SGS welcomes the New Year 2012 with the highest number of student intake in its history.
As reflected in Table 1, the receptive intake of international students showed an astounding surge of approximately 70% while new registered students for postgraduate programmes recorded an increase of 27%. Additionally, the current number of 297 local students registered for doctoral programmes is expected to increase and further surpass the targeted number as the duration for student registration will continue for 4 more weeks to come.

Corresponding with the goal of the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education to produce 60,000 Malaysian doctoral degree candidates by 2023, the new semester also ushers the New Year 2012 with a new PhD programme, the Doctor of Engineering or D. Eng for short. This new doctoral research degree is open to practicing engineers from the industry to help spur experts in the field to explore more viable solutions within the industry and bring fresh inspiration into our dictum, “With knowledge, we serve.”

SGS wishes our entire UPM community including academics, administrative staff and valued students an especially happy and rewarding new year 2012!
The 35th UPM Convocation Ceremony
15 to 19 October 2011

A week prior to the 35th UPM Convocation Ceremony, the School of Graduate Studies (SGS) was already abuzz with earnest preparations. Graduates were seen across campus picking up their graduation gowns and invitation cards, posing for photographs, filling in their 2011 graduates acknowledgment surveys for the Ministry of Higher Education and UPM, getting together for the rehearsal ceremony, visiting highlights of the event across campus, which included a sales carnival showcasing farmed on-campus produce, academic regalia and gifts as well as sampling a sumptuous spread of affordable local delights. Good cheer, pride and enthusiasm continued to resonate across campus throughout the slated graduation week from 15 to 19 October 2011. This electrifying sense of thrill rose to a peak during the morning of the first session. Proud parents, guardians, well wishers and graduates swamped the grounds of the Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah Cultural and Arts Centre, Universiti Putra Malaysia in anticipation of an extraordinarily successful ceremony.

By 8:00am graduates were ushered to a separate area from their guests as the military line-up and royal percussion band took their positions at the entrance of the Centre and prepared to engage their respective formations to receive our Tuanku Canselor, Duli Yang Maha Mulia Sultan Sharafuddin Idris Shah Alhaj Ibni Almarhum Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah Alhaj.

While guests were escorted into the hall, graduates paved their way to partake in the parade before making their grand entrance into the hall where beaming well wishers awaited to greet them on both sides. Preliminary proceedings extended with the announcement of the entrance of the Grand Procession, followed by the Pro Chancellor’s Procession, where all present were requested to stand in preparation of the final and most momentous, the Chancellor’s procession into the hall. His Royal Highness’ entrance was led by the bearer of the cokmar or mace, which represents the power bestowed upon UPM with the blessings of DYMM Seri Paduka Baginda Yang di-Pertuan Agong on 30 July 1977 in conjunction with the appointment of the university’s first chancellor, DYMM Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah Ibni Al-Marhum Sultan Hisamuddin Alam Shah Al-Haj. Each procession was duly followed with a few minutes of silence in honour of past, present and future academicians.

The conclusion of ceremonial processions commenced with a prayer by Tuan Haji Mohamed Ghazali Hj Ali, Director of the Islamic Centre. This was followed by an announcement by Professor Dato’ Ir. Dr. Mohd Saleh Jaafar, representative of the Vice Chancellor who proceeded to invite our Tuanku Chancellor to declare the official opening of the first session of the 35th UPM Convocation Ceremony.

