FACT-BASED ARGUMENTS

Making data key to debates

Statistics Dept sees improved use of data in inter-varsity debate meet

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DATA and statistics should be used in an intellectual debate to ensure one's arguments are based on facts.

Chief Statistician Datuk Seri Dr Mohd Uzir Mahidin said this was a vital skill for students and they should also learn to link data in order to better present their arguments.

He was speaking at the finals and prize presentation of the inter-varsity Statistics Debate Championship organised by the Statistics Department at the Selangor Public Library Corporation in Sungai Besar last Friday.

The competition was organised in collaboration with the Malaysian University Debating Council (Madum), and held in conjunction with the celebration of National Statistics Day 2023.

Uzir said this year's competition — the second organised by the department — saw participants debating using facts and data more effectively than the previous competition.

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> **DATUK SERI DR MOHD UZIR MAHIDIN**
> Chief statistician

"We wanted participants to be able to link data not just about the labour force, but also on economic growth, investment and so on when presenting their arguments.

"So, we wanted them to consider the debate's context more broadly, and in the future, they will improve their debates," he said.

"Through this debate competition, it is hoped that we can unearth public speaking talent among students.

"Furthermore, it will enhance the students' ability to be more responsive to current issues and strengthen their knowledge of the labour market," Uzir said.

The theme of the championship was "Labour Market" and involved a team each from 14 higher education institutions.

The programme aimed to encourage critical and analytical thinking among students on the labour market by presenting rational arguments and analysing data and facts, thus promoting the use of statistics issued by the department.

The competition's overall best debater, Nur Syahirah Balqis

Chief Statistician Datuk Seri Dr Mohd Uzir Mahidin (fourth from left) handing over a trophy to the Universiti Sains Malaysia team that won the Statistics Debate Championship organised by the Statistics Department last Friday at the Selangor Public Library Corporation in Sungai Besar. BERNAMA PIC

Shahrulnizam, 21, said data interpretation was her biggest challenge in the tournament as it required her to go into details when including facts and figures so that she could anticipate her opponents' arguments.

"For me, one of the challenges in this statistics debate is how we process the data and facts we have. Because everyone, every opinion, every team and every university has the same data. But how do we put the facts into perspective, or how do we interpret that data?"

The International Islamic University Malaysia law student said she started to have an interest in debating in secondary school, where she joined many public speaking competitions and built her confidence to speak in front of a crowd.

A debater from the winning Universiti Sains Malaysia team, Muhamad Hafizi Mohd Hanafi, expressed his gratitude to his teammates.

He said the victory was a team effort after months of training and friendly debates with other universities, which had shaped the team throughout the tournament.

Although there were three debaters on the team, Hafizi said working behind the scenes were

Economy Ministry secretary-general Datuk Nor Azmie Diron (second from left) and Chief Statistician Datuk Seri Dr Mohd Uzir Mahidin (left) launching National Statistics Day last Friday. BERNAMA PIX

coaches, fact checkers, timekeepers and even those who were giving hand signals from the crowd to give them instructions while they were debating.

Universiti Teknologi Mara was the runner-up.

Muhamad Alif Izudin Azmale said he had a different perspective to debating, and his background as a law student helped him to come up with witty retorts and rebuttals.

"I think, first and foremost, we need to change our perception of debates. When people look at debates, they assume you have to be serious and speak formally. Facts are essential, intellect is crucial, but to answer and stay cheerful or crack a joke during a debate, you need to change your perspective on debates first.

"I like to practice debates as a form of conversation, but a conversation with a scholarly approach," he said.

Uzir presented the prizes to the champions and the runners-up.

Also present was Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia deputy vice-chancellor and Madum chairman Professor Dr Lokman Hakim Ismail .

Uzir said the OpenDOSM portal that the department launched on Jan 12 had reached one million views.

"OpenDOSM is open to ordinary users and those involved in research, and we have received feedback from entrepreneurs who have found the service beneficial for their businesses," he said.

He also said the department was exploring technology for the collection of topographic data to obtain information related to the types of crops and agriculture in the country.

University students following the final of the inter-varsity Statistics Debate Championship last Friday.

Muhamad Hafizi Mohd Hanafi from USM in action during the final of the inter-varsity Statistics Debate Championship last Friday.