

Islamic studies at its best

Integrating Islamic values and teachings harmoniously into its academic programmes, USIM aims to bring Islamic studies into the mainstream of national education. **Gregory Basil** visits the campus to learn more about what the university has to offer prospective students.

SPANNING across a lush campus in the outskirts of Negri Sembilan, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM) commenced its academic session in 2000 with the primary objective of upholding, enhancing and bringing up the prestige of Islamic Studies to the mainstream of education.

This unique approach to learning and living has seen the university to grow from a mere university-college to a full-fledged university in Bandar Baru Nilai with eight faculties, five centres of excellence and 10 centres.

One of the centres is the Centre for Graduate Studies which was established in 2002 as the university felt that in order to increase the number of good researchers a graduate school was of utmost importance.

"In order to produce a good research paper that is worthy of publication in a good journal, postgraduate students will be required to carry out a lot of research and the Centre for Graduate Studies will be the perfect avenue for them as it is the centre for producing master's and doctorate holders," says Professor Dr Bachok M. Taib, Dean of the Centre for Graduate Studies (CGS).

Professor Bachok says that postgraduate studies help develop human capital as we are still lacking in the amount of doctorate holders. The establishment of CGS is also USIM's way of contributing to the Ministry of Higher Education's goal to

escalate the number doctorates to 60,000 by the year 2023.

THE USIM ADVANTAGE: USIM stands out from other public or private universities because no matter what programme a student is taking, the element of Islamic education and values is injected into all of its courses regardless of the faculty.

"We have a slightly different way of thinking and doing things here at USIM," says Professor Bachok with a smile. "If a student comes from a traditional Islamic studies institution, chances are they become religious teachers or kadis or imams but the USIM advantage is that even with an Islamic studies background, students get to be doctors, engineers, scientists, dentists and even lawyers. We try to cater to a wider audience by offering students more professional fields."

A regular law degree takes four years to complete, however, it at USIM it takes five years. Professor Bachok says that this is because students will be taught regular law subjects as well as syariah law and will be awarded with a double major giving them an added edge.

HOW IT WORKS: Professor Bachok says that six of the eight faculties at USIM offer postgraduate programmes. Master's programmes are offered via coursework and research and this September will see the introduction of the mixed mode.

"Mixed mode will allow students to



complete their master's with a combination of about 50 per cent coursework and 50 per cent research. They start off their first semester through just coursework. They start with their research during their second semester and finally in the third semester, they carry out their research independently. Doctorate programmes, on the other hand, are carried out fully via research," explains Professor Bachok.

Another factor that is unique to USIM is that students are allowed to only write their thesis in English or Arabic.

"This is because most students at the university are previously from Islamic schools and if we allow them to write their thesis in Bahasa Malaysia, they will have a

poor command of English and Arabic," Professor Bachok explains. "By doing so, we are training them to have a solid grasp of both languages."

At present, the population of foreign graduate students at USIM exceeds the population of local graduate students. "Most of our foreign students are from Middle East countries and this I think is greatly attributed to the fact that we allow students to write their thesis in Arabic. Our foreign student population is also made up of students from Singapore, China, Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia and Libya," Professor Bachok says.

In keeping with its international approach, USIM is also working towards



Professor Dr Bachok M. Taib

employing 20 per cent of foreign lecturers. At present, USIM has medical lecturers coming from Egypt, as well as -Quranic and Sunnah lecturers from Jordan, Libya and Nigeria. The university plans to expand this list to give its students a more global feel.

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE: USIM also offers zamalah, more commonly known as scholarships, to its students. The university offers two types of zamalahs.

The first one involves USIM paying the tuition fees and also providing monthly spending money for the students while the other one includes just the payment of the tuition fees. Both zamalahs are open to international and local students.

Master's students are sponsored for two years which is equivalent to four semesters while doctorate students are sponsored for three years which equals to six semesters.

A whole new world awaits students who take up graduate programmes at USIM. By providing them with a holistic education that incorporates Islamic values and ethics, USIM is one university that has indeed plenty to offer.