Upon our Tuanku Chancellor’s declaration, Professor Dr. Hasanah Mohd Ghazali, Dean of the School of Graduate Studies proceeded to invite His Royal Highness to inaugurate the proceedings and bestow the first graduates in the list of graduates with their doctoral degrees. A musical interlude ensued prior to succeeding proceedings to bestow listed graduates with their master degrees. This was followed with an inspiring proclamation by our Tuanku Chancellor, which included an audio-visual presentation. Highlights from this presentation include a declaration of an impressive 7,327 total number of graduates for the ceremony. Of the total number of graduates, 369 received their doctoral degrees; 1,816 received their master degrees; 4,744 received their bachelor degrees and 398 individuals received their diplomas. Some of the more interesting highlights further included the proud achievement of producing over 350 doctoral candidates and successfully graduating three inaugural groups of students. The first
During the interlude, all present were treated to a live tenor performance by Bernard Tan Yong Boon, a first year, Bachelor of Music student before the respective Deans of Faculties proceeded to invite Tuanku Chancellor to bestow remaining graduates with their degrees. Subsequently, Professor Dr. Hasanah Mohd Ghazali, Dean of the School of Graduate Studies announced the initiation of the award of university prizes. This announcement is followed with an invitation by Professor Dato’ Dr. Mohd Saleh Jaafar, the representative of the Vice Chancellor to His Royal Highness, Tuanku Chancellor to bestow the Gold Chancellor Award to Ms. Ng Kit Lin; the Royal Educational Award to Ms. Elmy Binti Talip and Mr. Ong Ban Shui; the Gold Alumni Award to Mr. Megat Marwan Bin Megat Nizar; the Gold Medal Award of Yayasan Pak Rashid to Mr. Khairul Na'im Bin Ya'akub; the Gold Medal of Professor Emeritus Tan Sri Dr. Rashdan Baba to Ms. Wong Yee May; the Agribio Medal Award to Mr. Low Wei Han and the Syed Kecik Prize to Ms. Nur Diyana Binti Mohamad Tahir.

In closing the ceremonial proceedings to bestow successful graduates with their degrees, Mr. Sabran Abd. Kahar who received his Master degree in Corporate Communications, represented the graduates of the 35th UPM convocation ceremony to deliver a rousing where he stressed the importance of honouring one’s parents, guardians, family and nation. This is succeeded with a stirring declaration by Professor Dato’ Ir. Dr. Mohd Saleh Jaafar that every graduate of the 35th UPM Convocation Ceremony is now recognised as a member of the university’s 2011 Alumni. This declaration is followed with an invitation to our Tuanku Chancellor’s declaration, all present were requested to stand and partake in the university’s theme song, “Putra Gemilang.” A final announcement ensued to proclaim the departure of our Tuanku Chancellor from the hall. The departure of our beloved Tuanku Chancellor, Duli Yang Maha Mulia Sultan Sharafuddin Idris Shah Alhaj Ibni Almarhum Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah Alhaj was duly ensued with his entourage, the departure of the Pro Chancellor Procession and finally the Grand Procession before graduates and guests dispersed from the hall and pushed forward towards plans to celebrate their prodigy’s achievement of a lifetime.

Wishing all 35th UPM Convocation Ceremony graduates a brighter future.
1. Effective Search Strategies
On the Internet, the user has access to a wide variety of search services and tools. The provided sites in Table 1 describe the various avenues available for finding information on the Internet as well as outlining strategies and offering practical suggestions for searching.

Table 1: Various avenues available for finding information on the Internet (Only three examples)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Search Places</th>
<th>Guidelines on how to search</th>
<th>Website link</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The search engine list</td>
<td>Comprehensive list of Search Engines. It is important to know that search engines covering contents from all published works on the Net such as companies’ production, news, etc. So it is hard to find good academic recourses using such search engine.</td>
<td><a href="http://www.thesearchenginelist.com/">http://www.thesearchenginelist.com/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master Journal List</td>
<td>The master journal list includes all journal titles covered in scientific products. It should be mentioned that there are plenty of journal lists for searchable databases of which only three of them are indexed in the Web of Science (WOS) platform. We normally call them ISI indexed journals. This information about ISI indexed journals is normally presented and updated every year in the Journal Citation Report (JCR) platform.</td>
<td><a href="http://science.thomsonreuters.com/mjl/">http://science.thomsonreuters.com/mjl/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citation Tracker</td>
<td>Almost all databases have citation record tools that allow them to save every citation recorded for the journals subscribed in their indexed list.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>As stated above, WOS platform has three main indexes as below</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Arts and Humanities Citation Index Source Publication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Science Citation Index Expanded Source Publication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social Science Citation Index Source Publication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>This means that references brought along with any papers published within journals in ISI index will influence the citation of other journals (e.g. improving impact factor). If only both covered in ISI indexed (e.g the cited and citing journal should be in the same citation tracker).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Knowing this we can search for the most cited journals based on our research interest.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 1:</td>
<td>search for the interest keyword as “topic” or “title”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2:</td>
<td>sort the search result based on the citation number from the highest to the lowest.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 3:</td>
<td>Click from the first items and see which journal already published it.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 4:</td>
<td>Check whether the mentioned journal is subscribed in your host library or not. If yes, try to search it in the related websites that cover the journal (e.g. Sciencedirect covers more than 6000 journals in its search engine).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some of the citation trackers are mentioned below:
Academic OneFile, Chemical Abstracts Service (CAS), Chemistry Citation Index, ChemWeb, CSA, Current Contents/Physical and Earth Sciences, Earthquake Engineering Abstracts, EI-Compendex, Engineered Materials Abstracts, Gale, Google Scholar, Index to Scientific Reviews, Journal Citation Reports/Science Edition, Materials Science Citation Index, OCLC, PASCAL, Polymer Library, ProQuest, Science Citation Index Expanded (SciSearch), SCOPUS, Summon by Serial Solutions
2. **Targeting a Journal**

