail and the

Internet

Dr Zahran Halim and Dr

Zaidah Razak

Grounding Up FACA

Dr Hatta Azad Khan

A CALM Beginning

Dr Halimahtun M. Khalid

We Made It – A Malaria Lab

Dr Balbir Singh

Cyberlove and VR@IDEA

Dr Halimahtun M. Khalid

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LIST OF CONTRIBUTIONS

15 On Faculty Programme Innovation & Management

The Mission

Dr M Zawawi Ismail

Inception of the First Faculty
of Medicine and Health
Sciences on Borneo Island

Dr S Hassan Ahmad

The Founding of FRST

Dr Mohd Azib Salleh

Gearing Up FMHS

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Fast-tracking FACA

Dr Hatta Azad Khan

Beyond Our Fields

Dr Edward Foo Loke Min

Our First Batch of Medical
Graduates

Dr S Hassan Ahmad

Pelajar Perintis Fakulti Seni
Gunaan & Kreatif di Pentas
Perdana

Dr Mohd Zahuri Khairani

Retreat to Go Forward

Dr Murtedza Mohamed

16 On Research & Services

IHCM's World Class Diagnostic
Research and Services for
Sarawak

Dr Mary Jane Cardoso

The Right Place

Dr Indraneil Das

Sowing the Seeds for Faculty
Research

Dr Mohd Azib Salleh

Ekspedisi Bario: Merakam
Khazanah Semula Jadi Tanah
Tinggi Kelabit

*Dr Laily Din dan Dr Murtedza
Mohamed*

I.T. in the Forest?

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Paran*

My 'Highlanders' Family

Dr Souba Rethinasamy

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Membina dan Memanfaat Khazanah
Ilmu Borneo

Dr Mohd Tajuddin Abdullah

Out and About for Blood

Dr Abdul Karim Russ Hassan

Mencari Ikan Asing dan Temilok

Dr Khairul Adha A. Rahim

Bakun Dam EIA Study – Backstage
Anecdotes

*Dr Mustafa Abdul Rahman and
Dr Murtedza Mohamed*

17 Students Life

Pioneer's Angst

Dr Abdul Rashid Abdullah

Cerita Hari-hari Pertama
Pusat Pemajuan Pelajar

Dr Sulaiman Hanapi

Learning Throughout the
Starry Nights

Dr Edward Foo Loke Min

My Hostel Life

Dr Norizah Ibrahim

Bermulanya di Sini

*Mustaffa Kamal H.
Shamsudin*

Tempat Jatuh Lagikan
Dikenang
Jati Kasuma Ali

Kembara Ilmu
Dr Abdul Halim Busari

18 Campus Heartbeat

Forever UNIMAS
Kamaliah Md Shahid

Aku dan Nasyid UNIMAS
Mohd Fadzil Abd Rahman

Weaving Life and Love in UNIMAS
Dr June Ngo

Exploring My New Base
Dr Mahanita Mahadhir

Kamek Baghu Situk
Dr Zaiton Hassan

Trailing the Sun
Dr Mustafa Abdul Rahman

Reminiscing the Early Tutor Days...
Dr Alvin Yeo Wee

Number One
Gloria Kong

Ukhuwah Kami di Lapangan
*Abang Arabi Abang Aiman, Wahap Marni,
Besar Ketul dan Mohd Tajuddin Abdullah*

