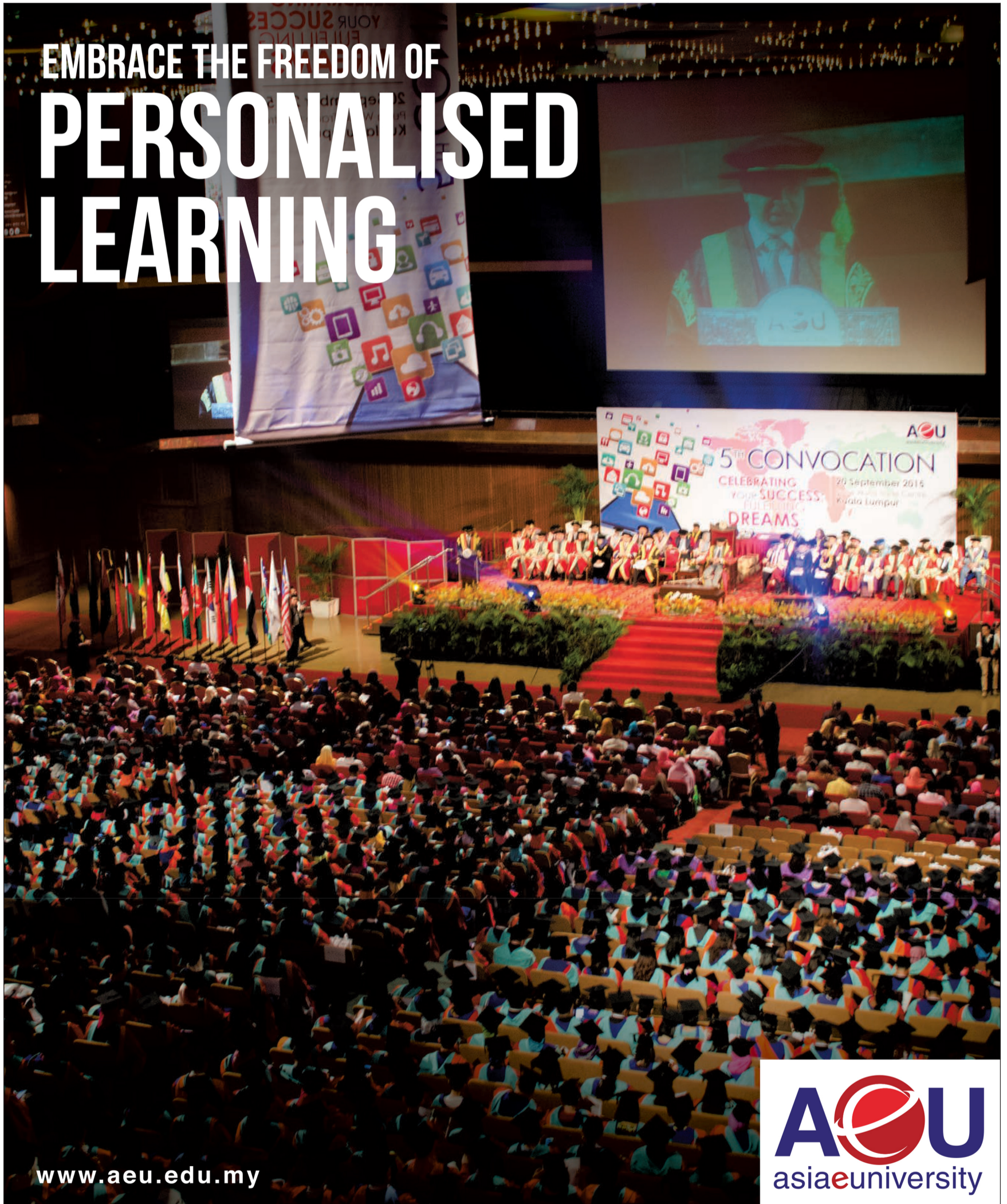


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Personalised for adult learners

ASIA e University (AeU) has a long history of extending opportunities to adult learners who wish to progress in higher education. Each year, AeU welcomes

learners of all ages into its various programmes of study. As many AeU students continue to work full time, AeU makes education accessible

by offering flexibility, balance and focus as well as compassionate staff dedicated to serving adult learners. Through AeU, adult learners can

upgrade their knowledge and skills for career progression and pursue lifelong learning ambitions, all within the comfort of their own pace, space and time.