A common question among researchers is how can we find a suitable journal for our publication? Table 2 provides information on how to find suitable journals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Different ways of targeting a suitable journal</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Using the “Master Journal List”</td>
<td>The master journal list includes all journal titles covered in scientific products. It should be mentioned that there are plenty of journal lists for searchable databases which only three of them indexed in the Web of Science (WOS) platform. We normally call them ISI indexed journals. This information about ISI indexed journals is normally presented and updated every year in the Journal Citation Report (JCR) platform.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Using databases | **Step 1.** Using any search engine website from well-known publishers such as “sciencedirect.com”, “springerlink.com”, “ACS”, ASCE Library, ICE Thomas Telford, etc.).  
**Step 2.** Search for those keywords related to your study.  
**Step 3.** In the categories made by the search engine (normally provided on the left side of the search page) see which journals have the most published in the searched keyword.  
**Step 4.** Go into the journal webpage (remain in the publisher main page) and search the keywords again. You can still refine your search and find papers most related to your study. |
| Using Citation Trackers | Web of Science  
Scopus | Search for the related keyword to your subject  
apps.isiknowledge.com  
www.scopus.com |
3. **Tools in Journal Citation Report (JCR)**

Using journal citation reports produced by Thomson Reuters could be very helpful to evaluate the ISI Indexed journals. It would be very helpful for the researchers to develop and manage journal collections, discover highest-impact journals, analyze self-citations, compare a custom selection of journals, and identify review journals. The most important tools provided in JCR are presented in Table 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tools</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Impact Factor</td>
<td>How frequently has the average article in a journal been cited in a particular year? Within the scientific community, journal impact factors play a large but sometimes controversial role in determining the quality of a scientific article.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immediacy Index</td>
<td>How quickly is the average article in a journal cited? The students are mostly interested in this parameter since they look forward to publish their papers into the journals that expect a high immediacy index. The higher immediacy index results in the higher impact factor. Since the student study life period is about 2-4 years they would be on the safe side at the viva having had a high impact factor journal publish their research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cited Half-Life</td>
<td>What is the age range of the articles in the journal that have been cited by others? The supervisors are mostly interested in this factor since the higher the cited half-life means that the longer the published paper within the journal will be cited in future.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citing Half-Life</td>
<td>What is the average age of articles that the journal has cited? The less cited half-life means that the journal used a very recent published papers and all the reference are from just few years ago. This proves that the journals are most interested in recent research. Eventually, the more recent research has more chance to be cited in a longer period that will result in highest cited half-life as well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject category</td>
<td>You can focus on your main subject (e.g. Allergy, Andrology, etc) which makes it easier to target an appropriate journal. It is possible to be sort the journal data based on the journal cites, impact factor, total cites, immediacy index, cited half-life, 5-years impact factor, eigenfactor (TM), and article influence (TM) score.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Citation and other citation</td>
<td>Authors of course cite related research and this may have been published in the journal to which one in turn submits a paper for publication. However, 80% of all journals listed in the JCR Science Edition have self-citation rates of less than 20%. Based on trends within a category we can get an idea of what may be excessive self-citation, which weakens the integrity of the journal's Impact Factor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal source data</td>
<td>Using this data we can estimate how many references are needed in targeting for a journal. Also it is possible to see whether the journal accepts the review paper or not. If yes, how many references are needed for the review paper.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. What is H-index?
A scientist has index $h$ if $h$ of [his/her] $N$ papers has at least $h$ citations each, and the other $(N - h)$ papers have no more than $h$ citations each. As shown in Figure 1, the h-index for the searched author is 8. First the published papers should be sorted based on the citation. It can be seen that in row number 8 the citation is 8 and in the 9th row it is only 7. That is why the author has the h-index = 8.

