

TRACKING FORMER UUM STUDENTS: WHERE ARE THEY?

Md Zahir Mat Cha¹, Huda Ibrahim², **Nafishah Othman**³, Amran Ahmad⁴, Musyrifah Mahmod⁵

School of Computing, Universiti Utara Malaysia, 06010 UUM Sintok, Kedah, Malaysia.

{zahir¹, huda753², nafishah³, amran⁴, musyrifah⁵}@uum.edu.my

INTRODUCTION: OH MY ALUMNI!

Dr. Abd. Halim Mat Lazim is quietly contemplating in his office thinking about how to tackle the given directives, by the upper echelons of university management, that were established during the Senate meeting held earlier on that morning. As the Director of UUM Alumni Centre he is ultimately responsible for the direction of the Alumni Centre and its success. He needs to discuss this pertinent matter with his officer. He called for Mr. Omar, the System Officer, to discuss about how they should correctly proceed.

“Knock! Knock! Knock!”

Mr. Omar: “Dr. Halim, you wanted to see me?”

Dr. Abd. Halim: “Yes, yes, please have a seat”.

Without wasting any more precious time, Dr. Abd. Halim explained in detail to Mr. Omar the directives from UUM top management and the utmost urgency of having the alumni records updated. He also explained the dire need for activities that would benefit both UUM and the alumni in order to successfully accomplish the objectives of the Alumni Centre.

Dr. Halim: “Currently, we have almost 70,000 graduates from UUM. Some of them include international postgraduates who hold reputable positions in their respective countries, such as ministers, politicians, corporate leaders, and academicians. So, if we are able to maintain good rapport with them, we could involve them in promoting UUM to the world, by utilising their knowledge and experience in supporting the development of the students’ career internationally”.

Mr. Omar: “Yes, I agree with you, Doc. We could collect the graduates’ updated information so that it would facilitate the cooperation between them and the local students of UUM. We do have a system to do that”.

Dr. Halim: “Yes we do. But, well... the system does not really accomplish what we want to achieve, does it? We have used the system for quite some time now. However, I believe there are some issues with the system”.

Mr. Omar: “For your information Doc, the current system doesn’t store updated information since it is a stand-alone system and can only be update based on a group of data and not in real time. The information we have in our system is only from the past five years, yet we have produced graduates for more than 20 years! The records before 2008 cannot be updated since we do not have any information. It is very difficult to track down previous alumni records”.

Dr. Halim: “If that is the case, we need to think what we should do to collect updated information, so that we can maintain the link between UUM and its former students. We also need to get feedback or responses on their current employment status either they already employed, still looking for a job or unemployed”.

Mr. Omar: “I agree Doc. The updated information would be useful for fulfilling our Alumni Centre objectives”.

Dr. Halim: “Yes, this can be a major referral centre for planning UUM internationalisation activities, such as promoting UUM internationally, recruitment of foreign students, and updating status of their employment after graduating. As a result of this system, their employment status can also be analysed for gauging the marketability of our graduates. Our current problem also at the moment is the desired system would demand high a budget, which we simply cannot afford at this moment in time”.

Mr. Omar: “Yes. We definitely need quite a high cost to install the new hardware and software”.

Dr. Halim: “While waiting for the budget, may be we could think of suitable system requirements that we need”.

Mr. Omar: “Indeed. I will discuss about the system characteristics that we want with my staff, but the challenge is we do not have any staff with IT background to assist us”.

Dr. Halim: “I can assist government with that... I will try to request for an IT officer to be allocated in the Alumni Centre. Alright, thank you Mr. Omar. We’ll see each other again in one week to discuss this matter thoroughly. I hope that you can gather the requirements for our new system based on the current system constraints. I will look into the matter of our alumni directions to tally with the system. We have to work fast on this matter as our top management is pushing for the Alumni Centre to accomplish this mission”.

GENERAL BACKGROUND OF ORGANISATION

Over time, UUM has produced more than 70,000 graduates from different levels of studies and programmes since its first convocation ceremony in 1988. This figure is indicative that UUM alumni are everywhere in the country and it is not surprising if they are also posted abroad. This milestone reflects UUM’s capabilities in producing satisfactory graduates to fulfil the demand of human resources in the Malaysian labour market and also at the international level.