Here are some of the success stories from AeU's alumni and students.

> SEE NEXT PAGE

Dr Nixon Alberth Simamora, business consultant, Indonesia

Dr Simamora graduated with the Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) last year. He has 20 years of experience in Indonesia, Japan, Australia and the United States in the manufacturing industry and energy sector.

His dissertation is titled *Employee Readiness for Organizational Change: Case Study in a Local Plastic Packaging Manufacturing Company in Java, Indonesia*.

Having worked for a few international companies since completing his undergraduate and postgraduate degrees, Dr Nixon was interested in building upon his business acumen and felt a DBA would help him fill the gaps.

He was considering a full-time programme when a friend told

him about the AeU DBA, which would offer him the flexibility to continue working while earning his doctorate.

"AeU DBA provided me the chance to continue doing a job I enjoy and gain the diverse business skill set I was looking for," says Dr Nixon.

"One of the big advantages I discovered was that working while learning gives you an opportunity to apply the lessons you learn and skills you gain immediately. I felt the online format offered more interaction than what I know a traditional on-campus programme would.

"My classmates were a great set of peers. We supported each other, pushed each other and offered each other advice."

The AeU DBA has also helped Dr Nixon fine-tune skills that are



crucial to his professional success, such as time management.

He says he has become an expert in this respect, especially as he attempted to balance his family, career and education day to day while pursuing the DBA.

Mohamed Anif Sallay, chief executive officer of a finance company in Sri Lanka

Mohamed Anif graduated with a Master of Business Administration (MBA) in 2014. He says, "From day one, I was impressed by the quality of the teaching at AeU. Everything was extremely top notch. It's what you would expect from a business programme.

"Another thing that impressed me about the programme was the calibre and diversity of my classmates. Their experiences and resumes were really impressive. The interactions we've had and what I've learnt from group projects and online classroom discussions are great."

When asked about learning in an online classroom, he says, "I got more personal attention and interaction than I've gotten in the past from some of my on-campus learning experiences. I think it has a lot to do with how AeU creates classes that foster interaction."

AeU's unique format provides the flexibility of learning online with the interconnectedness of a vibrant global community.

This whole new level of engagement and interactivity gives working professionals such as Mohamed Anif the opportunity to advance their careers and make their mark



anywhere in the world.

"The flexible learning experience that I enjoyed during my study allowed minimal disruption to my family and work commitments. It also helped me overcome the challenges that I faced in adjusting my time and roles as a professional, husband and father."

After graduation, Mohamed Anif is looking forward to leveraging the new contacts he has made and focusing on what comes next.

"My personal goal for earning an MBA was that I wanted a better understanding of business concepts – I definitely achieved that. Now, I'm looking forward to exploring opportunities in my company that involve more leadership and responsibilities," he says.

Punithavathy Kupasamy, owner and principal of Taska Day Care Center, Genting Highlands

Punithavathy graduated with a Graduate Diploma in Early Childhood Education from AeU last year. She continues her higher education at AeU in the Master of Education (MEd) with a specialisation in early childhood education.

Her eldest daughter, 19, has also enrolled in AeU's Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood Education).

"Working as a school teacher while pursuing my MEd is certainly not easy, but I find the experience to be deeply rewarding," says Punithavathy.

"Experiencing the level of engagement that AeU lecturers bring to their students, for example, has motivated me to generate the same enthusiasm in my own classroom."

"The lecturers' enthusiasm and passion reinforced how I should act and respond to good ideas when my own students

voice their opinions in my classroom. Classrooms are a safe place to take risks and to fail, and my lecturers remind me of that important aspect of education, which helps me be a better educator."

