

Building for greater good

ARCHITECTURE can transform living spaces and the way an entire community functions.

A group of 50 architectural students from UCSI University (UCSI) and Chung Yuan Christian University (CYCU), Taiwan, have risen to the challenge.

The students are part of a project that involves transforming an abandoned shop lot in the unassuming fishing village of Kuala Sepetang, Perak, into a communal centre of learning for the community and visiting scientists.

The project is named The Corner and students are redesigning it into a children's library with a play centre on the lower floor.

The upper floor is set to become a homestay centre – a facility that will accommodate the numerous scientists and academics who often visit the fishing village and nearby mangrove swamp for research purposes.

The collaboration between CYCU and UCSI involves 30 students from the Taiwanese university and 20 from UCSI who are currently on site working hard to make their sketches a reality.

This community project is guided by two of UCSI's visiting professors, Prof Huang Sheng-Yuan and Dr Chen Xuang-Cheng. Both are renowned architects from Taiwan.

The entire project is something that UCSI's School of Architecture and Built Environment is passionate about as it exemplifies the university's praxis approach.

The approach emphasises hands-on learning, bringing the industry and fieldwork into the classroom.

UCSI University's School of Architecture and Built Environment believes in holistic education that focuses on character building on top of skills training.

UCSI lecturer Teoh Chee Keong says that the school organised 18 curricular and

research activities last year.

Among these was an activity where students built huts in a fishing village. The experience taught them to understand the connection between nature, buildings and people as well as understand the lives of the fishermen.

"The university supports activities that teach students how to fully utilise precious natural resources," says Teoh.

This outdoors approach is supported by the dean of the Faculty of Engineering and Built Environment, Assoc Prof Ir Dr Jimmy Mok.

He says that the hands-on experience gives students an invaluable practical experience that can shape their character and make them better leaders for the future.

Assistant Prof Ar Chia Lin Lin, head of programme for the BSc (Hons) Architecture, says that the current global problem of a widening social gap can be attributed to failure in the education system.

This can be addressed by introducing students to various strata of society while preparing them for their careers.

"Through outdoor classroom learning, we wish to encourage a sense of responsibility in our students so that they remain humble and caring," says Prof Chia.

The initiative and communal approach implemented by UCSI has been praised by Kuala Sepetang state assemblywoman Chua Yee Ling.

She says that The Corner will provide children of the area an ideal and safe space to read and complete their homework and hopes that it will become a platform to encourage researchers to visit the area as well as promote the ecology, culture and community development of the area.

UCSI is hosting its Open Day on Aug 15 and 16 at its Kuala Lumpur campus.

■ For more information, call 03-9101 8882 or e-mail www.ucsiuniversity.edu.my/onlineenquiry



UCSI University and Chung Yuan Christian University architecture students working together to build a communal centre.



Students gain a different learning experience from being on-site and serving the locals.