I Thought You Were Just A Village Girl
Dr Poline Bala

The Silent Observer
Dr Fitri Suraya Mohamad

Collegiality Ploughed In
Dr Mohd Tajuddin Abdullah

Kotak Memori Kota Samarahan
Dr Zulkifli Mohamad

Permulaan Daif Seorang Tutor
Dr Khairul Adha A. Rahim

Closer to the Heart than Any
Biennale
Hasnul J Saidon

Memory of Old UNIMAS
Rashidah Salam

A Dream Comes True
Dr Cheah Whye Lian

Secebis Kenangan di
UNIMAS
Fauziah bte Ghazali

Al-Ḥatimah Buatmu Prof
Sendie Tangan

Down on Memory Lane to
Pontianak
Noor'ain Aini

More Glimpses of Fond
Memories
Dr M Zawawi Ismail

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FOREWORD



Professor Emeritus
Dato' Ir Dr
Mohamad Zawawi
bin Ismail

*Founding Vice-
Chancellor, UNIMAS*

When I formed the UNIMAS Pioneers WhatsApp group, I wanted to bring together those who joined me in the early days of UNIMAS to remember the good old times and to find out how each of us is faring now. Like many other groups, we share information and news, light and sad. And many a time, when members recall and share their past moments in UNIMAS or Sarawak, others will remember events or personal experiences, and many of these were unshared or untold stories. How interesting it would be if everyone were to write those narratives and publish them for all present and future university community members to know how their organisation began.

UNIMAS is 30 years old, and it has been 22 years since I left. Time flies by, but my eight years as a founding Vice-Chancellor were the best part of my life. There was never a dull moment. I have captured many of those moments in my recent book, "Defining Moments - a Memoir". Together, this collection of narratives

containing memories of my founding colleagues helps paint a complete picture.

As UNIMAS grows older, we, the founding fathers, and our memories, will slowly fade with time. I am glad that we have captured our recall of events into this volume for we have already missed the opportunity from those who have passed on. In my eight years, none received any official recognition for their work. I believe self-satisfaction and the common bonding between us is the ultimate reward for working oneself out in establishing a university from zero. Nevertheless, I hope this collection of narratives permanently records their valuable contribution.

As founders, we have put solid Academic and Development plans for a University that is Contemporary in Character and Forward-Looking in its Outlook. As a result, we now witness a beautiful campus with the growth of students, staff, and graduates beyond our early imagination. We look forward to the University's future successes.

I thank Dr Murtedza and his team of editors for the willingness to collect and edit the articles and UNIMAS Publisher for publishing this group memoir. Finally, I thank the Vice-Chancellor, Dr Kadim, also one of the founders, for his support – without which this publication is impossible.

FOREWORD

Bismillahirrahmannirahim

Assalamualaikum Warahmatullah
Wabarakatuh

I'm writing this from my office overlooking the peaceful and serene UNIMAS Lake. Sheltered in Kota Samarahan, the designated Education Hub, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) stands tall and strong as a community driven university against the perfect backdrop that is the culturally rich and biodiverse Sarawak. From this vantage point, it is hard not to reminisce about the earlier days of UNIMAS. A humble beginning of 119 students from two faculties - we now boast 10 faculties and almost 17,000 students in our tireless quest to position UNIMAS as the institution of choice for learners, researchers and scholars from this region and beyond.

My personal journey growing with UNIMAS has been an interesting one. As one of the pioneering staff members, I spent 10 years as an academic at the Faculty of Engineering. During this tenure, I was responsible for different roles and positions, culminating as the Dean of the faculty before I left in 2004 to set sail on a new adventure. Little did I know, my voyage would lead me back to UNIMAS in April 2013, and this time it was as its 6th Vice Chancellor. Naturally, the appointment came with immense expectations and responsibilities, but it also rekindled that fire in me when



Professor
Datuk Ir Dr
Mohamad
Kadim bin
Suaidi
*Vice-Chancellor,
UNIMAS*

I first started almost 30 years ago which was to see UNIMAS grow into a leading institution of higher learning in Borneo by strengthening its roles, contribution and involvement in the development of knowledge.

In this special book, you will hear from my fellow pioneering colleagues as they recount their early days at a newly established public university as we worked together to mould UNIMAS into a reputable institution of higher education. This book reflects the collective aspiration of our founding members including UNIMAS' first Vice Chancellor, Dato' Dr Ir Mohamad Zawawi Ismail. The key takeaway from the narratives that you will encounter in this book is that grit, perseverance, sacrifices, collegiality and leadership are the unifying thread that first brought us together, helped us stay through its most challenging periods and has continued to fuel our exploration as we pass on the baton to new groups of bright academics and administrative staff.