“Pusat Alumni UUM” or the UUM Alumni Centre, which was established in 2008, is located at the Student Affairs Department. It is headed by a Director and assisted by an Assistant Director with four support staff, as shown in Figure 1. They are responsible in ensuring that the Centre plays an optimal role in achieving the vision and mission of UUM through smart partnership with the alumni. It also serves as a liaison among the alumni and UUM.

Vision of Alumni Centre

Establish continuous cooperation between alumni and the university in the realisation of the UUM development agendas and the country.

Mission of Alumni Centre

Strengthen alumni relations through smart partnership between the alumni and university for mutual benefits.

Objectives of Alumni Centre

- Establish continuous cooperation with the alumni for further university development.
- Expand the alumni network among local and international graduates.
- Manage endowment of alumni and channel it to the welfare and development of the students and the university.
- Manage UUM Foundation for the purpose of funding for students and university.
- Provide programmes involving the alumni which contribute the expertise and skills that can be shared with future graduates to upgrade themselves and their careers.

Alumni Centre Organizational Chart

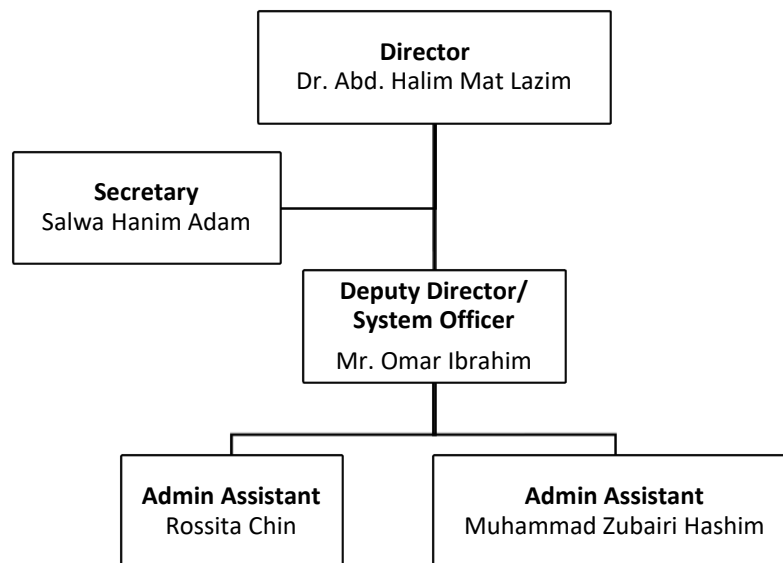


Figure 1: Alumni Centre organisational chart

The Alumni Centre is responsible for keeping track of all records about former UUM students, either graduate or postgraduate students, whether they are attached with a local or international company after graduation. To maintain a good relationship and open communication between ex-UUM students and the Alumni Centre, a database can play as a bridging method so that all

relationships and student development after they leave the campus can be monitored. This database can also help the university management to reach out to every ex-student and thus facilitate university promotion of UUM programmes throughout the world.

TRACKING FORMER UUM STUDENTS

Where are they?

After one week, Mr. Omar reported to Dr. Halim, about the findings and information that he had collected. He described briefly about the scenario of managing records of former students. The main issue is to track and manage updated records of all former UUM students since 1988. As a practice before graduation, students are required to fill up the graduate Tracer Study form, as prepared by the Ministry of Higher Education. The information required includes graduate profile and employment status (Figure 2). The Alumni System retrieves the data from the Tracer Study database.

However, the Alumni System only stores data provided by the alumni during that single moment in time before their graduation, and does not have features to allow updates or the updating of information. The Alumni Centre staff also do not have access to update their information directly to the Alumni System.

Profile Information

Name :

Identification Card/Passport/Police/Army Number :

Email :

Mobile Number:

*Your personal information will be kept confidential and will not be disclosed or shared with any third party without your consent.

Studies Information and Job Status During Convocation

Convocation Year	Institution	Award	Job Status During Convocation
2015	UNIVERSITI UTARA MALAYSIA	IJAZAH SARJANA MUDA SAINS DENGAN KEPUJIAN (TEKNOLOGI MAKLUMAT)	Not Working

Figure 2: Graduate Tracer Study System (<http://graduan.mohe.gov.my>)

The system desired by the UUM Alumni Centre will enable UUM to build good rapport with former students and allow communication among former students. Therefore, the alumni need to update the current employment status information in order to maintain a continuous relationship with UUM. In accordance to UUM internationalisation planning, the Alumni System will be the main referral centre between former students and UUM. In the case of international students, UUM can identify potential former students to promote UUM in their respective countries.