![Figure 1: Evaluating the authors using the “Herzing’s Publish and perish” software](image)

5. Strategies to Increase Citations
- Target a journal with a high impact factor, or, in fact, with any impact factor at all.
- Choose a new, rapidly growing field of research. Articles on hot topics tend to cite much more recent references than those in more traditional fields.
- Target journals in rapidly growing research fields because they tend to publish papers with a short time interval from submission to acceptance.
- Write research articles, technical notes and reviews. For the purposes of calculating citations, these are considered citable items. Editorials, letters, news items and meeting abstracts are non-citable items.
- Write reviews in addition to research papers. Reviews are more likely to be cited than original research papers.
- Write at length. Longer articles are cited more often.
- Make it easy for others to access your work. Online availability of articles clearly increases citations (and therefore, the journal’s impact factor).
- Find quick publication journals.
An update on the Putra Sarjana Program from June 2010 - December 2011

The Putra Sarjana Program is a learning support programme for postgraduate students at Universiti Putra Malaysia. The program is aimed at providing support for academic development and inculcating soft skills such as communication and leadership skills as well as creating awareness of social and community activities. To the best of our knowledge, UPM is the first university in this country to provide an official support program to facilitate learning and enhance the postgraduate experience since 2009. Registration for the seminars and workshops are on a voluntary basis.

The expected outcomes of the Putra Sarjana Program include the production of quality graduates who are knowledgeable not only in academic activities but also have enhanced soft skills. The School of Graduate Studies is committed to enhancing the learning experience and providing our students with a competitive edge when seeking employment. The support provided in writing such as research proposal and manuscript writing as well as motivational talks are aimed at boosting the standard of research and innovation achievements to an international level and facilitating the journey to a successful education.

A snapshot of our seminar/workshop programmes are as follows:

1. The first seminar for semester one of the new academic year 2011/2012 was delivered by Professor Dato’ Dr Sheikh Omar Abdul Rahman. His lecture entitled “Making Your Research Exciting” provided an excellent guide to the postgraduate journey and the relevance of emotional intelligence as well as critical thinking to the success of a postgraduate candidature. Students have been greatly inspired by Professor Dato’ Dr Sheikh Omar who delivered three lectures in the last 18 months.

2. Lectures on research proposal writing, manuscript writing and journal publication were also conducted. Students were taught the elements of thesis writing, expectations from examiners and the process of the viva voce. Rules and regulations, research ethics, avoiding plagiarism and scholarly integrity were also covered.

3. Workshops to teach statistical analysis, research design and methods were also conducted.

4. On 4 November 2011, a seminar organized in collaboration with the Academy of Sciences Malaysia gave students a chance to gain an insight into the opportunities available to participate in the Nobel Laureate meetings at Lindau, Germany. Dr. Michael Ling King Hwa shared his experience by delivering a lecture entitled “A Nobel trip to Lindau, Germany: Once in a Lifetime Opportunity”. Hopefully, this has inspired our students to apply for selection to participate in the scientific conferences held at the Nobel Laureate Meetings at Lindau, Germany.

