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Welcome to the world of electronic designing

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DO not be surprised if Malaysians make headlines in the movie scene for outstanding digital animation in the future. They may be creating creatures that would far outshine any of those seen on the silver screen so far.

This is a very strong possibility since LICT (LimKokWing Institute of Creative Technology) will be offering digital animation as one of its courses, starting July, pending approval from the Ministry of Education.

This programme is jointly offered by LICT and the Sheridan College in Canada and is a three-year course.

"Sheridan is clearly the best in the world and Malaysia is the first country outside Canada to offer this course," says Tan Sri Lim Kok Wing, the founder and president of LICT.

"An LICT student who signs up for a post-graduate in digital animation will find the best names of Hollywood peeking over his or her shoulder as the movie moguls all recruit from Sheridan which is considered the Harvard of design and animation," he says.

Students who complete their first year earn an LICT certificate in graphic design and multimedia. After two years, they get an LICT Advanced Certificate in graphic design and multimedia.

Upon completion of their third-year studies, they obtain a Sheridan-LICT Diploma in design and animation. Then eight months in the Sheridan campus in Canada will earn them a Post-graduate Diploma in digital animation.

Sheridan College, located in Ontario, Canada, is a pioneer in computer animation, having introduced the programme in 1972, long before the huge demand for it.

"The animation studio is pivotal to the entire course. This is where students take their animation systems class, so it will be a real hands-on experience," explains Lim.

3D animation is taught using Softimage, a high-end interactive modelling and animation software. The 3D software runs on high-powered silicon graphics workstations which is an industry standard.

Students also learn sophisticated paint software to create 3D environments with backgrounds, textures, image processing and composing. They will study the theoreticals and fundamentals of computer animation technology which cover issues related to software, hardware, programming concepts, operating systems and output technologies.

The programme does not lose focus of the aesthetical, communicative and filming aspects of the student's work. In the animation methodology course, the knowledge and techniques of traditional animation are presented as important aspects to the practice of computer animation.

Skills such as storyboarding and scripting for animation, as well as the principles of motion and continuity are part of this comprehensive course.

Adds Lim: "They are world class animators at Sheridan and now LICT graduates will have access to Sheridan and through Sheridan to Hollywood.

"Introducing the animation course is one of the steps leading towards an innovative Malaysia," he says, leading the way towards the exhibition hall where some stunning pieces of creativity are on display.

Various innovative devices grab your attention all at once as you step into the large hall. This exhibition is also an opportunity for students to demonstrate their skills and talent to the public.

Since the institute was set up in 1991, the students, led and encouraged

by the enterprising, dynamic and innovative Lim, have been winning both national and international awards and have earned a reputation of excellence in creative work.

Recently, when Dr Mahathir Mohamad paid a visit to the newly-completed campus in Taman Mayang Jaya, Petaling Jaya to officiate the exhibition, he was shown a logo they created out of the alphabets "Dr M". It was created as an example of "Made In Malaysia" goods and in response to Dr M's comments about a higher profile for Malaysian-made goods.

Seeing NST photographer Goh Seng Chong paying extra attention to one of the exhibits, I take a closer look and find a brilliant design of an underwater camera, complete with mini disc, using the latest technology. It was the creation of Paul Siew Chee Seng, a final-year product design student.

Other exhibits include ideas on how to package goods in more desirable and saleable designs.

Scott Whiteside, LICT's programme leader for product design, then leads us to another proud example of the LICT students' creativity - The Malay House, by third year graphics students. It is a computer graphic featuring the various types of traditional Malay houses.

"It was developed to interact with tourists, like an information kiosk, and is based on a foreword of the Prime Minister's speech," adds Gail Phung, LICT's corporate development director.

"It was shown to the Prime Minister when he was here recently and he was impressed. It is also suitable for developing educational programmes by the Ministry of Education."

Similarly, LICT's Advanced Diploma in electronic designs and multimedia is aimed at creating experts who can take graphics and design to new heights.

"Jointly delivered by LICT and Australia's prestigious RMIT University, the programme is presently the only such course in South-East Asia," says Gail. This programme prepares students for professional positions in industries that are involved in corporate communications, graphic design, publishing, print production, film and television, advertising, electronic publishing, information design, visual arts, multimedia, outdoor communications, environmental graphics, digital imaging, animation, education and entertainment, among others.

"Students who have successfully completed two-and-a-half years in LICT are granted entry into RMIT for the final year. The college is hoping to have the final year done locally too," adds Gail.

The LICT's electronic design and multimedia programme leads to a Bachelor of Arts in multimedia design.

Multimedia is a combination of the computer, television, publishing and graphic design technologies with new technologies of electronic communications.

"We are catering to a future that requires innovative, skilled and creative technology."

The first batch of 75 LICT-RMIT students are into their second semester. For the second intake in January, the number of students increased to 91.

Also closely involved in the launch of the Multimedia Super Corridor, Lim was recently appointed by the Government to establish the Malaysia Design Technology centre.

Upstairs, we are lucky enough to find some LICT-RMIT students still hard at work - long after lectures had ended.

Eddie Lau, 19, is at the computer trying to design the perfect Wira (Sukom mascot) for the bowling event, one of the many sports to be featured in the Commonwealth Games. He is watched by R. Sailendran and Arik Yeo.

"To get as perfect a design as possible, my group (of seven) actually went bowling and took a picture," explains Eddie. "We scanned the picture and, using it as a basis, are modifying it to get the design required.

"EDM is very interesting," he says, his hand still on the mouse, clicking away. "It has very bright prospects for the future as these days, everything is IT-based. My ambition is to be a good designer and I find this course both fun and a lot of hard work."

Arik, 22, also into his second semester like the others, expresses a similar view, saying he hopes to be an editor in the movie world.

The more vocal of the three, Sailendran, 21, says: "It leads to a lucrative and promising career." He already has a diploma in computer studies. Admitting to being a computer freak, he adds that with this EDM qualification in hand, he can go into the multimedia line as a designer.

"Being an LICT student guarantees me a job when I complete the course and I look forward to being one of the pioneers specialising in multimedia."

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