But before this can be achieved, alumni data need to be recorded manually and due to some constraints, the university is unable to completely trace all of the alumni. At present, the university can only manage to record 10,500 alumni since 2008, when the alumni database system was developed (Figure 3). However, the process is updated by batch processing, which with its constraints, will create problems related to the data not being updated on time and thus ultimately affecting data integrity.

The screenshot shows a web-based form titled "w_ha11 - Merekod/Kemaskini Maklumat Peribadi Siswazah". The form is designed for recording or updating alumni personal information. It includes the following fields and options:

- No. Matrik : [Text input field]
- No. K/P : [Text input field]
- Tarikh Lahir : [Text input field]
- Jantina : ☐ Lelaki ☐ Perempuan
- Bangsa : [Dropdown menu with "Tiada kod" selected]
- Warganegara : ☐ Warganegara Malaysia ☐ Bukan Warganegara Malaysia
- Agama : [Dropdown menu with "Tiada kod" selected]
- Taraf Kahwin : [Dropdown menu] K - Kahwin B - Bujang
- Alamat Surat Menyurat : [Three stacked text input fields]
- No. Telefon : [Text input field]
- Kolej Akademik : [Text input field]
- E-mail : [Text input field]
- Ahli PAUUM : ☐ Ahli Aktif ☐ Ahli Seumur Hidup
- Status Meninggal : ☐ Ya ☐ Tidak
- Falsafah Hidup Anda : [Large text input field]

Below the "Falsafah Hidup Anda" field, there is a note: "(Tidak melebihi 15 perkataan)".

At the bottom right of the form, there are two buttons: "Sambung" and "Simpan", along with a small icon of a computer monitor.

w_ha12 - Merekod/Kemaskini Maklumat Pekerjaan

No. Matrik : 10772 Omar Bin Ibrahim

Status Kerja :

Jawatan Sekarang : Pegawai Tadbir

Taraf Jawatan : Tetap

Kategori Jawatan : Pengurusan

Jabatan : Badan Berkanun

Tarikh Mula Kerja : 11/01/2000

Gaji : RM 3001 keatas

Bidang Tugas : Pengurusan Pentadbiran

Nama Pejabat/Syarikat : Universiti Utara Malaysia

Alamat Pejabat : Pusat Alumni
Universiti Utara Malaysia
06010 Sintok
Kedah

No. Telefon : 04-9284036 No. Fax : 04-9284016

Status MSC : ☒ Ya ☐ Tidak

Sambung Simpan

Figure 3: Alumni System

What went wrong?

There is no robust and tough system completely without having some failure. When this happens, the most critical matter is the safety of the data, and also the system integrity itself. Backup and restore processes should be done by IT experts, but this case, there is no IT staff being assigned to the Alumni Centre to manage and maintain the system. Therefore, updating and modifying information must be done directly by staff from another department, in other words UUMIT staff.

The process of updating the data is done through batch processing by UUMIT. The Alumni Centre has no access to update student profile and current employment's status. In addition, most of the alumni are not aware of the system due to several reasons, such as weak links between UUM and the alumni, and no direct access to the Alumni System from the university website.

The data storage (server) is currently located at UUMIT, which also shares with other university applications. The continuous growth of alumni data from year to year would require a separate large data storage and high speed processor, due to the current server that is no longer able to support the high volume of data.

In order to purchase a new server, the Alumni Centre requires a large amount of funds which is not currently available. In addition, the Alumni Centre is not a profit-based unit. Therefore, it is beyond their capability to generate income to purchase, install, and maintain the new server.

REFERENCES

Graduates Tracer Study. (2015, November 15). Retrieved from: <http://graduan.mohe.gov.my>

Mission, objectives, and organizational chart of the UUM Alumni Centre. (2015, October 15).
Retrieved from: <http://alumni.uum.edu.my>

Connolly, T., & Begg, C. (2014). *Database systems: A practical approach to design, implementation, and management* (6th ed.). USA: Addison Wesley.