

SPECIALIST IN AMERICAN EDUCATION

Labeled as world-leading and have ranked fifth in global education survey in terms of teaching quality, the Singapore education system has cemented its place in the global educational landscape as a paradigm of excellence. Boosting the city-state's competitiveness, one woman spearheaded a school that follows a US based programs, in contrast from the usual UK or Australian system, and in pioneering the introduction of criminology course – the first from a private a school in Singapore.

While finishing up her MBA at Colorado State University in 2003, Ms Maria Lee, Director of Arium School at Arts and Science Pte Ltd (ASAS), was approached by Adams State University to head start its expansion in Asia. At an opportune time, Ms Maria Lee, who has been strongly affected by the US education system since 18 from its testing methods to its out-of-the-box analysis of concepts, established ASAS in 2004 offering comprehensive Psychology and Criminology programs – courses considered off-the beaten path to most, but the palpable growing need for these programs cannot just be disregarded.

After forging strong alliance with regionally accredited American universities, government institutions and industry partners such as Psychotherapy Association of Singapore (PAS), Ms Maria Lee blends ingredients of a can-do attitude despite the ups and downs with passion and perseverance in ensuring the school's quality is always above par. ASAS come off with flying colours when it opened its door even in a country that is not pro-American in education standards, drawing in students on its first month with the help of a 2-page editorial from The Straits Times, but for Ms Maria Lee, "Setting up was easy; it's maintaining the business that was tough."

With the school's strict adherence to the US education system, finding the right partners who are able to deliver the standards without compromising the reputation of the company, proved crucial. Furthermore, rental costs and manpower impede such move for expansion, but the biggest hurdle was the herculean task to comply with the regulations of the Private Education Act in December 2009 when private schools must fall under the scope of the Council for Private Education (CPE).

Today, Ms Maria Lee shares Directorship with Mr Mack Fei Sun, with a team of 40 staff (full time and part time). Most of ASAS students comprise of working adults, the oldest at 73; coming from different background, be it professionals switching careers, or those who would like to delve deeper in the various Psychology programs/workshops. It has widened its reach in offering short courses with certificates in neighboring Indonesia and Malaysia through the help of PAS.

Other ASAS key partners include HomeTeamNS and ISCOS (Industrial & Services Co-operative Society Ltd). HomeTeamNS is a not-for-profit organization set up to recognise the contributions of NSmen serving in the Singapore Police Force (SPF) and the Singapore Civil Defence Force (SCDF); ASAS provides discounts on all academic courses as well as grants sponsorship for selected courses for HomeTeamNS members. On the other hand, ISCOS, helmed by Mr Patrick Ng, helps ex-offenders in their reintegration and well-being, as well as provide support to ex-offenders' families, especially their children. ASAS has chosen ISCOS as part of its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).

Reaching its 10th year milestone, ASAS is geared up to grow its presence online and in the region. The school prides itself of providing students flexible and affordable fee payment scheme as it continues its march to become a leader in providing customer driven programs for individuals and organizations.