

## UKM is “penalising” students

Written by straits-mongrel

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**Letter to Prof Tan Sri Dr Sharifah Hapsah Syed Hasan Shahabudin, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) vice-chancellor**

Dear vice-chancellor,

I am writing to you with regards to the persecution of four [UKM students](#) for taking part in the [Hulu Selangor](#) elections. Come 2 and 3 June 2010, the four will be charged under Section 15 of the [Universities and University Colleges Act](#) (UUCA) 1971 which prohibits students from associating with any political party, society, trade union or any other organisation without the vice-chancellor's approval.

I assume that if we grant voting rights to citizens who are 21 years and above, that would mean that we acknowledge their capacity to make decisions and to exercise their rights as adults.

Therefore, as Malaysian citizens, they have every right to participate in the country's political process. Hence, why then are we persecuting these students for exercising the right that every adult Malaysian should have?

We already have too many students who are apathetic about the country's fate. We complain about those who don't bother, don't care, tak tahu and tak nak kisah about events in the country. These students are among those who will eventually become graduates who are clueless about the country's social, political, and economic landscape.

But when we finally have students who bother to take an interest in elections, we choose to penalise them for their interest and for executing their rights. Dear vice-chancellor, when the rest of the student population cannot even be bothered about what's happening in the country, shouldn't we instead take pride in having students who are?

Are we to reward patriotism with penalties? On 19 May 2010 at 9.28am, you posted this on [Twitter](#) and on Facebook — “Tun Musa Hitam: 'youth & women will change d world'. But both need empowerment. Let's do it.” Now how do we empower youths to make decisions when their capacity to execute their basic rights as adults is restricted under the UUCA? This isn't empowerment. This is control and intimidation, not to mention an infringement of a person's rights.

[UKM](#) 's educational goal is "to produce graduates with strong leadership qualities who are confident of themselves with a strong sense of national integrity and are ethical and able to engage internationally." Our four political science students stepped up to the plate to demonstrate that they can and will take an interest in the nation's politics. They showed that they were confident, willing, and brave enough to engage with "the outside world" although they may be regarded as mere students by some.

Hence, penalising these students would amount to contradicting UKM's own educational goal. It would demonstrate that UKM refuses to acknowledge student leaders who rise above their peers and who show that their interest and contributions extend beyond the university's walls. The university is choosing to see these four students as pests and threats rather than recognise them as change agents. And mind you, we are not talking about poor students with hooligan tendencies. Among these four are students with Cumulative Grade Point Averages of 3.51 and 3.79.

If we penalise such students, we risk having generations of cowardly students, too afraid to challenge the status quo, who will be unlikely to break free from their comfort zone.

Is this the direction UKM is heading for? And is this the kind of students UKM wants to produce?

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**UKM student**