According to Punithavathy, AeU MEd's approach to education encourages independence and collaboration. Students are allowed the freedom and flexibility to study on their own and determine how to best fit projects and assignments into their schedules.

At the same time, group projects and live sessions enable students to leverage the expertise of their peers and benefit from working with their classmates.

As a teacher in a brick-and-mortar setting, Punithavathy is attuned to the quality of an educational experience.



Not only does she speak highly of her learning experience with AeU MEd, she also found the online classes to be a source of inspiration for her own teaching style as an educator.

"This programme has given me a very holistic view and valuable insight into the field of education. AeU's flexible mode of learning allows me to access learning materials online, whenever I can and wherever I am. This makes it so easy to plan my study time effectively," she adds.

Mafio Matthew Mlambo, minister from the Embassy of Zimbabwe in Malaysia

Graduating with an MBA degree from AeU last year, Mlambo says, "The flexibility of the online format coupled with online resources and exceptional student experience were the overwhelming factors in choosing AeU MBA.

"I wanted the degree to hold weight in the business community and provide a schedule that would allow for classes and projects to be completed wherever my business responsibilities took me.

"I have attended classes during business trips, vacations and at my international branch offices. This would have been impossible with a traditional MBA programme."

According to Mlambo, another advantage of the programme was the flexibility of completing his coursework in his own timing.

"AeU's unique, flexible approach to learning means I didn't have to put my life on hold to get a qualification.



"For me, the AeU pledge to personalised learning is its hallmark. AeU accommodated my learning style and provided me with a personalised and adaptive learning support. I was able to structure my own learning at a pace of my choice and adopt learning modes that complemented my lifestyle."

He adds, "When you attend AeU, you're never alone. From registration through to graduation, there are support, resources and guidance by your side to help you along the way."

Thant Thant Sin Aung, managing director, Hondeson Survey & Inspection Myanmar Ltd

Sin Aung, 55, from Myanmar enrolled in the MBA programme in April last year. She says, "The myPLS platform is not just where classes are held, but also where we meet for group meetings and study sessions (and even virtual happy hours on certain occasions).

"Earning an MBA is not a solitary venture for me; we spend a significant amount of time with our classmates in this programme. Even though I can't meet most of my classmates at the coffeeshop to catch up and discuss assignments, the

platform allows us to get together socially whenever we want.

"The AeU MBA meets the demands of high-potential professionals who want to earn an MBA from a full-fledged university without leaving their jobs.

According to Sin Aung, the flexibility of AeU MBA is apt for expatriates, professionals whose jobs require extensive travel or frequent transfers, or people with commitments such as taking care of young children or ageing parents.



Dr Mak Met, country talent manager, Sarawak Shell Bhd

Dr Met graduated with a DBA degree last year. His dissertation is titled Effect of Monetary Motivation and Demographic Factors on Employee Job Satisfaction and Performance in Malaysian Oil and Gas Industry.

He testifies, "I chose AeU because of its flexible blended-mode learning and weekend classes. The scope of studies features both contemporary and futuristic thinking with a balanced emphasis on theory and industrial applications.

"The course fee is affordable and the learning environment is stimulating and above my expectations. The knowledge

gained from theories, methodologies and research has sharpened my method and approach in problem-solving in business and management."

Dr Met also notes that the presentations made and public speaking experience gained in AeU DBA have made him much more confident in these areas.

However, juggling work, a growing family and study did not come without sacrifices.

"You learn to live with a whole lot less sleep than you ever thought you could. You also find yourself reprioritising your life," says Dr Met. One sacrifice he did not have to make was the quality of his degree.



Redefining education

> FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

"We are proud to provide outreach that is consistent with AeU's mission and allows students to earn their degree from wherever they are in the world. We treasure our special culture and are excited to extend it and build the community in ways that are not bound by location," says Mizana Muhamad, director of communications at AeU.

According to her, AeU is developing a student-focused institution that is superior to anything that exists today. "Technology has transformed all parts of our lives and will ultimately redefine education, too. We have the opportunity to rethink

how we teach what our students need to know, and AeU has a rare opportunity to lead a transformation. We are excited to be in the vanguard of that change," adds Mizana.