5. Updates on the latest technologies are an important component of our program. Seminars on Smart Chip by Realtime quantitative PCR and Thin Layer Chromatography were presented by collaborators from the industry. The importance of protecting intellectual property was also covered by Professor Dato’ Dr Mohamed Shariff Mohamed Din.

6. Dato’ Leela introduced our students to the community activities of a non-profit organization, Penyayang. Two students, Justin Wong and Juliana Ooi shared their experiences as volunteers in the community. Thus, our students were given awareness of the opportunities available to generate and share knowledge with the community.

Analysis of attendance data

Figure 1 shows that the number of seminar topics and workshops from June 2010-December 2010 has increased from 15 in each of the previous three semesters. On average, approximately 25 seminars/workshops were conducted each semester. The number appears to be lower for the period of July-November 2011 as compared to the same period in 2010 due to streamlining of the program, whereby some of the individual sessions held previously were combined in 2011.
Interestingly, the number of participants has increased tenfold, from approximately 200 during each semester in 2009, to 2148 during the period of July-Dec 2010. A further increase to 6611 participants was noted during the period of Jan 2011-June 2011 (Figure 2).

However, the period of July-November 2011 saw the total number of participants reduced to 3840.

Figure 3 reveals that in 2009, 2010 and 2011 (Jan-Nov 2011), 27%, 22% and 45% of postgraduate students attended at least one Putra Sarjana seminar or workshop respectively. It should be noted that the percentage of total attendance increased twofold to 45% in 2011.
Further analysis showed that the composition of attendees was approximately equal for local versus international students in 2009 and 2010. However, in 2011, the ratio for local to international students was approximately 2:1 (890:355).
Figure 5 shows that the attendance of students from each institute or faculty calculated as a percentage of enrolled students in their respective faculties or institutes. From January to June 2011, the faculties/institutes with more than 50% of their students who have attended at least one Putra Sarjana seminar or workshop were from the Faculty of Agriculture and Food Science, Bintulu, the Halal Product Institute, the Institute of Agricultural and Food Policy Studies, the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, the Institute of Tropical Forestry and Forest Products, the Faculty of Food Science and Technology, the Faculty of Forestry and the Faculty of Science.

Institutes/faculties with 30-40% student attendance were the Institute of Gerontology, the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, the Faculty of Agriculture, the Institute of Bioscience, the Faculty of Human Ecology, the Institute for Mathematical Research and the Faculty of Engineering. Approximately 20-30% students from the remaining nine faculties or institutes attended at least one Putra Sarjana activity.

In conclusion, the Putra Sarjana Program has been executed smoothly and feedback from students indicate that they find it to be beneficial. The attendance has been encouraging and it is envisaged that it will become even more popular when more students are aware of this learning support programme.
Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the hard work of the Putra Sarjana team members for execution of the program, namely, Mr. Suhaifi Sulaiman, Ms Af Fa Abdul Rahman, Ms Arayati Selamat, Mr. Amil and members of the IT group.

I am also grateful to UPM academic and library staff who have assisted us in delivering seminars and workshops for the Putra Sarjana Program since June 2010. They are as listed:

Prof. Dr Abdul Rahman Omar
Prof. Dr Bujang Kim Huat
Prof. Dr Chan Swee Heng
Prof. Dr Jayum Anak Jawan
Prof. Dr Hasanah Ghazali
Prof. Dr Hussni Omar Mohamed
Prof. Dr Mohd Ali Hassan
Prof. Dato’ Dr Mohamed Shariff Mohamed Din
Prof. Dr Raha Abdul Rahim
Prof. Dato’ Dr Sheikh Omar Abdul Rahman
Prof. Dr Tan Soon Guan
Assoc. Prof. Dr Abdul Rashid Mohamed Shariff
Assoc. Prof. Dr Bahaman Abu Samah
Assoc. Prof. Dr Faizah Abood
Assoc. Prof. Dr Goh Yong Meng
Assoc. Prof. Dr Latiffah Hassan
Assoc. Prof. Dr Mardziah Hayati Abdullah
Assoc. Prof. Dr Mirna Kandiah
Assoc. Prof. Dr Tan Chin Ping
Assoc. Prof. Dr Wong Bee Eng
Assoc. Prof. Zunita Zakaria
Dr Ahmad Selamat
Dr Lailawati Mohd Salleh
Dr Ling King Hwa
Dr Mohd Bakri Adam
Dr Steven Eric Kruass @Abdul Lateef Abdullah
Dr Syahrilinizam Abdullah
Dr Sharmili Vidyadaran

