

Announcements on Online Learning and Academic Updates during the MCO

Since the Movement Control Order (MCO) started on 18 March 2020, regular announcements have been sent out by the University to all staff and students regarding online learning. The first announcement from UTAR regarding the transition to online learning was sent out via mailmaster and social media on 15 March 2020 and subsequently, for every extension of the MCO, an announcement was sent out to inform staff and students on the continuation of online learning and all updates on academic matters including the FAQs. Each new announcement was sent out via UTAR mailmaster and social media.

The announcements are also uploaded on UTAR website. For easy reference, please refer to the following link for all previous announcements on online learning and academic updates: <https://dccpr.utar.edu.my/COVID-19-News-Announcements.php>

To summarise the announcements and to provide further updates, the following are the key information for students' attention:

1. Temporary Closure of UTAR Campuses due to the MCO

UTAR campuses have been closed since 18 March 2020 in accordance with the declaration of the Movement Control Order (MCO). The first period of the MCO was from 18 March 2020 to 31 March 2020. The MCO was subsequently extended from 1 April 2020 to 14 April 2020, from 15 April to 28 April 2020 and from 29 April 2020 to 12 May 2020. It was announced by the Prime Minister, YAB Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin on 1 May 2020 that schools, colleges and institutions of higher learning will remain closed. Therefore, UTAR campuses will remain closed until further instructions from the Government and teaching and learning will continue to be conducted online.

2. Rescheduling of the Academic Calendar

The end of the January 2020 trimester for Foundation Programme has been extended to 31 May 2020 and for Undergraduate/Postgraduate programmes to 14 June 2020. The next trimester will commence through online teaching and learning for new and existing students on 1 June 2020 for Foundation Programme, and 15 June 2020 for Undergraduate and Postgraduate programmes. For Postgraduate programmes, this refers to those programmes conducted via coursework and mixed mode.

Orientation for the new intake students will be conducted online as e-orientation and will commence from 15 May 2020. Students are advised to refer to the University website on e-orientation (<https://e-orientation.utar.edu.my/>) for the e-orientation schedule and content.

3. Online Teaching and Learning

In line with the announcement by MOHE on 20 March 2020 that online teaching and learning is allowed, UTAR has implemented online teaching and learning via WBLE/ WBLE2 (Web Based Learning Environment) and other modes of interactive video communication channels such as Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Google Meet and WhatsApp, etc. Online teaching and learning will remain for the whole of this Jan 2020 trimester and shall continue for the coming May 2020 trimester until the end of the trimester.

Once the MCO is lifted and after MOHE has announced that students are allowed to return to campus, students need not return to campus immediately until further instructions from the University. Students will be notified in advance (about 4 weeks' of notice) on the date of return to campus so that sufficient time is given for students to make preparations for travel and accommodation arrangements before commencing classes on campus. The returning of students to campus will be in stages and by batches beginning with smaller groups of students. Students who are required to attend physical lab classes or clinical training as required by professional bodies will be arranged to return to campus at the initial stage, keeping the number of students on campus to a minimum group.

During this whole process, safety and health precautions and social distancing in accordance to the standard operating procedures set by the government will be followed strictly. E-learning resources will continue to be made available to students for online teaching and learning. Please do note that the arrangement is subject to MOHE's decision and announcement on when students can return to campus.

During the period when the students are returning to the campus in batches, online teaching and learning shall continue to be provided until the end of the trimester. The programme course materials for those courses with face-to-face teaching after students are allowed to return to campus, will also continue to be made available on-line for students who are unable to return to campus due to personal or unforeseen reasons. Students who do not want to continue studies for the next trimester, can apply for leave of absence for the whole of the May 2020 trimester and continue their studies in the October 2020 trimester.

For some courses, especially those taken by final year students, which require students to have hands-on experience in practical/clinical training to comply with requirements of professional bodies, students will be provided with remedial classes to supplement their online learning, after their return to campus.

All postgraduate students (by research mode) and research assistants will also return in stages to resume their research activities in the laboratories/studios/workshops after MOHE's announcement to allow students to return to campus. Permission for postgraduate students (by research mode) and researchers/research assistants to access the laboratories/studios/workshops should be obtained from their respective Deans and shall be based on priority and subject to the availability of the space in the laboratories/studios/workshop in line with the need for social distancing. Postgraduate students (by research mode) and research assistants are requested to discuss with their respective supervisor(s) on the scheduling and planning of their laboratory experiments, studio work and research activities.

UTAR will ensure that the instructions issued by the MOHE and MOH are properly adhered to and strictly executed to ensure the overall health and safety of staff and students on campus.

4. Co-curricular Activities and Events

In line with the government's instructions, all co-curricular activities and events in the coming trimester that involve group gathering of people are not allowed until further notice. However, these activities can be conducted through online channels such as webinar, online meetings, cyber forum, online talks and others.

For the duration of the MCO period, UTAR has taken steps to clean and sanitise the campuses to ensure that the campus environment is safe and ready before staff and students return to campus. The University will continue to follow the instructions and guidelines from the Malaysian government with regards to health and safety. Once the government allows staff and students to return to campus, precautionary measures as per government SOPs, such as temperature scanning, wearing of face masks in campus, use of sanitisers, regular cleaning of premises and social distancing in campus will be strictly followed and implemented.

We thank you for your patience, understanding and cooperation. Together we can overcome the challenges that are confronting us.

Do stay safe and healthy

Office of the Registrar

6 May 2020