PREFACE



Dr Murtedza
Mohamed
*Coordinating
Editor*

A WhatsApp Group (WG) labelled as “UNIMAS Pioneers” was created on 20 July 2008 by the founding Vice-Chancellor, Professor Emeritus Dato’ Dr Zawawi Ismail. The idea was to provide an informal interaction platform for fellow pioneers who were involved in starting and developing the University; and this was aptly reflected in the slogan he used for the WG profile - “Good Old Times”.

The recent chats amongst the group members, specifically on the career progress and achievements of UNIMAS alumni, triggered the idea for this group and other pioneer staff and students of UNIMAS to pen short stories or brief accounts of their lives and experiences during the early days of the University. Hence, this book is a collation of stories by these pioneers; stories of their experiences, struggles, accomplishments, and memories of incidences, events, and people in their midst, that may have or may have not been shared with colleagues or fellow pioneers before. It is hoped that others, including future UNIMAS citizens, retirees, and alumni find this an interesting and worthy read, perhaps as an epilogue to other formally written history of UNIMAS.

This group memoir is the brainchild Dato’ Dr Zawawi Ismail. His impassioned bonding to UNIMAS does not end after eight years of establishing and serving the University. For this project, he actively initiated numerous discussions and tirelessly guided the editing committee through the entire process of its publication. It is hoped that this compilation of memoirs, written by his former subordinates and students, serves as a sweet memento from his episode of life and service at UNIMAS.

An attempt was made at formatting this book somewhat similarly to a typical coffee table book in terms of design and aesthetics. Nonetheless, it was rather complicated to collate text-rich stories into a table book-like format. Efforts were made to augment the stories with high-quality and relevant photographs, but old images are typically less satisfactory in terms of their resolution.

As the Coordinating Editor, I would first of all express my sincere appreciation to fellow pioneer staff and alumni of UNIMAS for contributing stories that we can all now cherish. I am also very much thankful to voluntary hard work and support of fellow pioneers who have agreed to team up as members of the Acquisition and Editorial Committee. Special thanks go to Puan Siti Sumaizan Ramli for her dedication in soliciting articles, to our ergonomist Dr Halimahtun M Khalid and renowned auteur Dr Hatta Azad Khan for their input and advice on the content and layout design of this book, and Assoc Prof Dr Fitri Suraya Mohamad Hapni Joblie, Dr Ernisa Marzuki and Dr Mahanita Mahadhir for proofreading the final manuscript. Lastly, on behalf of all the pioneers, I would like to express heartfelt gratitude to the UNIMAS management, the Vice-Chancellor in particular, for the support and consent to publish this book, and as well acknowledge it as one of the showcase items for the UNIMAS 30th Anniversary celebration.

mendalam dan menebal dalam diri beliau. Sebagai Dekan pertama dan pelopor FSKPM, nama Prof R.A. sentiasa di bibir warga fakulti juga Universiti. Prof R.A. sangat dikagumi dan sentiasa diingati. Al-Fatihah buatmu Prof.

DOWN MEMORY LANE TO PONTIANAK

Noor'ain Aini

Being the 279th person to join UNIMAS qualifies me as a pioneer, I would like to think. And if there is an advantage to being one of UNIMAS' pioneers, that would be the close bond that we have formed. Like a small town anywhere, everybody tends to know and care about everybody. Being a small community where everyone was in the know about what each other was doing, words got out that the Faculty of Social Sciences was organising a trip to Universitas Tanjung Pura (UNTAN), Pontianak, West Kalimantan. That was in mid-May 1998. Going by bus, it is perhaps prudent for me to not mention the road condition to Pontianak at that time and to simply leave it to your wild imagination. Needless to say, nobody was spared any backaches.

