

Like father, like daughter: The ADTP spans a generation

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The term "alma mater", in these times, refers to an allegorical phrase to describe a university, college or school which an individual has attended. Made up of two root words in Latin – *alma* ("nourishing/kind"), and *mater* ("mother") – the usage of the term in the modern era stems from the University of Bologna, which is said to be the oldest university in the Western world in continuous operation. Founded in 1088, the motto of the university is motto *Alma Mater Studiorum* ("Nurturing Mother of Studies").

And although it is usually mother who understandably gets the credit for the development of children, the role of fathers is hardly less important. In the case of Alya Riad, Sunway University and the Centre for American Education (CAE) can be actually said to be her alma pater – because her father Riad Asmat went through the same programme that she did. **BLAZE** got a hold of the Naza Corp Director of Strategy and his actuarial science offspring, and they kindly shared their story with us.



Her story

Hello! My name is Alya Riad, and I am 19. I come from an average family of five, where I am the eldest of three kids. Although we are originally from Petaling Jaya, my family actually moved to England in 2012, where we spent two-years-plus before coming back to Malaysia. It was an extraordinary family experience, and I went to the City of Norwich School in Norwich. At the school, I managed to win a *Certificate of Excellent Conscientious Attitude* for English, the *Form Tutor Award*, and a *Progress Award for Business*!

Just like many people, I love attending gigs, baking, blogging. I also play the piano. Reading is another go-to hobby, and I was hooked on *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* by Mark Haddon. It's a gripping story about how an autistic teen goes about his abnormal daily life. The different layers of the main character are depicted so well by Haddon's impeccable writing – so I experienced an emotional rollercoaster. My favourite author, though, is Stephen Chbosky.

What made me choose to do the ADTP at Sunway University? It was familiar to my



The Purdue University gateway.

dad, so I had confidence in him sending me to Sunway, haha! After studying in England, I knew that I wanted to go to America for university. My dad took that into account, and led me to Sunway, as he had already experienced the twinning programme back in the day.

I love the ADTP programme. I love all the different people that I've had the pleasure of becoming friends with. It's not just us Malaysians in this environment – we've got people from all corners of the world as well. The most challenging thing was getting used to the coursework weightage, as I've always been educated in a system where final exams are most important. I must say, it's a fairly well thought out programme. Students are inclined to put in effort throughout the entire

semester (from coursework to quizzes) – and by the end, they would already know how to go about their final exams, instead of only working hard when final exams come up (which is very daunting).

For me, the best thing that I took away from the ADTP was the friends. I know that the friends I made in ADTP will be the friends I choose to be my bridesmaids/godparents of my future children, because we've been through so much together – from assignments to personal issues – in the last year and a half. Other than the academic life, I was Head of Marketing in the Centre for American Education (CAE) Student Committee.

I am pursuing an undergraduate degree in Actuarial Science, under Purdue University's College of Science, which is in West Lafayette, Indiana. I love math, and I love business – so, why not put the two together and strive to come out with a commendable degree? After finishing the programme, I will hopefully go on to do my Master's. If not, a job in America or England would have to be my post-graduation goal. **BLAZE**

His story

I'm Riad, a local boy who was born and bred in Petaling Jaya. I went through the Government School system right up till Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) – yes, it was called SPM then; I am not sure what it is now, ha ha! Upon finishing school and getting my results, my parents and I looked at the options: between local institutions, and – possibly – foreign-linked ones.

The final decision we made was for me to go to Sunway College, which had then only established the Twinning Programme to the US with Western Michigan University (WMU). I was part of one of the earliest groupings (Group 5); we were pioneers of sorts, but we always thought of ourselves as guinea pigs too, as we were prepared to head to Kalamazoo. (Yes, there really is a Kalamazoo.)

Education in Malaysia at the New Town Campus was good and qualitative, preparing us for what was to come. We were guided by a Resident Director of sorts from WMU, who assured us of the correct guidance and advice throughout our programme here. No queries went unanswered, and – more importantly – genuine advice was always given; this was not only on academic issues, but also on expectations of life over there. Bear in mind that, at that time, we were naïve kids, averaging an age of 18 years – so yes, I was most appreciative of the set-up that was done for us all.

There was not that we much did to be active

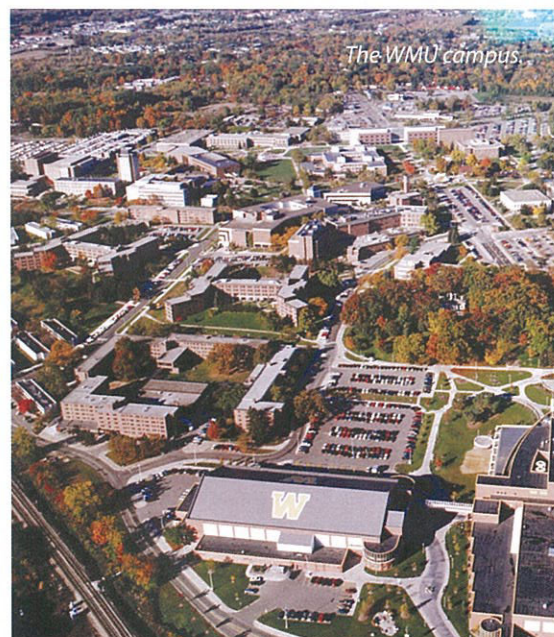
students at Sunway back then – remember, pioneers! For us, it was really studying and trying to get ourselves out there at the soonest. All factors – including the economics of it all, i.e. costs and timeliness – were priorities. The College then didn't offer much in terms of extra curricular activities – but we students enjoyed the experience in our own ways. For example, we parked at the side streets, and stayed in line to get the most limited car passes to park in that little campus site. Yes, we had to pay for it too – if we were lucky to get one!

