

## **Leaders in the Civic Engagement Movement: Vice Chancellor Shahabudin**

by Lorlene Hoyt

June signals the fourth installment of our monthly *Leaders in the Civic Engagement Movement* series. This issue features the Vice-Chancellor of the Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) and active member of the Talloires Network Steering Committee, Sharifah Hapsah Shahabudin.

Vice Chancellor Shahabudin identified three key moments in her early life that ignited her passion for civic engagement. Her mother was an active member of the Women's Service League in Kedah, Malaysia, and as a young girl, Vice Chancellor Shahabudin accompanied her mother to villages in Alor Star where kampong women were being taught to cook and sew. Her interest in civic engagement grew when she was a second year medical student in Kuala Lumpur and bravely volunteered to deliver food and other supplies to people in "hot areas" who were stranded by the curfew imposed during the racial riots after the 1969 general elections. The third moment that shaped the Vice Chancellor's passion for civic engagement took place in 1985 when she successfully raised money through fashion shows and charity bazaars to establish a nursery for the working parents in the Faculty of Medicine at UKM. Through that effort she was invited to join the Association of Women Graduates and became its representative to the National Council of Women's Organisations of Malaysia (NCWO).

Today, as UKM's Vice Chancellor (since August 2006) and the president of NCWO (since 2004), Vice Chancellor Shahabudin is a forceful advocate of knowledge transfer for social development by way of industry-community partnerships. As head of a premier research university with more than 27,000 students, she is committed to "institutionalizing" the university's civic work and has made significant progress on this front. UKM recognizes and reinforces civic engagement at the highest levels. In 2007, it established the position of Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Industry and Community Partnerships, which is currently led by Professor Saran Kaur Gill. Additionally, Vice Chancellor Shahabudin created full-time Deputy Dean Positions for Industry-Community Partnerships in each of the 13 colleges and revised faculty evaluation procedures to reward civically-engaged faculty members. UKM's focus on social responsibility is also guided by national and local priorities as well as its own students. Vice Chancellor Shahabudin believes that civic engagement not only benefits people in the community, but it also enhances the future employability of UKM's students.

There are too many civic engagement initiatives at UKM to describe here. They include such efforts as (1) adopting Kundang Hulu, a village in Johor that was devastated by a massive flood in 2007 and getting an interdisciplinary faculty to work with the villagers in its development; (2) creating an annual camp in UKM to challenge gifted children ages 9-15 with advanced mathematics, science and literary classes; (3) supporting a special program led by the faculty of education who work with parents of children with autism to develop new methods of instruction; and (4) establishing a center for youth at

risk and developing models of intervention and empowerment.

For new and future university presidents who have an interest in making their university or college more socially responsible, Vice Chancellor Shahabudin offers the following, “Passion is an important characteristic; you must have a passion for civic engagement and the will to change academic structures and policies to support it.” As for the future of civic engagement in higher education around the world, she would like “to see universities working together at the regional level to address particular issues such as poverty, human rights, and literacy.” She is a fierce advocate for youth and believes that civic engagement “helps people to see beyond their differences.”

Last month, UKM launched AsiaEngage at the National University of Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur. At present, AsiaEngage has more than five dozen members and aims to maximize the strengths of the Asia-Talloires Network of Industry and Community Engaged Universities (ATNEU), the ASEAN University Network (AUN), the Thematic Network on University Social Responsibility and Sustainability (AUN-USR&S) and the ASEAN Youth Volunteer Programme (AYVP). As an active member of the Talloires Network Steering Committee, Vice Chancellor Shahabudin has provided invaluable guidance on issues related to youth economic participation.

For more information on the AsiaEngage conference, see:

Regional Focus as ASEAN Joins Global Family of Engaged Universities

<http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20120517155927916>

Forging University-led Community Partnerships through AsiaEngage

<http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20120517132331608>

How to be a World-class, Community-engaged University

<http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20120518123421968>

Universities Need to Serve Regional Economy, Society

<http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20120517121051359>