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Take 5 Corner

Take a break, before you break!

Sometimes a break from your routine is the very thing you need. We have set up a Take 5 Corner at the



Postgraduate Hub where you can find some board games and quizzes. We will keep on enhancing the corner with a variety of materials and resources.

We welcome you to write to us at graduateschool@nottingham.edu.my with any suggestions and ideas that you would want us to consider.



Future Event

Hari Raya Open House

15th July 2016

3pm

Postgraduate Hub, H1B12

Marking the end of the Islamic holy month of Ramadhan is the festival of Eid, known in Malaysia as Hari Raya Aidilfitri or Hari Raya Puasa. Ramadhan is a period of sober repentance for Muslims, with approximately 30 days of dawn-to-dusk fasting.

In conjunction with the festive celebration, we will be organising a Hari Raya Open House on 15th July 2016. All UNMC postgraduate students are welcome. Full details will be announced in due course.



Fancy hearing an 80,000 word thesis explained in less than 180 seconds?

Research students from across the globe are doing just that in preparation for the Three Minute Thesis Competition (3MT®).

Established by the University of Queensland (UQ) in 2008, 3MT is now held in universities around the globe.

3MT contestants must condense their research into a brief, engaging presentation for a non-specialist audience, using a single static presentation slide. The aim is to help research students develop their academic, presentation, and research communication skills.

UNMC will hold its 3MT competition in early September 2016. Active PhD students who have successfully passed their first year confirmation review milestone (including thesis under submission) are eligible to participate. Graduates are not eligible, unfortunately.

The winner of the Malaysia Campus will progress to the video round to compete against the other Nottingham campuses. The overall winner will represent the entire University of Nottingham at the U21 Final, also via video, which will be judged by an international panel of industry and academic professionals. The winner of the entire 3MT Competition will receive a bursary of US\$2,500 to visit a U21 university of their choice to benefit their research or on-going career development.

A compulsory preparatory event and training session for those who are interested in entering the competition will be held on Wednesday 10 August 2016. Several peer review feedback sessions will then be held within two weeks leading to the date of the competition. During these peer review feedback sessions, participants will have the opportunity to practice their 3 minute presentation and be given feedback on elements that they can improve on.

In the meantime if you would like to gain a greater understanding of the 3MT competition, please visit the Three Minute Thesis website: <http://www.threeminutethesis.org>. To view examples of winning presentations from other universities that host the competition, please visit 3MT Showcase: <http://threeminutethesis.org/index.html?page=191541&pid=193447>.

More information comprising dates and times will be confirmed nearer to the time of the competition.

To register your interest, please click on the following link: http://moodle.nottingham.ac.uk/mod/tutorialbooking/tutorialbooking_sessions.php?tutorialid=9944&courseid=11606.

The Experience

The winner of the Best Poster Award of the UNMC Research Showcase 2016, Tan Jing Yang, shares his experience and tips from the competition. Here is what he has to say...



Tang Jing Yang, PhD student, Department of Mechanical, Materials and Manufacturing Engineering, with his poster titled "Little FUEL in, Little SOOT out."

It all started with a pact I made with my fellow peers to participate in the Research Showcase together. We thought that it would be a great opportunity to share our ongoing work with a wider audience, outside the cubicles, workstations and laboratories. Firstly, we had to submit press releases outlining the essence of our research which were targeted at the general public.

Particularly, the training course titled "Preparing a Press Release" provided helpful tips and guide for a novice like me in composing the written communication.

The next stage involved designing a poster, which served to convey the research idea in a visualised format, and presenting it during the exhibition. Images and illustrations included should be relatable to and understandable by the general public. One key point to bear in mind which was highlighted by the instructors during relevant training workshops is that the poster presentation is directed to members of the public who have little or no technical knowledge on the field of research. With that being said, the use of jargons and acronyms which the audience is oblivious to should be minimal. However, I found it unavoidable to mention a few scientific terms related to my research in the poster. To prevent confusion, I introduced and explained them in layman's terms during my presentation. I even posed some questions just to make sure the listeners grasped the basic ideas about my research.

The research exhibition was both exciting and rewarding. Meeting other researchers and learning about their impressive work really opened up my mind. Coming from different disciplines, we discussed, shared and exchanged valuable opinions among each other. Undoubtedly, the poster presentation helped to enhance my communication skills, especially to the wider community. Furthermore, feedback gained from the audience generated a new perspective to my research which was thought-provoking. To sum up, it was indeed a fruitful experience for me which would benefit my research journey as a whole.

N.B. Many thanks to my supervisor, friends and the Graduate School for the support provided.

The View by...

Professor Nashiru Billa

Associate Dean (Research), Faculty of Science

Personal perspectives on successful postgraduate student supervision

Colleagues who have supervised postgraduate (PG) students to completion would agree that PhD supervision is a serious business encompassing complex processes and issues related to the intellectual development of and emotional support for the student. For this reason, the University Quality Manual requires that each student has at least two supervisors. A further safeguard is that, academics supervising students for the first time can only do so in a joint supervisory arrangement. There are instances where academics with no prior supervision experience have served as principal supervisors to PhD students with positive outcomes. On the other hand, there are instances where supervisory issues have become apparent from more regular academics. In my opinion, requisite skills necessary for successful postgraduate supervision are not always commensurate with experience, as long as the needs of the student are central within the context of the supervisory arrangement. Whilst it is true that PG students should be independent and be at the forefront of their work, this expectation should be gradual rather than exponential. Supervisors should be cognizant of the fact that students enrol on the PG program with a varied level of experience or exposure. Therefore it is fair not to expect all students to perform at the same set of standards, especially during this maiden stage of their research experience.

