Surviving on campus

THE MAKING OF A GRADUATE: It is not uncommon to find students with average grades in Sijil Tinggi Persekolahan Malaysia (STPM) ending up with first-class honours and bagging many academic prizes at university. On the other hand, there are many cases of STPM superstars who failed to shine in their university years.

The transition from a high school to a tertiary institution can have far-reaching effects. The culture in a higher education institution is different from that of a school.

Every undergraduate will soon realise that college represents a break from the past. He is no longer in the shelter and comfort of his home. His parents' continual and physical existence can no longer be felt on campus. There is undoubtedly a newly-won freedom but at the same time there is a tinge of homesickness especially for those who are mummy's boys.

The academics whom they see more often than their parents are not there to usurp parental roles. They are there to teach and, if necessary, to supervise and mentor.

As mentioned in the book, The Academic Community, "the student may be surprised by the indifference of the college teacher to whether he does his classroom work or not; the faculty member does not beg the student to study". In short, the student is largely left to his own devices and he has to learn to fend for himself in a relatively impersonal environment.

Some seek a sense of worth through excellence in academic pursuit but there are those who seek leadership role in social, religious and cultural activities. Sometimes, these activities can take up too much of their time and, as a result, their studies suffer.

They have learned to handle maximum freedom with minimum responsibility. They make courtesy calls on academics who are busy in their academic engagements. They work with fellow students who are also their competitors.

They juggle their time between giving tuition and attending tutorials. In a nutshell, they have learned to be university students.

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