In summary, it was – for me – a brilliant experience, and I would wish for it to happen for anyone that gets such an opportunity. Also, I recommend that you join a fraternity, if you can. Mine was Sigma Lambda Beta – and we played in the WMU rugby team and the Kalamazoo Rugby Football Team. Our meeting base was at the Up N Under Pub!

When choosing Sunway for Alya, I will admit that a bit of my alumnus spirit kicked in there! Her experience at Sunway now is probably different, honestly. I am very glad that she has pulled through with help from her (older and wiser) friends, with her future likely chosen to be in Purdue next year. As for my time at Sunway College, the camaraderie of us all coming from Malaysia heading to the same place was a nice experience to go through. We had each other's backs, and all that. Most of us went our own ways when we were there – but we still ended up as friends for life. We meet often enough to

rekindle our memories – and I think we're quite proud of what we've achieved since the days of the College in New Town.

If there was one word I would use to describe Sunway College, it would be "port". A place to learn and experience – a future "port" of sorts for anyone wanting to achieve something. Especially with the huge campus now! What would I say to this generation of students? No clichés – because you are students, and studying comes as a qualifying factor. Well, someone's paying for it, right? So, you have to do it, regardless! Ha ha ha! But more importantly, embrace the opportunity to learn, and live it! It is the total experience that counts, and it will make one a better person in life. Simple. **BLAZE**



The WMU campus.

Continuing their academic odyssey in the USA

The American Degree Transfer Program (ADTP) students – Fong Hui Chi and Abigail Lim Shu Yee – from the Sunway University Centre for American Education (CAE), have managed to make their way to the home of the brave and the land of the free.

The ADTP was developed specifically to allow students to study for the first part of their American degree at Sunway University, and was designed in consultation with American universities to ensure that the students could transfer seamlessly to America to complete their studies. Just like other undergraduate degree programmes in the USA, the Sunway University ADTP provides a mixture of specific subjects and general education, ensuring that students are well prepared for the upper level degree courses for their studies in the USA. Alongside their academic studies, students are encouraged to take part in a range of extracurricular activities, including community services, field trips and sporting events.

"The reason I chose ADTP was because I wanted to have the independence to choose courses and the freedom to plan my graduation track," said Hui Chi, the 21-year-old native of Puchong. "I am a curious child, with a wide range of interest in different fields, and I wanted to have the chance to try them all while I can. Unlike other programmes, the ADTP allowed me to do just that." Having completed her ADTP at Sunway University in March 2014, Hui Chi transferred to the University of Minnesota Twin Cities for a degree in supply chain and operations management in fall of 2014.

Abigail, who is a 19-year-old Kuala Lumpur lass, had a rather different reason for undergoing the ADTP. "Firstly, I'm blessed with parents who love me unconditionally. I'm the third child among four siblings. Both of my elder sisters did the American Degree Programme as well – whereas my younger brother is still in high school. I was already familiar with the programme, and I chose to do it at Sunway University because its location is convenient for me to commute from home."

The engineering student, who cites Haruki Murakami as her favourite author, knew that she wanted to further her studies in America, and that the best option for this path was the ADTP. "This option is more economical as I'll be able to get an exposure of the American educational system. Moreover, the flexibility of taking courses that aren't related to my major is really an aspect that draws me to ADTP and American universities in general." Abigail has since gone off to continue her studies at Cornell University, New York.



WORTH THE EFFORT: Hui Chi made friends from all over the world.

For both of them, undertaking the ADTP has been a positive experience. "I made friends with people from all over the world, such as China, Korea, Zimbabwe, and Sri Lanka," Hui Chi explained. "I missed arguing (discussing) with these friends over the simplest things that are different in our cultures, while celebrating the similarities that we could find! I loved the fact that the lecturers highly encouraged us to participate in class discussions. In my opinion, the best way to polish an individual's public speaking skills is to speak up in class."

Abigail said that maintaining a good CGPA throughout the course was a challenge. "The subjects offered are both interesting and stimulating at the same time. Another aspect that's challenging is subject enrollment; it's important to pick the right subjects, because the credits of some of these subjects may not be transferrable in certain American universities! Overall, though, I think the programme's structure is well-balanced. The marking scheme of 60% coursework and 40% final exam is really advantageous – in this way, students are encouraged to maintain a consistent performance throughout the semester, and we aren't graded solely on one exam. Instead, we are graded holistically."

Both young ladies are also not just bookworms, but active in extra-curricular activities as well. Abigail was the Head of the Community Department of the Sunway Student Volunteers (SSV), as well as a member of the CAE Student Committee. Meanwhile, Hui Chi – whose love of all things Korean is especially strong when



it comes to its TV and food culture – is currently the President of the Malaysian Student Association at the University of Minnesota Twin Cities. It comes as no surprise, then to note that both are recipients of the Tan Sri Dr. Jeffrey Cheah Entrance Scholarship.

For Hui Chi, the biggest take away from ADTP was being independent and being prepared. "My peers in University of Minnesota are at a different level, and I am still lacking, but I am already on the way. The ADTP experience was a great push to get me started on my journey. As described, if I am not prepared, I would be a mouse chasing after a cheetah, and I can imagine that being very difficult. I am responsible for my own graduation plan, my own schedules, and my own performances. ADTP students receive much freedom – but we also receive a similar amount of responsibilities.

"I would recommend the ADTP to others who are keen to study in America, as it's economical and it provides students with a platform to excel academically," Abigail added. "Also, time management is an important skill that every student has to master. We need to have a balance between our studies and personal life." **BLAZE**

CHALLENGING PROGRAMME: Abigail found the course both interesting and stimulating.