PG students enrolling after undergraduate qualification (however good their credentials), require significant levels of supervision initially followed by gradual detachment so that the student progresses from significant dependence to autonomy at the time of thesis write-up. Personally, I prefer students who enrol to the PhD programme with a postgraduate degree or equivalent because of the tag of prior research experience. It makes the task of supervising less daunting. Student-supervisor relationship is just as important to ensuring a successful doctoral research experience. It has the potential to be enriching and productive to the student whilst at the same time, can be extremely difficult and frustrating. As academics, we have the tendency of equating 'research supervision' with 'research training'. The former is more of mentoring and requires supervisors to have situational awareness and flexibility in the student-supervisor relationship. In a major study carried out by Cullen et al (1994) at the Australian National University, a list of characteristics considered as 'ideal' for supervisors to succeed are listed below, which strikingly are similar to what undergraduates hold as desirable characteristics of ideal teaching:

- Approachable and friendly
- Supportive, positive attitude
- Open minded, prepared to acknowledge error
- Organised and thorough
- Stimulating and conveys enthusiasm

Supervisor expertise also plays a significant role in a successful PhD student experience and has been a criterion for selection of prospective students. However, it is also true that non-expert related characteristics which provide support balanced with creative criticism can supersede expertise-related characteristics. To summarise, as supervisors, we need to engage with students in a manner that stimulates thought, openness and independence. The relationship between the two should be cordial and bound by mutual respect. I believe that these attributes make up for any shortfalls there might be and would ensure a successful research experience.

Reference

Cullen, D., Pearson, M., Saha, L. J., & Spear, R. H. (1994). Establishing effective PhD supervision. Canberra: AGPS.

SWIRL @ Nucleus

So What's It Really Like?

Find out about life at UNMC from current postgraduate students!

Helena Song Sook Yee

PhD candidate, the School of Education

It has been a roller-coaster journey so far. Being in an academic position and having to be responsible to a home with two young kids while working on the PhD is no easy feat. Many times I felt like giving up, thinking if pursuing a doctorate is worth all this agony. I don't need to be called a Dr. to make meaningful impact in this world, that's for sure, I often whisper to myself. But God has other plans. I am to continue the good fight, to finish the race, to keep the faith.

My turning point was when I met Professor Pat Thomson (University of Nottingham, UK) when she was here in UNMC. I had the privilege of meeting her one on one for a short chat. The conversation was ordinary but open and honest. It was life changing for me as I was finally able to talk about my fears and concerns openly. I was struggling with changing of supervision at that time but the few words that she spoke gave me hope. Though she was not in the position to do anything, I felt I was cared for and listened to as a PhD student at Nottingham. Since then, I have been following Pat's blog, *Patter* (patthomson.net). It was refreshing to read and learn about solid and meaningful practical advice and strategies compared to hollow methods and techniques. I particularly resonate with the real stories of the struggles that other doctoral researchers go through.

There was this particular guest post: <http://patthomson.net/2016/02/25/the-phd-supervisor-as-mentor/> that spoke to me deeply. The writer shared her struggles, the importance of supervisors being mentors, about how desperate she was at the final lap of her PhD but finally she made it! After reading this post, I was near tears because I understood and experience the emotions involved. The good news is at this point of my PhD journey, I found my mentor — the supervisor that didn't give up on me despite my lack of progress. She is giving me her all and for the first time, I felt I could really do this and I am going to make it. For that I am truly grateful and thankful that she continued to believe in me especially even when things didn't look promising. This trust she has in me has given me great courage and renewed motivation. I might not have a good start but I know I am going to have a beautiful finish.

To other fellow doctoral researchers, don't give up, you are almost there!



Helena Song Sook Yee

Doctoral Training Programme

CFF-UNMC DTP

Tales from a DTP Researcher

Welcome to the ongoing CFF-UNMC DTP column. In this month's issue Lim Chun Hsion shares his experiences as a DTP researcher.

With the vision to develop underutilised crops in global agriculture, Crops For the Future established CFF-UNMC Doctoral Training Programme (DTP) as a platform and opportunity to guide passionate researchers to work in their field of interest. As a graduate from UNMC in MEng Chemical Engineering in 2012, I am proud to be part of the DTP family and one of the pioneer DTP student to work on biomass supply chain optimisation development.

My research experience has offered opportunities in working across the research value chain, helping me engage in various research collaborations which include:

- Sago mill visit in Pusa, Sarawak with Dr Yuki (one of the DTP students at that time) for sago biomass sample collection.
- Collaboration in biomass pyrolysis with Mr Isah, which eventually produced a conference paper in PRES15 in Kuching, and the work was invited and published as special issue in Journal of Cleaner Production.

Besides the numerous research experiences, I was also involved in some training, lectures and activity, for example:

- Poster and oral presentation which enhance individual communication skill, a very critical aspect to “market” our research.
- Proposal writing is one of my favourite training programmes conducted by DTP. We were exposed to the techniques of proposal planning, writing and budgeting, which normally require years of experience in the research field.

In addition, these activities promote research sharing among students and hence potentially create new ideas or projects for a continuous and productive research value chain. DTP has been instrumental in promoting higher quality in biomasses and crop utilisation to enhance global sustainability. It has also supported the a generation of young researchers.





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