Report prepared by,
Professor Dr. Seow
While horror stories abound to increase my anxiety as I anticipated my viva, I found very little information about the examination process. As a survivor from what most graduates may describe as a traumatic rite of passage they would never want to sit through again, I am grateful for this occasion to share some information I wish I had known about the viva with the goal to help ease the anxieties of those anticipating their viva.

Three key points to turn an ordeal into a positive learning experience.

Having worked on your thesis for three years (or more), it is understandable that like myself, most people will find it stressful to have their work examined in a space of a few hours or less. I was scared and intimidated to have to come face to face with three examiners, particularly when the PhD viva is certainly a defining moment for candidates vying to emerge with the highest taught award a university can offer.

Three key points helped me to overcome my apprehension and stay positive. First, I kept reminding myself that I have done my best. Next, I acknowledged that the viva is an important opportunity to have my work validated by eminent, top-class examiners in the field. Third, I knew that the examiners were not expecting perfection. My hope is that by keeping these same perspectives in mind, you will be able to turn your ordeal into a positive learning experience.

The process in brief.

While I remember my viva like it ended yesterday, it is harder to remember the entire process and in particular those involving forms that required signatures. Considering that all the arduous paperwork pales in significance to a successful viva, I begin my attempt to map out the processes involved, with the viva voce. Upon arrival on the day of your viva, you will be directed to a room to set up your presentation. At the appointed time, three examiners will arrive. One of them will be the chair examiner. While your chief supervisor and members of your supervisory committee may also be present, regulations stipulate that they may not comment on your work unless requested by the examiners. This does not negate the importance of their presence and the added support that you will come to appreciate throughout your viva.

To begin, the chair examiner will introduce you to your examiners and proceed to inform all present of the procedures that must be adhered to during the viva. One of the most crucial points is that you must complete your presentation within twenty minutes or half an hour, at most. You will then be requested to begin your presentation, at the end of which, you will be requested to leave the room while the examiners deliberate on your work. Within an hour or less, you will be recalled to address concerns before receiving the results of your viva.

Given that the examiners would have identified areas of the work where they need more evidence or details prior to the viva (from the final thesis you submitted), you can expect each examiner to have some ideas about how your thesis should be revised. This is the point where you need to remember that what you want is minor changes that can be accomplished and approved within the given time frame (three months).
Shine at show time

Handle the questions calmly, competently and with courtesy. Even as you are explaining a point or conceding with comments, show that you are in command of your work and of the literature that informed your understanding. Do not become aggressive, hostile or impatient. Answer each question succinctly. Rephrase your points, refer to relevant pages across your thesis, make explicit links to questions asked and clarify all requested changes. What you need to achieve at your viva is to clearly demonstrate that you are worthy of a PhD.

Once everyone is satisfied, the chair examiner will thank you and all present. This signals the near conclusion of your viva. Finally, you will be informed of the result: that your examiners believe you deserve to pass your viva (most probably) either with minor or major changes. Within a week, you will be requested to collect the final examination report, which will include comments agreed at the viva and embark on the final leg of your journey before you graduate.

From here on, you need to consider every comment given and make sure that all the relevant amendments have been made to the satisfaction of your examiners. This means that the next few weeks (or months) not only involve a lot of intensive work on your thesis, but also a lot of shunting back and forth from your chief supervisor as well as from one internal examiner to the next, to ensure that you have correctly made all the necessary revisions required to secure their signatures of approval on one of the last forms you ever need to complete before you earn your PhD. Only after you have successfully completed the form along with all the requisite signatures and stamps of approval can you begin to breathe easy and look forward to your graduation ceremony, the anticipated flow of good wishes, commendation and compliments from your friends and family. Now, I take the liberty to be the first to congratulate you on your journey towards attaining your PhD.

