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<td>Author(s)</td>
<td>Bukhory Ismail.; Sankaran Ramanathan.</td>
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Communication Education At Institut Teknologi MARA:
Responding To Media Needs

By

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&
Sankaran Ramanathan
COMMUNICATION EDUCATION AT
INSTITUT TEKNOLOGI MARA: Responding To
MEDIA NEEDS *

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OUTLINE

1. Origin, Objectives and History of Institut Teknologi MARA.
2. Origin and Development of the School of Mass Communication.
3. Involvement of the School with the Private and Public Sector Media.
5. Conclusion.

INTRODUCTION

Apart from the fact that the School of Mass Communication, Institut Teknologi MARA (ITM) and the Asian Mass Communication Research and Information Centre (AMIC) are both institutions involved in the study of and research into mass communication, they also share a common birth year. Both institutions were founded in the year 1972 as pioneers in their respective geographical areas, i.e. AMIC in Asia and ITM in Malaysia.

We are therefore honoured to have been invited to present a paper at this august gathering of academicians and practitioners and hope that the ITM experience reported in this paper will be useful in the discussions about communication education at this seminar.

Communication has often been described as the process of social interaction through messages applied via four different contexts: individual, small group, organizational and mass. There are two aspects to this process, namely interpersonal communication and mass communication. While interpersonal communication focuses on the human aspect of social interaction, mass communication centers on the technical resources involved in the social process, which may include anything from the humble pen or typewriter to the more sophisticated telecommunications and computer technologies.

The School of Mass Communication directly engages in the training of students for the mass communication industries, and has incorporated into its training program many components dealing with the human aspect of social interaction.

The School provides professionals directly to the advertising, broadcasting, journalism, public relations and publishing industries and indirectly, to related fields such as education, politics, marketing and management.

In order to achieve this objective and in the wake of evolutions and revolutions in the information and communication industries, both within Malaysia and among international communities, curriculum review, staff-training and physical expansion are ongoing priorities.

1. ORIGIN, OBJECTIVES AND HISTORY OF INSTITUT TEKNOLOGI MARA

In 1956, the Dewan Latihan RIDA (RIDA Training Centre) was established to provide education in trade and industry for young bumiputras from the rural areas. In 1965, RIDA (Rural and Industrial Development Authority) was renamed MARA (Majlis Amanah Rakyat - Council of Trust for the Indigenous People) and its training centre was renamed Maktab MARA (MARA College).
In October 1967, the institution underwent another name change as was known henceforth as Institut Teknologi MARA, located at its parent 300-acre campus at Shah Alam, capital of the state of Selangor.

In June 1986, the ITM Act came into effect and the institution was subsequently placed under the Ministry of Education, but administered by its own Council.

Today, ITM offers courses in 95 fields of study at Certificate, Diploma, Advanced Diploma and Bachelor's and Master's degree levels. These courses are administered under 12 different schools in the academic areas of Science and Engineering, Business and Management and the Social Sciences and Humanities. It has a student population of 27,536 distributed throughout its 10 campuses, with 12,980 students at the main campus. ITM's philosophy is based on the belief that every individual possesses talent, intelligence and interest and hence is capable of developing self, society and country through the right guidance, education and practice gained from the transfer of knowledge from various cultures and world civilizations as well as through the transfer and inculcation of Islamic values.

The current ITM Director, Ir. Haji Ahmad Zaidee Laidin, has embarked upon an academic agenda the objective of which is to educate Bumiputeras to be professionals of high-calibre who will be independent, knowledgable and morally upright in the conduct of competing in business, trade, science and technology.

2. ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE SCHOOL OF MASS COMMUNICATION

The first full-fledged Malaysian programme in Mass Communication was initiated by ITM when the School of Mass Communication was established in July 1972. The establishment was based on a feasibility study undertaken by Professor Ralph Kliesch from Ohio University in Athens, Ohio in 1971.

