

# Prepare for an academic career

THE growth in the number of doctoral candidates enrolling in Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) has been substantial.

Over the past 10 years, 107,477 students have enrolled in the university, a large percentage of whom are academic staff from both local and international universities.

These academicians are given study leave to pursue their doctoral studies and, upon completion, return to their universities to take up lecturing positions. These jobs entail competencies in research, teaching and service.

Contrary to international studies, which report on a relatively low level of the availability of academic jobs, these doctoral candidates have a job to return to.

Given this scenario, UPM has taken the initiative to equip these postgraduates with the right kind of skills needed in their academic career.

Preparing for an Academic Career is a week-long certificate programme offered by UPM's School of Graduate Studies in collaboration with the Higher Education Development Centre of the University of Otago.

Experienced staff from UPM and the University of Otago, New Zealand, teach in this programme



Students of UPM receive mentoring from University of Otago academicians.

and provide the participants with rich developmental experiences.

During the training session, participants are taught the importance of teaching experience when planning an academic career, planning and evaluating teaching, and developing a teaching portfolio.

Besides this, participants are given practical expertise in developing a research portfolio,

which includes writing for journals, reviewing journal articles and conference abstracts, presenting research at conferences, chairing conference sessions, networking, examining a thesis (text and oral), writing examiner reports, and knowing how to keep abreast of current developments.

They are also provided with opportunities to take on leadership roles to enhance their capacities.

Programme participants work closely with their supervisors in UPM to develop their own programme of learning as an academic.

Participants also undertake teaching responsibilities during their candidature and are mentored and guided by experienced staff from UPM over a six-month period.

At the end of this period, reflective journals are collected and further mentoring is provided by colleagues from the University of Otago.

This collaboration between UPM and the University of Otago provides the right international experience in preparing for an academic career.

Students who have graduated from the programme describe their experience as extremely useful, allowing them to stand out from their colleagues, take on leadership roles and be appointed as new mentors upon returning to their own universities.

Mohamed Bello Ibrahim, an academician from Nigeria, describes the mentorship programme as something he would recommend to his university upon his return.

Dr Azita Azadi from Iran

has already started a similar programme at her own university by capitalising on local expertise and incorporating lead practices in becoming a well-rounded academic.

This shows the effectiveness and the international impact of the UPM programme.

UPM's proactive initiative is in line with current international development in doctoral education, where the thesis is not the sole focus.

The Oxford Statement (2015) states that doctoral candidates make a substantial contribution to society upon graduation and need to be equipped with career-ready skills.

UPM adheres to this international statement and prepares academicians for the next generation with a wide range of skills necessary for an academic career.

The vibrant research culture in UPM and the proactive measures of the School of Graduate Studies provide academics undertaking their doctoral studies with the right environment to deliver.

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