

The Alumni Magazine

# Contact

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“The only way to discover the limits of the possible is to go beyond them into the impossible.”

**Arthur C. Clarke**

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# A**about** Contact

**Contact** is the medium for OUM graduates to stay connected to their alma mater. Published as a quarterly e-magazine, **Contact** tells the inspiring stories of those who have realised their dreams at OUM.

# IN THIS ISSUE

"Impossible is nothing," said Muhammad Ali.

While some people may be held back by insecurities or past failures, there are the courageous ones who, by conquering their fears, have proven true the words of this boxing legend.

We celebrate three such unique individuals in this issue of **Contact**, all of whom have found success through their studies at OUM and also beyond.

The fifth issue of this e-magazine will also explore the increasingly serious topic of global healthcare to give our readers useful tips on keeping themselves both safe and informed.

Happy reading!

LIVE & LEARN:

# RECORD-BREAKER

## *Continues to Make Her Mark*

By Izyan Diyana Merzuki (izyan\_diyana@edu.my)



**D**r Soo Wincci, one of OUM's most celebrated graduates, has surprised everyone yet again with her decision to pursue another PhD.

Some have called her crazy, but according to Dr Soo, studying, researching and reading journals are food for her brain.

"I love learning so much that I am always craving for more. This is the reason I decided to go to Spain for another master's degree and PhD.

"You know what's funny? The university in Spain took months to accept me for the PhD programme because they thought I was a scammer for having so many credentials," shares Dr Soo with a laugh.

She is currently pursuing a PhD in Artistic Production at Berklee College of Music in Valencia. She previously obtained a Master in Music and completed a Post-Master's Degree Fellowship programme at the same institution. In 2016, she obtained a PhD (Business Administration) from OUM.

“

I love learning  
so much  
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”

Last year, Dr Soo made it into the Malaysia Book of Records once again for the most number of academic degrees obtained by a beauty queen and recording artist.

“I want to achieve a lot of things and I believe I can do it all through education. It’s the best way to earn recognition.”

She admits that academic research did not interest her in the beginning: “I used to hate it. But I grew fond of it while studying for my PhD at OUM. The full support I received from lecturers and staff throughout the years helped me realise my potential.”

She has been in the music industry for so long and the dream of getting a scroll in music pushed her to take a chance in Spain.

“I hope I can spread my wings in music production in Spain as the music industry there is huge,” says Dr Soo, who is also learning Spanish.

Apart from making regular trips to Spain, the beauty queen is busy giving talks at universities, recording television shows and producing videos for her YouTube channel.

“I love giving talks to university students because I want to encourage them to do their doctorate. In today’s challenging world, even a master’s degree is pretty common nowadays. So if you want to be unique, why not pursue a PhD?” she says.

She is also using her YouTube channel as a platform to convey her ideas and messages regarding education in interesting ways.

“I am interested in coming up with my own books as well. I want to keep challenging myself and be a lifelong learner. I don’t know how far I can go, but I want to keep striving. With education, it is always worth the effort!”

PERSONALITY:

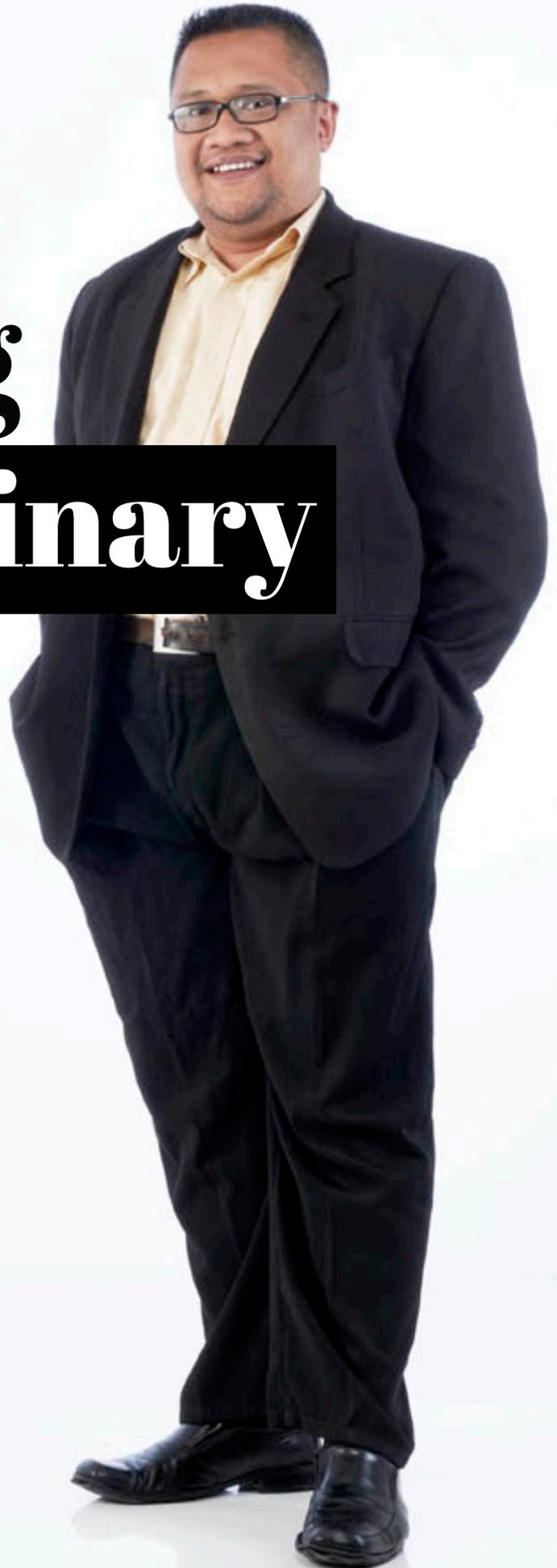
# Becoming Extraordinary

By Tengku Amina Munira (tg\_munira@edu.my)

“Just because I failed a few times doesn't mean I'll always be a failure.”

That was what Dr Mohd Nizam Sarkawi said on 12 September 2015. It was a special day for him and his family, as he graduated with a PhD (Business Administration) at OUM's 17th Convocation.

Success did not come easily for Dr Nizam. Though he failed his school exams multiple times, he never gave up hope. His story was so unique that it was even featured in a local newspaper. Soon after, a stranger stopped him on the street and asked if he was indeed the man who always failed yet had obtained a PhD, leaving him both touched and amused at the unexpected celebrity status.



“Kejayaan ini adalah bukti penebus tiga kali kegagalan saya sebelum ini dan ia adalah untuk mak saya yang mendorong hingga saya sampai ke tahap ini,” kata Mohamad Nizam Sarkawi, 41, yang berjaya mengenggam ijazah Doktor Falsafah (PhD) pada Majlis Konvokesyen Open University Malaysia (OUM) kali ke-17 di Pusat Dagangan Dunia Putra (PWTC) di sini, semalam.

Mohamad Nizam yang mengambil jurusan pengajian perniagaan berkata, dia pernah mengalami kegagalan dalam dua peperiksaan penting sebelum ini, namun tidak mematahkan semangatnya untuk menebus kembali kegagalan lalu dengan belajar bersungguh-sungguh.

“Pada 1989, saya gagal dalam Sijil Rendah Pelajaran (SRP) dan setahun selepas itu saya masih gagal selepas cuba membuat peperiksaan ulangan.

“Kemudian, saya mematuhi sebuah sekolah aliran vokasional di Batu Pahat dalam jurusan elektronik sebelum belajar alternatif ter



■ Tiga kali gagal SRP, dua kali ambil SPM

*Dr Nizam's unique success story was even featured in a local paper in 2015.*

Five years on, Dr Nizam has moved on in more ways than one. He once lived in his hometown of Johor Bahru, just 10km from Singapore. Today, he calls Changlun home, incidentally just 10km away from Thailand. It is a move he jokingly calls a 'south-north pilgrimage'.

“In my life, I've tried on so many hats,” Dr Nizam shares. “I've worked at a fast food restaurant, and also have experience in the chemical, financial and airline industries. In the nine years it took me to complete my PhD, I changed jobs several times. I feel like my career and education progressed in tandem.”

As he reflects on how far he's come, the 46-year-old is not shy about sharing his past. He says, “Back in the 80s, the Form Three exams were known as *Sijil Rendah Pelajaran* (SRP). I was not a bright student and failed the SRP thrice. I also had to sit for the SPM more than once.

