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## Where learning is truly free

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I HAVE been an academic for almost 40 years now. I have served in both public and private universities, those that are among the best in their categories of public and private. I have given talks and held seminars or forums at many, many universities locally and abroad, albeit more closer to home.

And in all this time, I have never found any university that fits my dream of what constitutes a true university.

Over the years, I have outlined many criticisms and offered many suggestions of how we could remake Malaysian universities to better serve young minds as well as the nation, but none have been taken up or even seriously considered.

So today I will simply... fantasise. About a university that fits all my ideals and principles of education and knowledge roles.

My dream university will be an online one with students from all over the world. My goal is not only to provide excellent education for life sustenance, but also to build a new world citizen based on compassion, tolerance and the ability to learn as well as unlearn.

I want to rebuild the world using young minds that can "unlearn" their inherited values, history, politics, everything. By unlearning who they have come to be at this point in their lives, they can open their minds to who they could become by becoming aware of the larger world and the choices available to them.

Thus, my university will not be a factory for industry, but a place

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This is not the reality, it is just a fantasy. But wouldn't it be nice if acquiring knowledge was the only purpose of universities?

MOHD  
TAJUDDIN  
MOHD RASDI



## Over the top

of awakening.

I once stumbled on an online university set up by noted Canadian Islamist Dr Bilal Phillips. He had grants from an Islamic country to set up an online university at which you could earn a diploma or degree in social science subjects or subjects that do not require studio or laboratory work.

Fees are kept low and are based on whether you're getting a diploma or degree.

When I first came across it, the only condition the university had was that you had to go through two courses or subjects in Islamic Studies. Students who registered were from all faiths and they did not need to convert to Islam or be a Muslim to access all the online lectures, the e-books and monthly

live online discussions and forums with the lecturers.

I imagine that all the social science-related studies will be a priority in my university. I want to build the next batch of leaders in the world through an education based on my theory of the 50:30:20 learning experience: 50% of the courses will be the main major or discipline; 30% will be multidisciplinary, covering civilisational and cultural studies of world communities; and 20% will be practical engagement with communities, professions and government.

All the academics will be free-lance, and they would earn allowances through a credit system.

A Masters level lecturer would earn RM200 per credit while a doctorate lecturer would earn RM300 per credit. Thus, if a lecturer teaches several three-credit courses, they could earn between RM5,000 and RM8,000 a month. And, of course, these lecturers can also work at other universities on the usual permanent or part-time basis.

Since it's online, my university would not spend any money on physical infrastructure like libraries or classrooms, of course.

Instead, money would be spent on structured real-life interactions: Every six months, students from various disciplines will be asked to gather at designated hotels to physically meet with their lecturers and university officers. There would be a week of workshops, social interaction and networking.

Accreditation of standards will be advisory in nature, done by experts from all over the world through online discussions, interviews and examinations.

Testimonies from eventual employers of the students will be posted online for parents to appreciate and evaluate the schools and departments. No domineering agency would be entertained.

Advice from "professional bodies" will be taken as advice, not dogma. A Board of Studies comprising experts and professionals from all over the world will contribute feedback.

Each academic will be offered RM10,000 grant money for research projects every year. Academics will be encouraged to propagate their ideas by writing books, articles and creating social media communications -

YouTube videos, perhaps. There will be no professor or associate professor titles. Everyone is either a Mr/Ms or Dr. Good academics will be rewarded with generous bonuses or honorariums.

Seminars, workshops and book discussions will all occur in the virtual world. Academics will be encouraged to make an impact with their studies and specialties.

When the *Ready Player One* idea of walking, talking avatars drinking coffee in the virtual world is a reality, then my university will stay on screens and my *Star Trek* holodeck dream will have come true.

Oh, and in this university of mine, all controversial issues will be discussed without anyone closing gates, turning off electricity or summoning the police (as has happened in real life to some speakers at some universities). This will be a virtual world of true freedom of knowledge and learning.

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