In concluding this article, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to every individual who prompted me along throughout my journey. My final thought: Although the regulations from the School of Graduate Studies may at times seem daunting, more explicitly when you need to secure relevant signatures, as in most other official tasks, the processes involved should be respected and upheld to the best of one’s ability.
I thought I was well prepared to go to Malaysia to work on my doctoral degree. I thought I was always pretty rational. I was wrong. Two weeks before my departure, I met a colleague of mine who was doing his doctoral program at the University of Southampton but came back to China to write his thesis. The conversation naturally went to how he coped with his life in Britain. He said he could bear everything but the separation from his daughter. He often found himself staring at her picture, and wishing very hard that he could just give her a hug. My mind went blank. How was I going to deal with the separation? My daughter and I had been optimistic; she was excited about Mum going abroad. I believed that phone calls and Skype would help make life easier for us. But after listening to my colleague, I started to doubt.

My study at Universiti Putra Malaysia started anyway. Initially, I was too busy adjusting to the new environment that there was not really much time to feel sad, but it was when things started to settle into a routine that I began to miss home all the more. Once when I was at the supermarket, the sight of a happy little girl with her Mum burnt into my eyes unexpectedly. Who is accompanying my daughter? How lonely would she be if she had encountered the same scene?

Calling home and Skyping with my family did not really help as much as I had expected. I would shed tears silently after each call, feeling the geographical distance more than ever despite the so-called global village we live in. My roommate would often tease me, saying that I had long past the age of crying like a little girl. I knew she tried to distract me from my sadness, but I just couldn’t help myself.

I also experienced great stress from my study. I enjoyed the classes, but there was one particular lecturer who was particularly demanding. We all struggled very hard to meet her requirements. The feedback from her about our first assignment was that the eight of us would all fail if without further improvement. It was devastating. She was kind, though, to give us another chance. We would always have discussions and mutual evaluations for this course later on in case she would repeat the same comment. The frustration experienced in that course was unprecedented. Fortunately we survived. We never imagined that one year later we would be telling one of our juniors what a pity it was that she did not have a chance to be “tortured” by the lecturer.

Yes, with time passing by, we change. Now I’m in my fifth semester, and I’m doing fine, but I still remember the time when I was so lonely that I would only feel better when I saw the big tree with white flowers near the clinic. I felt how lonely the flowers were surrounded by all the green, and yet they still continued to bloom all year round. I remember the pain of missing my daughter and feeling guilty about my absence in her life, but learn to see the positive aspects of my absence—she has become more independent and has started to set up her own goals in life. I remember telling my friend that although I was more used to life here, I would never truly get used to it. Whilst I may never get totally used to my life away from home, I have learnt to adjust to it. Like my daughter who is adapting to her primary school life, I have also found that I grow and learn once more through my experiences here.
At post-graduate level, the Master’s or PhD candidate has to attend a session called “VIVA-VOCE” to prove his/her worthiness for the degree to examiners who have expertise in the field. This last most challenging part of the postgraduate journey usually puts a lot of pressure on students. I would like to this opportunity here to discuss a few tips/techniques to handle this challenge.

At UPM, the outcome of the viva-voce session can be one of these six different categories: (i) Accepted with distinctions (thesis is accepted without any corrections), (ii) Accepted with minor corrections, (iii) Accepted with major corrections, (iv) Re-viva (the student has to present again at a second viva-voce), (v) Re-submission (the student has to resubmit his/her thesis within one year and attend another viva), and (vi) Terminated or rejected. In order to achieve success at the viva, the post-graduate student should consider a few crucial points.

Firstly, he/she must look for an innovative and original conception of his study in the field (in this regard the PhD student must be much bolder than the Master’s student), and try to prove it by writing and publishing papers in high indexed journals (Kazemian, 2011).