“My results were poor, so I could only sign up for a part-time certificate

programme. After that, I worked my way through a diploma, bachelor's degree and master's degree. In short, it was one small step at a time until I eventually got my PhD!”

This sci-fi movie buff is now a senior lecturer teaching management courses at a public university in Kedah. He enjoys sharing real-world examples inspired by his own ups and downs: a bonus for students craving knowledge beyond the theoretical or academic.

For learners who are still studying at OUM, Dr Nizam has this to say: “Part-time study is tough, but those who choose to go through it are extraordinary. While most people focus on family and career, part-time learners must prioritise studying too. It isn't easy, so be proud of this!”

This humble man and his long journey to the top is one of OUM's most extraordinary success stories. He proves that anything is possible. All you have to do is try.

WORLD VIEW:

# OUTBREAK!

By Izyan Diyana Merzuki (izyan\_diyana@edu.my)

**T**he deadly coronavirus outbreak has taken the world by storm since it reared its ugly head in the first week of 2020.

The virus, named COVID-19 by the World Health Organization (WHO), has thus far claimed more than 1,000 lives and infected tens of thousands of people.

"The coronavirus should be considered 'public enemy number one'," says WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus at a media briefing in Geneva.

In the midst of heightened anxiety, the death of Dr Li Wenliang on 7 February grabbed headlines around the world. Considered a hero and the outbreak's first whistle-blower, he was infected while working at Wuhan Central Hospital, ground zero for the epidemic. To date, the virus has spread from China to 25 other countries. In Malaysia, there have been at least 18 cases reported.

Among the many coronaviruses, COVID-19, MERS-CoV and SARS-CoV can be fatal to humans. SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) emerged in 2002 in Guangdong, China, and MERS (Middle East respiratory syndrome) was first identified in 2012 in Saudi Arabia. The SARS epidemic infected more than 8,000 people in 26 countries, while MERS resulted in more than 2,400 cases in 27 countries.





The Ebola virus disease (EVD) is also often deadly. In the worst and most recent outbreak in West Africa between 2014 and 2016, 28,616 cases of EVD and 11,310 deaths were reported in Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone.

“All of these viruses are zoonotic, which means they can spread between animals and people,” says Doctor of Nursing programme director, Dr Rashidah Shahrudin. “These infections can cause symptoms ranging from the common cold to very serious conditions such as pneumonia, respiratory problems, kidney failure and even death.”

Dr Rashidah has extensive experience in nursing and also holds certificates in Intensive Care Nursing and Midwifery. She is a member of Joint Technical Committee at the Nursing Board Malaysia as well as a panel member of evaluators for nursing programmes for the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA).

So, what should we do to protect ourselves from such outbreaks?

Reducing the risk of infection boils down to practising good personal hygiene.

“The WHO has outlined standard guidelines to reduce the chances of catching the virus. These include cleaning your hands with soap or alcohol-based hand rub, covering your noses and mouths when sneezing or coughing, as well as avoiding close contact with anyone who has flu-like symptoms,” explains Dr Rashidah.

WHO also advises practising food safety such as cooking meat and eggs thoroughly. We should also avoid unprotected contact with wild or farm animals.

In Malaysia, the Ministry of Health has said that the COVID-19 situation is still in the early containment phase and remains under control.

However, if you have any enquiries regarding the outbreak, please contact the Crisis Preparedness Response Centre at 03-8881 0200 or e-mail [cprc@moh.gov.my](mailto:cprc@moh.gov.my).

WORK & STUDY:

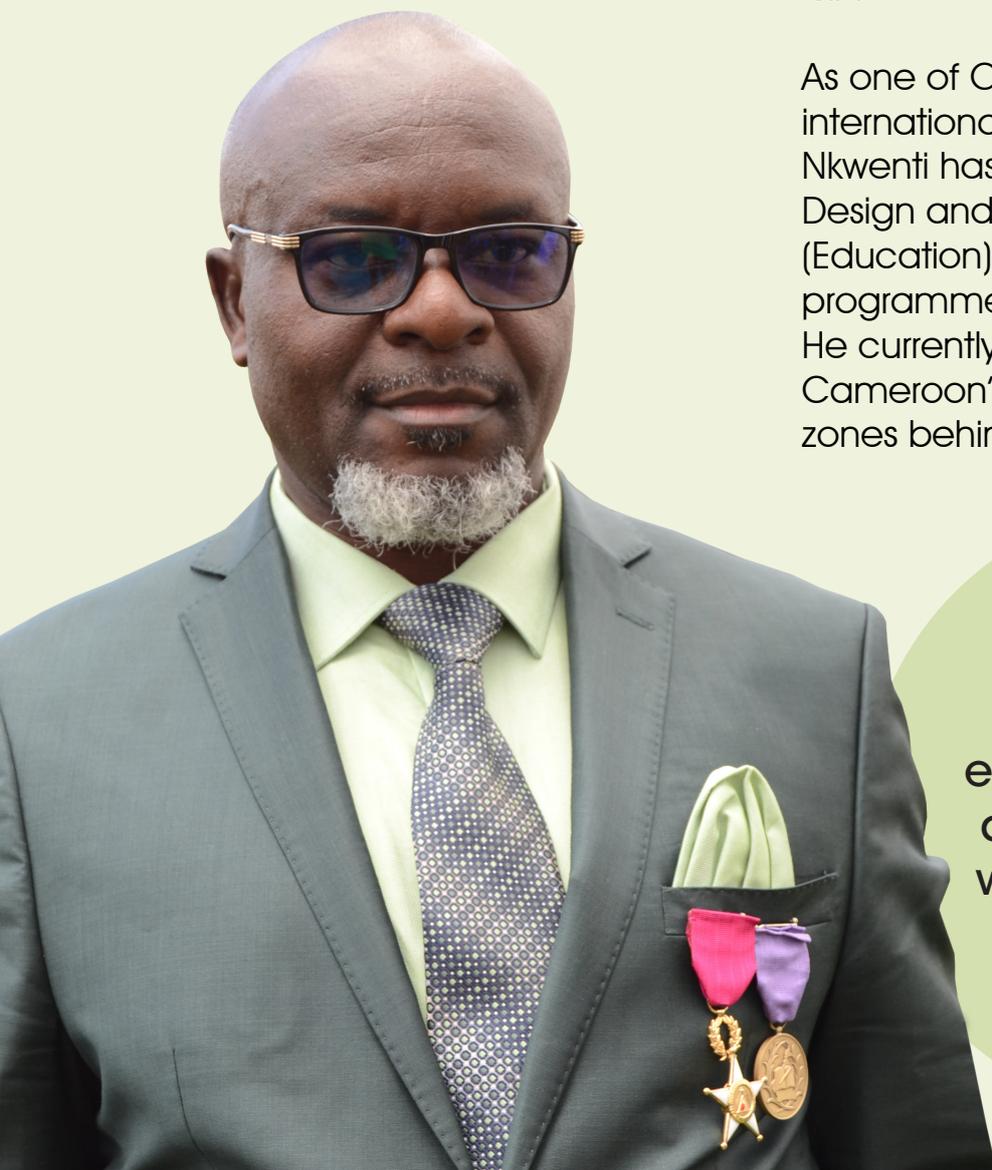
# A Knight in Cameroon

By Tengku Amina Munira (tg\_munira@edu.my)

**S**ir Dr Michael Nkwenti might not be a familiar name in Malaysia, but he is well-known in his home country, Cameroon. After all, there are not many who can say they've earned such a special title.

"I was awarded the 'Knight of Cameroon Academic Honour' by the Council of Ministers of Education in 2018," he says proudly. "Last year, I received the 'Cameroon National Order of Valour' from the President of the Republic, which carries the title 'Sir'."

As one of OUM's most distinguished international graduates, Sir Dr Nkwenti has a Master of Instructional Design and Technology and a PhD (Education). He completed both programmes as an online learner. He currently lives in Yaoundé, Cameroon's capital city, seven time zones behind Kuala Lumpur.



“

My greatest passion is to empower others to acquire skills that will help them live fulfilling lives.

”

“Since graduating in 2014, I have become a senior lecturer at one of the most prestigious state universities in Cameroon while continuing to serve as a lead inspector of pedagogy for ICTs in primary schools throughout the country. I have assisted 12 universities in six African countries to implement online learning programmes,” he explains.

Almost six years on, the father of five still remembers his student days fondly.

“I am so proud to be an OUM graduate! I truly believe that OUM’s learner-centred approach is one of the best in the world. I’m now better at perceiving, analysing and managing issues. The analytical and critical thinking skills I cultivated during my PhD have changed my life.”

