

MUT takes major step to curb first year drop-out rate

Being a first-year student at a university is quite daunting. In its message to students wanting to study at a US college or university, the US Embassy refers to a “culture shock” that foreign students have to deal with. The same is true even when students have enrolled in higher education institutions in their own country. The level of discomfort, confusion and frustration can be so significant that some

students decide to drop out. This has happened increasingly over time, eating into the number of students that graduate every year. This is a sore point for both higher education institutions and the government. MUT’s Teaching and Learning Development Centre (TLDC) has taken a decision to tackle the problem head-on through the ‘First Year Experience (FYE)’ programme. The TLDC is spearheading the project, but it is important to note that the FYE project is an umbrella that unifies all initiatives and interventions that focus on first-year students. As such, it is led by an MUT FYE team that comprises representatives of all the University stakeholders.

Giving more reasons for the project, Arthi Ramrung of the TLDC said that the FYE is an international movement towards intentionally focusing on first-time-entering students, with the aim of addressing a number of challenges such as high drop-out rates and poor performance of students in their first year of study. “MUT has made a step towards creating a more supportive environment for our first-year students. We intend to improve how we engage and support our students through a coordinated programme that will allow all stakeholders to acknowledge their roles in a first-year student’s life,” said Ramrung. She went on to say that MUT defines its FYE programme as an intentional and relevant institutional programme aimed at ensuring that first-year-entering students are exposed to stimulating, holistic and enriching curricular and co-curricular activities. “The programme will among other things, help students to transition seamlessly from school to university and create a sense of belonging, with a view to attaining the desired MUT graduate attributes.”



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The response of students towards some of the new workshops has been encouraging; a large number of first-year students attended the first round of programmes. The FYE project will be rolled out in phases. Ramrung said that they have introduced new interventions such as faculty orientation and digital literacy workshops; they have also introduced student academic advisors who are meant to guide students along their journey. They are currently developing an MUT FYE programme which will be called GPS (Getting Prepared for Success), which the TLDC hopes will help the students navigate the University and their studies simultaneously. Ramrung said they hoped to launch the programme to students in 2021. The TLDC also has a number of developments that it envisages in the programme.

“As we compete with the limited time in a semester, it is important to note that a lot of the engagement that we wish to have with first-year students will have to be somehow integrated into their timetables. It is important that the FYE programme not be looked at as a separate entity but as an important part of the MUT students’ journey,” concluded Ramrung.