Secondly, the role of the supervisory committee in guiding and advising the student is also important. The post-graduate student is supposed to select advisors who are experts in their field. By showing a hardworking attitude, the advisors will be encouraged to guide and help the student as best they can to start the research work and to expand the student’s knowledge in the area. The most important person in this committee is the main supervisor or the chairperson. There are

Almost all students who failed to complete their study stated that the main factor for their failure was their supervisor. For example, a student who failed to complete his studies said, “There were no big hurdles in the beginning”. “It started when my supervisor began to guide more candidates and had less time spent with me”. “My supervisor had personal problems and did not have time to read my thesis draft”. “Unfortunately, he did not give constructive comments and did not read deeply what I had given to him”. “I had to depend on others”. It would seem that the easiest target to put the blame on would be the SUPERVISOR (Ibrahim, 2010).

On the other hand, most if not all successful PhD holders may not agree with the above. Ibrahim (2010) has shared 10 views of successful PhD candidates. According to him, although a supervisor seems to play the main role in determining the success of a PhD, in reality it depends on the student him/herself. A supervisor can only help the students and cannot do more than that. Dato’ Dr. Mohd Zaini, a businessman and CEO of several companies, believes that a PhD is not just about the relationship between the supervisor and the supervisee. It is the capability or the failure to sustain the challenges. If you are not patient, or does not not have a strong enough desire to get the “Dr” title, you will be weakened and give-up easily when faced with problems.

In my opinion, the supervisor is a motivator for his/her students and can give preliminary guidance in the special research field, and not more than that. In other words, during the beginning of the study, the supervisor is like a person watching the street from the 10th floor of the tower. The student is a person watching the people and the cars in that street from the 20th floor of that tower.
With the passage of time, and when the post-graduate student is going to appear at the viva-voce examination, he/she is supposed to be the person who is watching the street from second floor of that tower and his/her supervisor is still on the tenth floor or maybe at most on the seventh or eighth floor of that tower. It means that the post-graduate student will be able to see all the details of his research field and can explain in detail what is happening in the street and his ability will be more developed than his supervisors in that particular field. For me, working with my supervisory committee (Prof Bujang B.K. Huat, Prof Thamer M. Ali, and Dr. Farah N. A. Abdul Aziz) was a big opportunity in my life. Their push, guidance, and strictness during the three years of my candidature helped me to succeed at my viva-voce examination to which I am truly grateful.

Thirdly, and perhaps most important of all, is to know how a student should behave during the viva-voce examination and how to prepare him/herself in answering the questions during this session. Broad (2011) gave the following as among common expectations and questions for which the candidate should prepare: (i) the examiners could ask you about literature not in the thesis, to test whether you are widely read in your area, (ii) the examiners may also test your ability to discuss the state of the art in any area related to your thesis, (iii) you must listen carefully to the questions and take his/her time in answering them in order to be able to answer succinctly (avoid going off at a tangent), (iv) you should ask for clarification if you do not understand the question, (v) if the examiners have a misconception about your work, try to pin it down and explain it, (vi) if you really cannot answer a question, be honest, Say, “I can’t answer this on the spot, but I should be able to work it out in my own time”. If it is about literature you have not come across, thank the questioner and ask for a reference, and most commonly are the following questions: (vii) what have you done that merits a Master’s/PhD?, (viii) what are the contributions (to knowledge/theory) of your thesis?, (ix) what is the relevance of your contributions to other researchers and to the organizations studied/industry, (x) what have you learned from the process of doing your Master’s/PhD?, and (xi) where did your research project come from? Or, how did your research questions emerge?

In sum, in order to succeed at the viva voce, the student should consider the three main points which have been discussed earlier: (i) to prove his knowledge and innovation in his/her field, (ii) to select suitable and wise people as supervisory committee for his/her particular area of research, and (iii) to know all the key points and to be able to answer most, if not all questions asked satisfactorily.

References


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<th>A Thought</th>
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<td>&quot;Think about it! If you were ever really truly alone do you think you could have made it this far? Don't feel sorry for yourself and hate everything about life just because things may not be going your way! Do something about it! You're not helpless! You may discover that in the long run you are much stronger than you believed and life will then take on a whole new meaning! You will be Great!&quot;</td>
<td>Anyone who has never made a mistake has never tried anything new.</td>
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Quotes

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Nick Rahall