Sir Dr Nkwenti is not only one of the foremost online learning experts in his country, he is also a consultant for the UNESCO Central African Bureau and Commonwealth of Learning.

“In this capacity, I’ve had the chance to design and develop technology-enhanced curriculum and resources, open and distance learning programmes, and support institutions to develop policies that foster the effective integration of technology in instructional processes.

“I’ve also contributed to helping Central African countries attain the UN’s Fourth Sustainable Development Goal,” he shares.

He believes that total wellbeing is key to a fulfilling life, a personal motto that inspires his enthusiasm at work as well as his spiritual passion as a prayer intercessor for his community.

“Positively shaping the minds of learners is one of the best things one can do as an educator,” he says. “So my greatest passion is to empower others to acquire skills that will help them live fulfilling lives.”

Sir Dr Nkwenti advises OUM learners to develop the right mentality.

He concludes, “Learners must have the desire to succeed so they can remain motivated throughout their studies. And remember that as time evolves, new challenges are always emerging. So they should focus on developing metacognitive, analytical and problem-solving skills. These are the things that will put them in good stead in the future.”

POINTERS:

# Keeping Healthy in 2020

By Tengku Amina Munira (tg\_munira@edu.my)

It's often said that an apple a day keeps the doctor away. Well, this adage is not only outdated, but also terribly unhelpful. To make 2020 your healthiest year yet, consider introducing a few changes in the way you take care of yourself.

Here, without involving apples, are seven tips to get you started.

## **Beware the “silent killer”.**

Hypertension, or high blood pressure, carries no obvious symptoms. If left uncontrolled, hypertension can lead to heart, brain, kidney and other diseases. So have your blood pressure checked regularly. If it is high, find out what you need to do to bring the numbers down.

## **Get tested.**

This is especially important for transmittable infections, such as the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), hepatitis B, sexually-transmitted diseases and tuberculosis. Getting tested means finding out how to either continue preventing these diseases or, if it turns out you are positive, getting the care and treatment that you need.



## **Get vaccinated.**

Vaccination is one of the most effective ways to prevent diseases and it isn't just for children. In addition to yearly flu shots, adults can opt to get vaccinated against the human papillomavirus, tetanus and shingles, among others.

## **Say no to mosquitoes.**

In 2019, there were 120,000 reported cases of dengue in Malaysia, one of the highest on record. But mosquitoes carry more than just dengue. Other diseases include chikungunya, malaria and lymphatic filariasis.

So take simple measures to protect yourself. If you're travelling, take antimalarial medicines or get vaccinated against Japanese encephalitis and yellow fever. Wear light-coloured, long-sleeved shirts and pants and use insect repellent. At home, use window and door screens, use bed nets and destroy mosquito breeding sites in your surroundings.

## **Get help when you're down.**

Sometimes, sadness isn't just sadness. It may be depression, which can manifest in different ways, make you feel hopeless or worthless, give you negative and disturbing thoughts or even overwhelming pain. If you're going through this, don't keep it to yourself. Talk to someone you trust, or contact Befrienders Malaysia at 03-7956 8145, e-mail [sam@befrienders.org.my](mailto:sam@befrienders.org.my) or visit [www.befrienders.org.my](http://www.befrienders.org.my).

## **Cook food properly.**

Unsafe food containing harmful bacteria, viruses, parasites or chemical substances can cause more than 200 diseases ranging from diarrhoea to cancers. When buying food, check the labels to ensure it is safe to eat.

*If you are preparing food, make sure you follow the Five Keys to Safer Food:*

- (1) keep clean;*
- (2) separate raw and cooked;*
- (3) cook thoroughly;*
- (4) keep food at safe temperatures; and*
- (5) use safe water and raw materials.*

## **Get regular check-ups.**

Regular check-ups can help find problems before they start. Health professionals have the tools to diagnose issues early, when your chances for treatment are better. Unlike the one about apples, the adage 'prevention is better than cure' is one worth remembering.



CALLING  
**ALL**  
ALUMNI!

Take the opportunity to be featured in this e-magazine and be an inspiration to others. Write to us if you're interested!

Keep in touch with friends and former classmates. Join the OUM Alumni Official group on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1666065323497165/>

**Reach out to us by contacting:**

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