Hence in July 1972, the first intake of 30 students began their course. Initially, three fields of specialisation were offered - Journalism, Advertising and Public Relations. The fourth - Broadcasting was introduced in 1974. Later in 1989, a fifth specialisation, Publishing, was added.
Several alternatives presented themselves when it became necessary to choose the School's name. It was felt that the School of Journalism would represent too narrow a scope, because to many people, journalism is limited only to news reporting. Communication, on the other hand, is generally taken to encompass not only mass media activities but also non-media activities such as group dynamics, telephony and telegraphy. The School of Mass Communication is felt to be the most appropriate name for the programme launched and it also leaves room for future growth.

In July 1981, a six-month intensive English programme was started in order to increase the English proficiency of students who come from Malay medium schools. This has increased the duration of the course from 3 to 3 1/2 years.

Beginning 1984 there was the implementation of two intakes of students per academic year i.e. January and July, and admitting about 50 students per intake. Hence, the student population gradually increased from 187 in 1981 to 350 by January 1985, and 724 in July 1987. Current enrolment (July 1994) is 796 students (see Table 1).

Over the past 22 years, there have been seven deans. The first was Puan Marina Samad whose term was from July 1972 to September 1975. Under her, an intensive faculty development programme was instituted for Young Lecturers to undertake graduate studies in the USA.

The second head was Puan Shahreen Kamaluddin whose term of office was from October 1975 to June 1979. She was responsible for strengthening and developing the public relations sequence. It was also during her term that the School acquired its own photographic laboratory.

Puan Hamidah Karim was the third head and her term of office was from July 1979 to October 1981. During her term, the School's laboratory newspaper, previously BERITA ITM, was revived under the name of DIMENSI. She was also responsible for initiating the double intake of students.

The fourth head, Datin Sharifah Mariam Ghazali, who was appointed in October 1981, instituted a programme of curriculum review in keeping with the changes necessitated by the double intake and the intensive English programme. A bi-yearly magazine SASARAN was also started in 1983.

The fifth head was En. Mohd Hamdan Adnan (1983-1988). Under him, not only was the student intake increased, a fifth specialisation, Publishing was added. He also introduced an off-campus programme for working professionals.
The sixth head was Tn. Hj. Ilias Haji Zaidi (1989), who implemented the plans for the publishing sequence.

The current Dean, Dr. Bukhory Hj. Ismail has served for nearly five years since January 1990. He has been responsible for strengthening and adding to the physical facilities in the School such as radio/TV studios, expanding the photographic laboratory, expanding the computer/writing laboratories, and most recently, introduction of an on-campus radio service called Radio Kampus.

2.1 OBJECTIVES OF THE SCHOOL

* To prepare students for professional careers in:
  - Journalism
  - Advertising
  - Public Relations
  - Broadcasting
  - Publishing

* To provide a foundation for further and more specialised study in Mass Communication and related areas.

2.2 ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS

Admission is highly competitive and is granted to students:

* who hold the Higher School Certificate (HSC) or Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran (STP) with two strong principal passes and two subsidiary passes including General Paper and a credit in English in the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM).

* who have at least four years of relevant experience in the mass media in lieu of HSC/STP. However, an MCE/SPM qualification is required with credits in Bahasa Malaysia, English and three other subjects.

The School conducts personal interviews with prospective candidates and requires them to sit for an aptitude test in order to determine candidates' potential attitude, personality and proficiency in English.
2.3 GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE DIPLOMA PROGRAMME

Students first enter the Pre-Diploma course (currently located at the ITM branch campus at Melaka). Those who successfully complete their course proceed to the ITM main campus at Shah Alam and enrol in one of the five specialisations offered.

Students need to complete a minimum of 130 credit hours to graduate. Each semester a student is also required to fulfill a minimum of 21 credit hours. This does not include the Institute's general requirements and the six-month intensive English programme.

2.4 ACADEMIC CONTENT

The three-year Diploma programme stresses three areas of content:

- language skills in both English and Bahasa Malaysia,

- a broad background in the humanities and Social Sciences, and

- intensive communication component.

The language base is uniform across all the content areas. It consists of intensive study of both English and Bahasa Malaysia. A lot of attention is given to language study as language is the basic tool of mass communicators. There can be no compromise to this most fundamental of all tools.