AeU offers an affordable and accessible pathway to higher education through flexible entry requirements and a learner-friendly academic system.

Working adults without the conventional prerequisite qualifications can choose AeU's Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) entry route, which recognises prior work experience as a criterion for enrolment.

■ For more information, call 1300 300 238 or visit www.aeu.edu.my.



ATC offers its graduates a head start in the field of law by equipping them with the right academic and practical skills.

Advancement in law

ADVANCE Tertiary College (ATC) offers the ideal educational chronology for law students.

It hones skills from the groundwork with courses such as A-Levels with the University of Cambridge, Bachelor of Laws (LLB) External Programme with the University of London and Certificate in Legal Practice (CLP) with ATC itself.

At the institution, classes actively and consistently engage students. Moreover, ATC provides flexible class timing that includes extra classes, weekend classes and evening classes.

For the A-Levels programme with the University of Cambridge, ATC offers seven subjects – law, business studies, mathematics, economics, thinking skills, accounting and English literature.

Students study three or four subjects to obtain the A-Levels qualification. With two passes from the A-Levels examination, students can pursue the LLB External Programme with the University of London at ATC.

The LLB External Programme at ATC allows individuals to complete a world-class UK law degree locally within three years.

In the LLB programme, students are exposed to a variety of fields of law, including contract law, family law and European Union law, depending

on their interests and level of study.

Upon completion of the LLB with the University of London with second class and above, students can move on to obtain their CLP.

ATC is the one-stop centre for all aspiring young lawyers. Not only are your academic skills perfected with the completion of your studies in law, you may also gain actual skills by having the opportunity to join ATC's Moot Programme.

ATC also provides a good opportunity for students to expose themselves through participation in clubs and societies, such as the Rotaract Club and the Asian Law Students' Association (ALSA).

Through these intermediaries, students get to venture into the legal system, see the works of it, meet the people within it and build their connection at an early stage.

Individuals with LLB can opt to be a mediator, legal editor, professor, activist or politician.

ATC offers other study options for those not looking for a career in law. Its School of Business Management offers Certificate in Business Studies, Diploma in Marketing and Management and Bachelor (Hons) in Business Studies.

■ For more information, visit www.atc2u.edu.my.

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4 work & study

By RACHEL PUNITHA

EDUCATIONAL establishments, sensing a shift from traditional to flexible learning that is adaptive to technology, are tailoring the dynamics of their programmes to fit working individuals, with some even specialising only in part-time courses.

Institutions such as Asia e University (AeU) have wrapped their entire pedagogy and programme delivery around learners instead of the other way around.

Assessments, assignments and examinations have become functional and practical, using real-time scenarios and results.

Adult or mature learners are typically working individuals above 25 years old and are involved in some form of learning. They are aware of the many advantages of working and studying simultaneously.

The best thing about it is that they need not forgo their jobs to further their studies, which means they can continue to earn a steady income while studying – a foreign concept not too long ago. In addition, adult learners learn invaluable intrinsic skills by juggling these two areas.

Adult learners are also aware of some of the downsides to working and studying. They know that when they decide to do it, they are signing up for a few hectic years ahead and have to mentally prepare themselves to sacrifice time, energy and savings to further their education.

However, as prepared as they thought they were during enrolment, dropout rates of adult learners are still high, according to higher learning institutions.

The myriad of issues adult learners face may be greater than initially expected, but there are ways to ameliorate these challenging circumstances.

Making sacrifices

Dr Danny Choong, principal and chief executive officer of Advance Tertiary College (ATC), says that adult learners should be clear about what it would take to study and work at the same time, including sacrificing family and personal time.

Even though working adults are no stranger to making sacrifices, the magnitude of commitment involved in working and studying is often overlooked.

The heavy commitments that come with studying will be piled onto the sacrifices individuals are already making for work.

Chronic lack of sleep, missing out on important family milestones and giving up leisure time are some of the time issues many adult learners have to face.

