

# **REPORT ON PROF HALIM ALI VISIT TO THE FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCE 8 OCTOBER – 11 OCTOBER 2012**

## **Introduction**

The office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor for Academic and International has formally appointed Prof Halim Ali as the Adjunct Professor for the Faculty of Social Sciences effective from 1 October 2012 to 30 September 2013. The Dean of the faculty, Prof Spencer, has agreed to invite Prof Halim to the faculty once the agreement was in place. The Department of Anthropology and Sociology (ANSOS) was the organiser of the event and has hosted Prof Halim's first visit to the faculty on 8 to 11 October 2012.

## **Objective**

For the first visit, there were two main objectives and purposes identified. The special emphasis was on developing and enhancing the capacity of the young academics in the faculty through research and writing workshops. Given Prof Halim's proven record in guiding the young academics during his tenure as the Chair of Nusantara Studies in the Institute of East Asian Studies (from 2002-2009), it was hoped that similar formula could be replicated during his tenure as the faculty's adjunct professor.

The second objective of his first visit was to assist in the planning and the direction of the ANSOS department, especially on matters relating to research and human capitals. A meeting was held with the head of department and the department-members on 8 October at 11 am to get to know the current state of activities and progress of the department members.

## **Programme**

There were four streams of activities which addressed the general interest of colleagues and students in the social sciences. There were:

- **READING CIRCLES**

8 & 11 October, 9- 10.30 a.m:

The activity was open to all, with the intention to encourage the culture of reading and discussion among members in the faculty. Two essays were selected by Prof Halim and discussed respectively:

1. "Research in the Social Sciences and Humanities in Malaysia: A Historical Overview" by Abdul Rahman Embong (2010)
2. "State-Society Relations in Malaysia: Moving beyond the Crossroads" by Abdul Rahman Embong (2011)

The theme of both papers talked about the historical and the current direction of social science in Malaysia. It was recognised that there have been an expansion of works and topics across various fields in social science, ranging from topics such as state power, democracy, gender, socio-economy and the middle-class. There was also recognition that the trend of multi and cross-disciplinary have been a familiar orientation among the local academics in order to present the multi-faceted nature of society.

For the future reading, it was suggested that the works by Thomas Kuhn (1962) and C. Wright Mills (1959) are to be discussed. These may bring awareness on the theoretical debates about the relation between society, science and ethics in the social science discipline.

- **ANTHROPOLOGY AND SOCIOLOGY SEMINAR**

9 & 10 October, 9- 11 am:

The activity was open to all and received positive and enthusiastic responses among the academic staff, postgraduates and undergraduates in the faculty. There were two topics presented by Prof Halim on the respective dates:

1. “Contemporary Issues in Malaysian Social Science”: discussion centred on the ideological war of positions debated in the early 1970s between the two social science departments in UKM and UM. The debate had cemented the move towards a progressive and productive social science in the period between 1970 and 1990. There was however, a decline since then. With consolidation, closing of departments and the dwindling numbers of seasoned academics and undergraduates in both universities, social science-especially the field of sociology- struggle against the forces of markets and politics. The speaker was optimistic that a new ideological battleground shall resume and lay his hope and prediction that UNIMAS will lead her way in reviving the spirit of debate.
  2. “Social Science Research in Sarawak”: The speaker took the audience back in the time of Edmund Leach first survey of Sarawak in 1948. He argued that social science in Sarawak began with Leach socio-economic survey, although he did not dismissed the pioneering role of Sarawak Museum in initiating a social research. Some of the works by the members of the faculty such as by Dr Hew Cheng Sim, Dr Ling How Kee and Dr Mohd Faisal Syam were cited to illustrate the diversity of topics and approaches. The speaker concluded his talk by calling for a strengthening of theory relating to the subject-matter studied and methodology applied in research.
- Capacity-building Workshops 9, 10 & 11 October: The workshops target the young academics and the postgraduates in the faculty. They were run on three themes:
    1. Exploring Research Topic and Area of Interest: The participants were either still working on their Masters’ research or had just concluded their Masters and PhDs. The participants shared their research interest or topic with Prof Halim who acted as a facilitator. Various options were laid on the table such as expanding the project that they have started in their Masters/PhD research or joined the others’ research project as a team-member or to initiate a completely new research/interest quite apart from their PhD. Dr Gusni was present during the discussion too. He had shared his past experience on writing for a research proposal and had also shared his current research and book project.
    2. Theory and Methodology in Social Science: Prof Halim acted as a facilitator and assisted by Dr Faisal Syam. He shared his experience working in a research team under the guidance of Prof Halim back in 2003. The pros and cons of a cluster research were discussed. However, it was concluded that a

cluster research is a good start for young academics to learn from the senior researchers about the conduct of research and on the aspects of methods.

3. Writing and publication: Prof Halim and Dr Gusni proposed that an edited book comprised of the essays from those who had just returned from their graduate studies. It will be published by UNIMAS Press and there is a strong support to have Dr Gusni as the book editor. In Prof Halim's next visit, there will be a paper-presentation by the contributors of the edited book before the essay is submitted for publication in 2013.

- **GUEST LECTURE for SSF 2063 Approaches to Social Inquiry:**

8 October 2012 4 – 6 pm.

Prof Halim spent 1 hour and 30 minutes to deliver a lecture to the second year students of the faculty. The topic chosen was on "The Importance of Nomenclature for Social Inquiries". Students were taught on the basic concepts in social science like social structure, social system and social roles. The basic approaches to explain social problems were also discussed namely the natural law approach, the monistic approach and the pluralistic approach. A short verbal exercise was also given to test the students' understanding of the lecture in which they were expected to provide their justification for the approach chosen to solve the hypothetical problem posed by the lecturer. Overall, the students had given a positive feedback while some had personally thanked Prof Halim at the end of the lesson for his fruitful and informative lecture.

- **MENTORING SESSIONS**

9, 10 & 11 October, 12 – 2 pm.

Open for all academic staff and postgraduates. The response from the postgraduates was positive and they had called to Prof Halim's office to talk about their research.

## **Recommendation**

The organiser has received several feedbacks from the guest, participants and colleagues about the running of the programme. While the responses from the colleagues and students in the faculty were overall positive, supportive and encouraging, there are areas that needed attention. They are summarised as follow:

1. Programme to be held during the semester break: Although there was a recognition that the activities planned were well-attended and the outstanding efforts made by the participants to get involved in as much activities as possible, there was also a call made to organise the programme during the semester break.
2. The guest to be given a break in-between his hectic schedule: This is a response that the organiser received from the guest himself and those among his friends. This was a point which has been overlooked earlier and to be taken on board for future planning.

3. The menu to be more representative and of variety: This is subject to the faculty's budget, the head of department's consent and the person who planned the menu.
4. Suggestion for a working-committee to execute the event/programme: It may be a good idea to have some members in the department to involve in the preparation of the programme. This can give a sense of participation and involvement to those who are not attached to any official duty in the department in order to broaden contributions across various members in the department. This matter is subject to the head of department's prerogative.

### **Conclusion**

Overall, Prof Halim first visit to the faculty was a success. The attendance to the programme was really well indeed despite being held during the teaching week. Colleagues across departments came and lend their support for the activities. There were aspects that need improvement for the purpose of future planning as identified earlier. The ANSOS department is looking forward at organising the next Prof Halim's visit to the faculty and shall be announcing the details in due course.

Signed by the Head of Anthropology and Sociology Department (ANSOS)