

GATEWAY TO KNOWLEDGE

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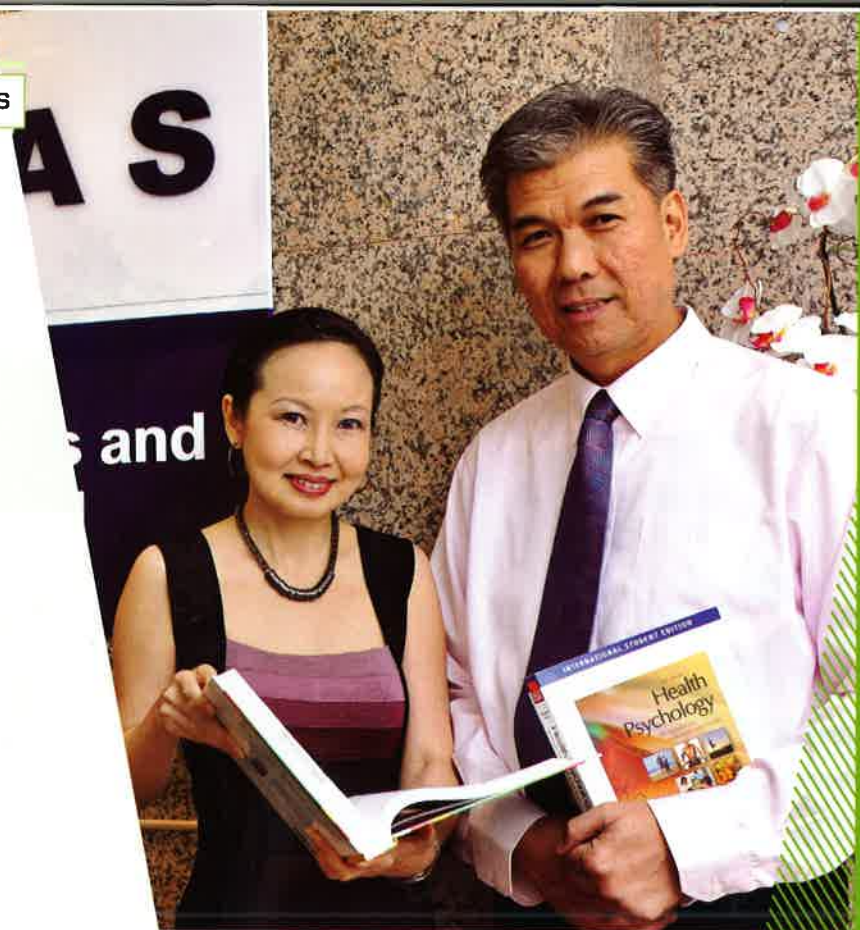
In Latin, its name means gateway – a veritable portal to higher learning and unlocking the human potential. Arium School of Arts & Sciences (ASAS) is one of Singapore's premier private education schools, offering unique, quality and affordable educational programmes through its partnerships with regionally accredited American institutions.

Ms Maria Lee, ASAS' founder and academic advisor, established the school in 2004 on the back of a two-year sabbatical studying for her master's degree in business administration at Colorado State University. "I've been in the training line for a long time, and I got to know a lot of university professors when I was in the US," explains Ms Lee, a computer programmer. "I eventually got in touch with a liberal arts university, Adams State, as they were looking to expand in Asia."

The partnership blossomed as she identified a gap in the local market for psychology and criminology programmes – not exactly your conventional academic path for the average Singaporean student. But the intrepid Ms Lee was undeterred. "Offering IT and business programmes would be too common and boring," she says. "We wanted to have a unique selling point – just because something is not available in Singapore doesn't mean there isn't a need for it."

And she was right – ASAS has proven to be a popular alternative proposition for a diverse mix of students. "We have a lot of polytechnic graduates who have engineering diplomas because that was the only choice they were given by their parents, nurses keen to take up a psychology course to complement their line of work, police and prison officers looking to further their careers and even a whole group suffering from mid-career crisis who are hoping to make the all-important career switch."

Today, the school has an annual intake of 150 students and has established linkages with several reputable universities in the US, focusing on replicating the American style of learning in Singapore. With two fully-equipped classrooms and over 30 faculties, the next step for ASAS is to spread its unique brand of teaching to the region and beyond.



Up Close & Personal

What is Arium's core teaching philosophy?

The way we run our curriculum is very like an American-based system and we also adopt a lot of policies and regulations from there. We wanted to create an environment where people recognize that there is a different way of learning and I hope more people will look at us as an alternative.

What gave you the impression that an American-based system would work in Singapore?

I've studied in the US for more than five years at various stages of my life and I really appreciate how their culture and methods of teaching build up your character. I have a lot of appreciation for it – I believe that those who fail in the Singapore system are just not suitable for it and deserve a second chance.

What were some of the toughest challenges you faced?

Starting up wasn't too bad because we had the contract with Adams State University and I funded the business with my own savings. But now that the business has grown, we face the problem of how best to expand. Our rental has doubled and we also need to find a way to retain manpower more effectively. The government has also been regulating this industry in recent years and the biggest challenge is to have new courses approved by them – it could take up to a year for that to happen.