Possible approach
Start by prioritising commitments – examinations, deadlines, classes, holidays and even milestones such as family birthdays or weddings. This



Continuing your education while working is a bold move forward that requires careful considerations and adjustments in your life.

Making it work

allows you to forgo the less important things and ensures you attend what is important to you.

As you rate them one by one, you can weigh the pros and cons of each activity or event and ascertain how important certain things are to you and your family.

This helps you make better decisions calmly at the start and not have to rush into making a choice in the middle of the academic year when the pressure is on.

Plan to let go of events and elements that are not a priority. Make the necessary arrangements for them – call, RSVP and inform way beforehand.

More often than not, your closest family members and friends will understand your non-appearance provided you are honest with them and ask for patience while you complete your studies.

If you have young or teenage children, letting them understand your choice to study and witness your commitment to it might help them make better decisions in their own educational journey later on.

Along with planning for your absence, plan for personal



Prof Christina Lee.

Adult or mature learners are typically working individuals above 25 years old and are involved in some form of learning. They are aware of the many advantages of working and studying simultaneously.

commitments as well. For instance, make it known to your family or friends that Sunday afternoons will be wholly spent with them, gadget- and distraction-free.

Make plans for a short getaway or fun treat once your examinations for every semester are over.

Families should be kept in the loop as they too have to make sacrifices, but by supporting the adult learner, everybody will benefit in the future.

Learning to divide time

Using your 24 hours wisely can be another tall order. According to Dr Choong, time management is the No.1 setback adult learners face when juggling work and study.

Many people often overestimate the amount of work they can accomplish in 24 hours. Commitments, errands, meetings and school can quickly fill up the day.

“The most common problem faced by learners at AeU is balancing work commitments. It is normal for our learners to be hard-pressed juggling between attending

tutorials and assignments and work commitments,” says AeU’s founder and president Prof Datuk Dr Ansary Ahmed.

“This, together with family commitment, takes time, meaning that learners must master time management, setting priorities and working smart.”

Having too much to do in one day can eat into crucial activities such as sleep and exercise, leading to lethargy and exhaustion that can cause you to miss important appointments or half-heartedly attend to your commitments, such as studying for your examinations.

Possible approach

Be precise in your scheduling – this includes writing down your study and sleep time. As long as you keep to your schedule, you do not have to worry about not having invested enough time to sleep or study.

You can take a break from your schedule during the holidays or between semesters.

Plan your annual leave as well. Prof Christina Lee, director of MBA International at Monash University Malaysia, says that most of her students use their annual leave to complete assignments and examinations.

Because they understand adult learners’ predicament, educational institutions have been actively providing as much help as possible.

Such help includes counselling sessions and seminars, round-the-clock hotlines and easy-to-navigate study materials to help adult learners cope with their studies.

Monash, for example, accommodates adult learners’ needs by planning and providing a study schedule set for the entire year.

This way, adult learners need not worry about planning their own study schedule and need only to focus on scheduling their work and family commitments around it.

Knowing the entire year’s

study schedule also makes it possible to plan and confirm events with family members or colleagues ahead of time, thus reducing grouses and disappointments.

Another effective way to manage time is to get technology on your side. Synchronise all your calendars into one on your phone and download apps that make managing your to-do list more accessible and convenient.

With the combination of technology, the study institution and your hard work, you can ace this juggling act.

Going back to school

The idea of going back to school can be daunting for many adults as they may not have been in a classroom environment for a significant number of years.

“The set of skills required to read and write lengthy articles, analyse case studies, scan hundreds of pages for information or make sense of complicated theories may not have been in use in a long while,” says Prof Lee.

This has sometimes been a direct cause of adult learners dropping out of their programmes.

Possible approach

The first step of coping with this transition is to ask for help. Educational institutions, especially those for part-time studies, are well-versed with the challenges adult learners face.

In-house comprehensive online support platforms such as the Student Assistance Support System (SASSY) at ATC and AeU’s personalised learning platform myPLS have proved to be crucial instruments in assisting adult learners in their day-to-day educational journey.