There is little need to argue extensively on behalf of the place of Bahasa Malaysia in the curriculum. The national language will become more and more important to all Malaysians and the communicator's need to be functional in it is obvious.

The inclusion of English is equally important because English will continue to be vital to Malaysia for many years to come. Malaysian mass communicators will constantly need to deal in English effectively. An English-language press will continue to exist in Malaysia. News of the outside world will continue to come to Malaysia via international wire services and communication media, in English.

If language skills are essential to mass communicators, so are the liberal Arts and social science subjects, to enable the student to understand the local, regional and international
environment in which he and his audience live and work. The mass communicator must have an understanding of people - of how and why they act the way they do. He needs to be able to understand and cope with changes that will inevitably occur in his society during his career. In short, he must be educated, not just trained.

The professional component of all sequences is divided into a small number of courses common to all streams and other courses unique to each stream. It comprises about 40 per cent of all subjects offered to the students.

The mass communication subjects are a mixture of theory-oriented subjects such as Communication Research, Interpersonal Communication, Mass Media & Society, etc. which are common to all sequences. There are also a number of practical subjects such as news writing, editing, copy writing, consultancy public relations, etc.

Thus ITM's Diploma in Mass Communication is a well-knit course offering a mixture of theory as well as practical subjects.

2.5 FACILITIES

The School has a typewriting room with 40 typewriters. This room is constantly used, especially by journalism students. Also, since all reports and term papers are required to be typewritten, it is not uncommon to find students at their typewriters in the late hours of the night, especially towards the end of the term.

A small photography laboratory was set up in 1976. This could initially accommodate six students at a time and has all the equipment necessary for developing and printing in black and white. In 1980, the photography lab was enlarged so that it can now handle 25 students at a time. The School also has 27 cameras for the students to use. Further expansion in 1990 resulted in a larger work area and better facilities (colour processor was added).

The School has a small departmental library housing about 3,000 books and subscription to about 100 periodicals on mass communication and world affairs. This library supplements the central ITM (Tun Abdul Razak) library and serves primarily as a centre for quick reference. It is also used by the staff as a repository for reading and reference materials for specific courses.

With regard to broadcasting facilities, there has been a Radio Studio used for recording and announcing over cable. This was expanded in 1990 and the School started operation of Radio Kampus in November 1993. Further, there is a viewing
room for video and film set up in 1990. A video editing and media room was also set up in 1990 with a sophisticated editing system using U-matic highband (commercial broadcasting standard). Currently, plans have been formulated for the establishment of a closed-circuit TV system covering key areas in the main campus at Shah Alam.

2.6 FACULTY

The School has now 36 full-time faculty members comprising 3 principal lecturers, 14 senior lecturers and 19 lecturers. Out of these, 4 are Ph.D, 31 are Masters Degree holders, while only one holds Bachelor's degree. (See Table 2)

Faculty members have also participated regularly in seminars, workshops and courses on mass communication, both within Malaysia as well as at the international level.

The School is also represented in a number of mass media organisations in Malaysia. Among these are:

* BERNAMA, (The National News Agency)
* IPTAR (Institut Penyiiran Tun Abdul Razak - (The National Broadcasting Training Centre).
* Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (The National Language and Literature Agency).
* Jawatankuasa Penggubalan Dasar Komunikasi Negara (Committee for Formulating the National Communications Policy).

2.7 JOB OPPORTUNITIES

Graduates from the School of Mass Communication are trained professionally to fulfill the requirements needed by the government and the private sector to fill professional posts.

Job opportunities for ITM graduates are very vast in view of the present demand for posts in both the government and private sectors.

Graduates would be holding posts like:

* Journalism - Reporter/Journalist, feature writer, sub-editor, editor

* Public Relations - Press Liaison and Information Officer, Public Relations Officer and Research Officer.
* Advertising - Accounts executive, marketing officer, copywriter and media planner.

* Broadcasting - Script writer, news/public affairs writer radio and television producer.

* Publishing - Editor, sub-editor, publishing executive, publications manager.

More than 95% of the graduates have secured jobs in the government and the private sectors.