The trip comprised mostly of young and aspiring academia wannabes (that would be my colleagues and me), and also joined by the more established academics holding distinguished posts in UNIMAS, notably Dato' Dr Zawawi Ismail himself, our pioneering Vice Chancellor, Professor Michael Leigh, Director of the Institute of the East Asian Studies (IEAS), the late Dr Jamali Ismail, Dean of the Language Center, Dr Nidzam Sulaiman, a friend from UKM, and a few FSS senior academics namely Dr Gabriel Tonga and Dr Wan Zawawi Ibrahim. The Dean of FSS, Dr Rashid Abdullah, had to withdraw at the last minute due to a red-eye infection. But I always had the suspicion that he must have discovered the best excuse to avoid the backache.

I vividly remember this trip for two reasons. One, I was the one responsible for organising all the details, reserving the accommodations,

arranging transportation, visiting the Fakultas Ilmu Sosial dan Ilmu Politik (FISIP), UNTAN, to recce and to carry out all the leisure visits in between. I was in charge of collecting money too because that was an unofficial trip, so we paid from our own pockets, including the Vice Chancellor. It was not much money to deal with anyway as the trip only cost approximately RM150 per person. Yes, RM150 for a return trip! Of course, taking into consideration the logistical limitations at the time, you would have to reconceptualise your idea of comfort. Remember, this was way back in 1998 when technology was already there but not quite there yet. You would have to be there to understand.

Because our visit was unofficial, we thought we could just sneak into UNTAN. Dato' Dr Zawawi had earlier requested not to alert the UNTAN officials of our visit as to not inconvenience them. I was told that Indonesians are extremely hospitable people and would go to great lengths to make their guests feel welcome with elaborate and lavish ceremonies. All of which we tried to avoid. I had to inform the Dean of FISIP of our visit, though, and he had inadvertently let the secret out.



In front of (Istana) Keraton Kadariah Pontianak, a distant remnant of the Pontianak Sultanate after the last sultan was deposed by the people in 1950 following the formation of Indonesia as a republic.

Apparently, upon learning of our presence on campus, the Rector of UNTAN had Dato' Dr Zawawi and his gang "abducted" and re-routed to the Rector's office. What transpired there remained a mystery, at least to me. This was simply because by the time we reached FISIP to pay our courtesy visit, our entourage had shrunk considerably in number.

The second reason why I remember this trip well was because it was connected to an important political event: The fall of Suharto's three-decade-long presidency on May 21, 1998, barely a week after our return to UNIMAS. We witnessed firsthand the vibrant campus community in UNTAN and how open the university was in allowing peaceful demonstrations staged by students all across Indonesia.

I was so inspired by those speeches given by students who took turns to vocalise their protests against the rising prices of fuel and energy and demanded the resignation of their President. The open-mindedness of the Indonesian higher institutions (at least what we saw in UNTAN), the vocality and the intellectual articulation of points by the students were what I envisioned the future of UNIMAS would be. Alas, here I am 23 years down the road, and I have yet to see anything in UNIMAS that remotely resembles such a vibrant campus ambience. And all these despite the incessant political crisis in Malaysia that began with the Reformation in 1998, ironically, just four months after the fall of Suharto.

Backaches aside, the trip to Pontianak fostered a deep bonding among the participants. But as UNIMAS grows, both in the size of its campus and population, change is, of course, inevitable. The close bond among pioneers remains, but the sense of belonging to a close-knit community slowly dissipates.

As values and goals change with time and technology, like a big town anywhere, people tend to mind their own business more and care about others less. "Intelligence is the ability to adapt to change", so said Stephen Hawking. Although I do not necessarily agree, I must concede, adapt we must.



UNIMAS entourage making our way into the UNTAN campus, trying to be as inconspicuous as possible. At least, so we thought.



With the Dean and dozens during our courtesy visit to FISIP.