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Finding a balance leads to success

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Through these platforms, adult learners can make appointments with tutors, discuss educational or personal issues with peers, submit assignments, post complaints and check schedules.

Dr Choong from ATC says the blended-learning modes at online learning institutions have become the preferred choice for many adult learners.

Institutions such as Monash prepare their learners from the onset of the programme. During the first two days, Monash learners are oriented and eased back into a learning environment with as much help as possible.

They complete a unit on critical thinking to prepare them for the year's intensive study. The unit provides learners with best practices and effective learning strategies to help them use their time more productively.

Riding solo

For fresh secondary school-leavers pursuing tertiary education, the high of having many friends and long hangout sessions indirectly contribute to the overall success of their education.

Updating each other on classes or announcements, lending a hand in

assignments and revisions, and covering for unavoidable absences or late submissions can strengthen the bonds between peers.

As you progress in life, the pull of various commitments becomes stronger especially when you are in the workforce. This can cause you to loosen your grip on the commitment of friendships.

Hence, when you are working and studying, depending on yourself is somewhat second nature along with depending on the academic staff of your programme.

This is especially so for those who take up distance or fully online learning as coursemates may be hundreds of miles away and the only contact they might ever make with each other is a brief one during convocation. Thus, they most probably would not experience a strong bond with their classmates.

However, Prof Lee says that although online learning is permanently imprinted in today's education landscape, the physical and social interaction between members of the

cohort and the instructor adds a crucial dimension to learning.

Feeling left out, being stumped on assignment questions, missing examination dates or not completely understanding some theories does not only happen to youngsters. It can happen to anyone, regardless of age and circumstances.

Dr Choong says that academic



Dr Danny Choong.



Keeping in touch and mingling with coursemates help build a strong support system to help you through your journey.

discourse with the tutor and coursemates is imperative to achieve effective learning.



Possible approach

Research and use the best of social media or messaging apps that connect you to your coursemates.

There are social media groups, university and external forums, chats, or online discussions that you can actively participate in. This can be your best source of announcements, updates, clarifications, help and even answers.

These tools are especially important to individuals who do not make friends easily, do not have the time to be physically present or are far away geographically.

Also, try your best to make it for scheduled meetings, seminars, classes and hangout sessions during your online or part-time learning journey.

If there are not many such events in your programme or tertiary institution, initiate one yourself. You can plan to meet up or study with a few of your coursemates in a library or cafes that are work- or child-friendly.

These places give you the chance to meet and mingle with others who are in the same boat as you are.

You will be surprised by how much you can gain from having a support system. To have your coursemates as your compatriots is vital in gaining insight into how you can ace your studies.

Managing your load

Taking on extra subjects or assignments beyond the required amount in the hopes of reducing your study duration may not be a good idea. This same principle can apply to

work and family as well.

Taking on new projects, assignments and commitments at work or at home during the course of your studies may cause unnecessary strain on yourself and relationships in your life, whether personal or business.

There are ways to motivate yourself, but to bite off more than you can chew may cause you to be unsuccessful in certain areas of your work, studies or family relationships.



Possible approach

Take the required number of subjects – or less if you have to. Many universities even allow only one subject to be taken per semester.

This kind of flexibility not only allows you to pass every course towards the completion of the programme, but to properly gain the knowledge and experience you signed up for.

At the home or work front, as much as possible, schedule large commitments such as moving house, having a child, getting a new car or changing your jobs around your examinations or submissions.

Prof Lee says this includes discussing with your employer and significant other about your career goals and your intention to further your studies so that they will be in the know when you decline an invitation or commitment to work-related matters.

When adult learners embark on a programme, they do not enter this journey alone as the people they work and live with will be affected, too.

However, it is important that they have the support of their employer, spouse and family.

Finishing first and fast is not the answer in any aspect of your life. It is more important to finish the race well regardless of the amount of time you take.