More than 300 graduates have gone for further studies to the United States and United Kingdom. Currently, 14 of them are serving the School as lecturers and there are some who have become lecturers in local universities. It is because of the ample job opportunities that the school has increased its intake and instituted the double intake system.

Thus, from 1995 onwards it is anticipated that the school will be producing 280 graduates per year.

2.8 RECOGNITION

The Diploma of Mass Communication has been recognised by the Public Services Department as equivalent to a general degree from any of the Malaysian universities.

Graduates are emplaced on the DT-3 salary scale. Recognition from private sector employees has been more encouraging, with graduates being emplaced on the same salary scale as honours degree graduates from other Malaysian universities.

Further, many American universities accept the ITM Diploma as being equivalent to a baccalaureate degree.

3. INVOLVEMENT OF THE SCHOOL WITH THE PRIVATE AND PUBLIC SECTOR MEDIA

The School has constantly maintained close rapport with Malaysian mass media organisations in both the public and private sectors. Many media practitioners including outstanding personalities such as Tokoh Kewartawan, Tan Sri Samad Ismail, Encik Samani Mohamed Amin, Azizul Rahman Kallahan and Datuk Ahmad Sebi Abu Bakar (to name a few) have served as part-time and guest lecturers.

Many faculty members of the School are actively involved in various professional organisations at both regional and national levels in various capacities. The organisations involved are:
International Association for Mass Communication Research (IAMCR). The School is an institutional member.

Asian Mass Communication Research and Information Centre (AMIC). The School is an institutional member. In addition, faculty members serve as representatives, consultants, reviewers and research collaborators.

International Institute for Communication, London. The School intends to become an institutional member.

Asian Institute for Broadcasting Development (AIBD). Faculty serve as course facilitators.

Institute of Public Relations Malaysia (IPRM). Faculty serve as council members and course resource persons.

Advertising, Communications and Training (ACT), the training division of the Malaysian Association of Advertisers. Faculty serve as consultants and course resource persons.

Institut Akhbar Malaysia (IAM-Malaysian Press Institute). Faculty serve as judges for journalism awards and as resource persons.

FINAS (the National Film Corporation). Faculty serve as resource persons and judges for film awards.

Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (DBP - the Language and Literature Agency). Faculty serve as resource persons.

In addition to the above, the School has conducted short training courses and counseling projects for numerous other agencies in the public and private sector such as Kelang Container Terminal (KCT), Dewan Bandaraya Kuala Lumpur, MAS, Ministry of Rural Development, Ministry of Information, Malaysian Association of Tour and Travel Agents, Ministry of Agriculture, Drainaga & Irrigation Department and Ministry of Defence. Faculty members also give talks on communication to voluntary organisations such as Rotary, Pemadan and Bakti.

It is also pertinent to note here that many ITM graduates and former faculty hold senior posts in Malaysian mass media organisations. This has helped to increase rapport between the School and media organisations. Special mention must be made of the former Heads of School and Course Tutors who continue to support the School in various ways.
4. **FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SCHOOL**

Over the past three years, the School has strived to obtain approval for a Master's Degree in Mass Communication to be conducted on a twinning basis with a leading American university. We are hopeful of obtaining approval soon.

Another proposal is a one-year Certificate in Broadcast Communication Studies (CBCS), to be conducted by the Asia-Pacific Institute for Broadcasting Development (AIBD) in collaboration with ITM. This certificate, designed for broadcasters in the Asia-Pacific region is scheduled to be launched in July 1995.

The School will also be submitting a proposal to the ITM Council to add a sixth specialisation (Film/Video Production) to its existing Diploma programme.

5. **CONCLUSION**

From the above report, it can be seen that ITM's School of Mass Communication has made a steady progress since its inception in 1972. We hope to continue responding in similar fashion to the need for communication education in Malaysia.
REFERENCES:


## TABLE 1

**STUDENTS ENROLMENT (JULY 1994)**

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### TABLE 2

ACADEMIC QUALIFICATIONS AND DESIGNATIONS
OF ACADEMIC STAFF, SCHOOL OF MASS COMMUNICATION,
INSTITUT TEKNOLOGI MARA

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