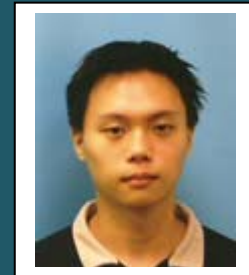


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Experiencing the world in SIS

More than just soaking up knowledge in school, SIS undergraduates see the world through deep and meaningful ways through internships, exchanges and other ECAs.

Third-year SIS student Fam Guo Teng got his first taste of what it was like in the working world when he turned up, fresh with ideas to implement, during his internship at French MNC Schneider Electric.



He had already helped to implement an IT audit of the systems used in the Singapore office when he travelled to Philippines to do the same. However, he found himself learning how to persuade colleagues in that office to follow through with the audit, as they had not been doing it previously and there was not yet anyone to take ownership of the project.

In the end, he did manage to persuade his Filipino counterparts to adopt a similar system – it gave management a clearer idea of what assets the company had – but not without leaving with a valuable lesson himself. Notes Guo Teng: “In school, we expect a lot of things we recommend to be implemented, but it is difficult in the real world because different people see the problem differently. You see the different human relationships and different working styles – it’s quite different from school.”

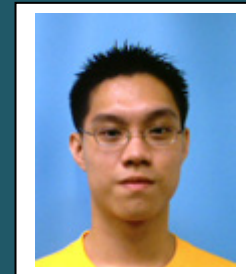
It’s an experience Guo Teng is eager to relive, as he searches for another internship in his final year in SIS. Like all others students here, he has to take on at least one internship to ensure that he gets a sense of how the corporate world works. The common thread among all students is that they learn something they cannot from lessons in class, be it simply figuring out human relationships or learning a new culture.

Besides internships, these real-world lessons are part and parcel of the experience at SIS, where a final-year project (FYP) can be done in collaboration with fellow students from an overseas university. This is also a place where students can go on an overseas exchange to the prestigious universities in the Unites States, Europe and Asia.

At the same time, SIS undergraduates find time for all manners of extra-curricular activities. This has included taking part in a national IT contest, won by the way by an SIS student, as well as organising a region-wide business case contest.

In short, students get to see the world through SIS.

For example, Thai student Jamorn Ho spent a semester at the prestigious Carnegie Mellon University (CMU) in Pittsburgh, USA, not just picking up the latest IS skills but also going skiing. “It was real fun to go in winter,” recalls the fourth-year student. The passion for learning was another insight he brought back from CMU. “Things are a bit different in the US,” he says. “In Singapore, people study for a career in future, but not so much in the US, where they study what they have a passion for. Most of the time, they just sleep in school, in the computer lab, as they finish their projects.”



SIS’ close ties with CMU extend beyond exchanges. Even in FYPs, where students spend months planning and executing an assignment, SIS and CMU students have managed to bridge thousands of miles to complete joint FYP projects. A recent project, for example, involved students from both SIS and CMU, who coordinated through weekly Internet telephony and video calls. The task: to help IBM.com easily create 2D barcodes that can represent, say, a website address or URL.

The effort was made all the harder because the teams had not met one another in person, and part of the work was simply getting together for a meeting. Mohit Garg, who along with his team, presented the FYP via a video link in Nov 2008, says the experience was one that had the feel of a real-world global project. “It was a steep learning curve for us, just trying to manage meeting timings and getting everyone on schedule,” he adds. But he notes that it is the best way to get real hands-on with a global project, which is becoming increasingly the norm for IS work these days.

Though not all FYPs are done in collaboration with overseas universities, all of them are real-world projects, in the sense that they are done for a real-world client, be it Merrill Lynch or Standard Chartered Bank (SCB) or Singapore Sports Council.

One recent FYP, for example, involved an iPhone application done for SCB by Team Kaizen, made up of a group of SIS students who were also Apple fans. The application enables iPhone users to easily find discounts for the nearest restaurants that accept SCB credit cards. It can also help users locate SCB branches and list the services they offer. Little wonder that the bank is interested in rolling out the application in future.

Outside of school, SIS students are active as well. Work is ongoing now to run the APEX Global Case Challenge, a business IT case competition that will bring together not just SMU students but also those from regional universities. The contest is the brainchild of three SIS seniors who went to a similar business IT case contest in

Canada last year, and felt: why not create an even better international business IT case competition centred in Asia?

Yang Kangwei, Deeraj Jagdish Karnani and Darren Toh are aiming to run a contest where bright students could develop new ideas for businesses looking to innovate. Says Kangwei: “We decided to hold something similar in Singapore, for example, to find out how business can be transformed with the use of IT.”



That's not all. Students also find time, despite the busy schedule, to take part in national IT competitions. Third-year student Olivia Chiu and boyfriend Tay Kang Xun were in the final rounds of the iWhiz contest organised by the Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore in 2007. After several gruelling rounds, Olivia won through, and was rewarded with a trip to the US to meet Microsoft founder Bill Gates.

Says Olivia, an Arts student at a junior college prior to SIS: “I hated programming when I came.” But she forced herself to adapt, and in turn, became more interested in IT and has now done successful business IT-oriented internships at banks here. She has also been invited to speak at an overseas CIO (chief information officer) conference, for example, in Nov 2009, to discuss what technologies young travellers would be interested in hotels of the future.