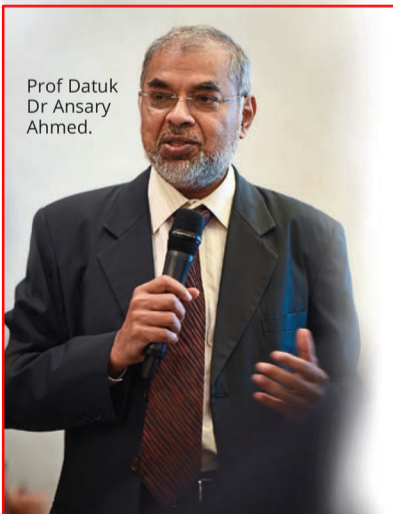
The shift in education

The education landscape has definitely changed for the better, thanks to technological and educational advances. New tools, apps and systems are being invented every day.


Keeping up can be difficult sometimes, but plenty of support is available from institutions, employers, co-workers, the family and technology.

All learners need to have is the commitment and desire to excel while acknowledging the reality that the life of an adult learner will be very different and will affect everyone around you.



By applying the right techniques and strategies, the end result can be very rewarding and empowering.




Prof Datuk Dr Ansary Ahmed.




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Encouraging higher learning

UNIVERSITIES around the world are constantly looking at offering a wide range of courses to attract new students, especially individuals who have already entered the workforce.

Besides running niche programmes within specific fields and knowledge areas, universities are introducing massive open online courses and online resources for the masses.

These trends are testament to large segments of the working population that are interested in pursuing further study. Be it for better career opportunities or purely for personal enrichment and development, many people are interested to upskill and gain deeper knowledge irrespective of industry.

It has been estimated that the global e-learning business that generated US\$110bil (RM450bil) last year is expected to hit US\$250bil (RM1.02trillion) by 2020, increasing the likelihood for every person to be exposed to some form of online learning.

Government and institutional support

As Malaysia has a large workforce without prior tertiary education, the Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) was introduced in 2011 by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) to allow Malaysians who lack formal academic qualifications an alternative route into universities.

This flexible evaluation programme recognises knowledge obtained through work experience, short courses, independent study, hobbies and leisure activities and other informal learning sources.

Under the purview of the Higher Education Ministry, the basic admission criteria for the different levels of tertiary education are listed below.

Certificate

- Above 19 years old
- Relevant work experience

Diploma

- Above 20 years old in the year of application
- Relevant work experience

Bachelor's degree

- Above 21 years old in the year of application
- Relevant work experience

Master's degree

- Above 30 years old in the year of application
- Possess at least STPM/diploma/foundation studies or equivalent qualifications
- Relevant work experience

Doctorate

- Above 35 years old in the year of application

- Possess at least a bachelor's degree in a relevant field or equivalent
- Have five years of relevant work experience

All applicants are subjected to APEL assessments conducted by the MQA before being allowed to enrol in institutions.

Corporate support

Unfortunately, working adults who are interested in pursuing further study are bound to face multiple challenges such as family responsibilities and a shortage of time and finance, therefore shunting the idea of going back to university.

It is crucial then for working adults to be provided with the means to complete their education.

Employers should always look to helping their staff obtain additional learning as they will eventually reap the benefits of having a better-skilled workforce.

Some ways an employer can help its staff are:

Sponsorships – The hefty tuition fees are often beyond the reach of many employees and those who decide to further their studies are sometimes ineligible for the financial aids available.

The strict regulations and the lack of flexibility of some of these options can prove difficult to achieve for most people. These include PTPTN loans that generally do not cover the total cost of the programme and Employees Provident Fund withdrawals that are only applicable for certain members.

Furthermore, opting to cover or pay part of the education costs will entitle the company for tax incentives and deductions.

To ensure employees continue to work at a company upon graduation, the terms and conditions for sponsorship can include an agreed duration of service with the company.

Study leave – Having days off in addition to annual leave will give employees adequate time to complete the various course assignments, attend seminars or study trips and prepare for examinations.

By having a resource of highly trained professionals with new knowledge and expertise, employers will have a group of inspired individuals who are eager to apply what they have learnt to their work, consequently implementing improved processes that will ultimately lead to more cost-and labour-efficient outcomes and exciting business opportunities such as expansions and acquisitions.



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