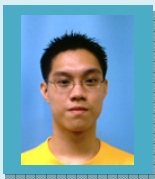


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International Students



Yanice Mako Kasuma
Year 3 student, 2006 entry batch



Jamorn Ho
Year 4 SIS student, 2005 entry batch



Nguyen Son Tung ("Bryan")
Year 2 SIS student, 2007 entry batch

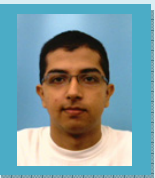
Local Students



Wong Deming
Year 1 student, 2008 entry batch



Ernest Cai
Year 1 student, 2008 entry batch



Deeraj Jagdish Karnani
Year 4 student, 2005 entry batch

Yanice Mako Kasuma

Year 3 student, 2006 entry batch

Like many a JC student coming to SIS, Yanice Mako Kasuma was at first surprised by the number of projects that undergraduates here do. In junior college, she recalls doing one big project in two years, but in SIS, she says the projects roll on from Term 1, culminating in five presentations in the first year alone. "SIS is very challenging," she admits, adding: "but all this breaking out of the shell... it's very valuable."

One of the most important traits that students learn at SIS is presentation skills, which enable them to express ideas that are sometimes abstract to those not in the IS profession. Yanice remembers classes where students were encouraged to speak up, because course marks also included in-class participation. After a while, this became more natural, as they progressed through the years in SIS. "You are forced to come out of your shell," she notes.

But this was what she always wanted. Before joining as a freshman in SIS, she was offered a scholarship in another discipline, but she turned it down. She wanted a course that combined both business and technical skills – not something that was "too technical" but not a generalist course, she says – so her decision to join SIS was an easy one. "Going to SIS was exactly what I wanted. No other universities offered this – not in Singapore anyway," she adds.

She also considered leaving Singapore to further her studies after her 'A' levels, but decided to stay in the place she has called home since her teenage years. "In the United States and Europe, it's very expensive. The education might be good but I didn't want to spend that much money. Plus, the education levels here in Singapore are high as well," says Yanice, who is Indonesian. She should know. She came to Singapore as a teenager to join a secondary school at Sec 3, having won a scholarship to do so. She later went on to Anglo Chinese Junior College, then to SIS after completing her 'A' levels.

What she will take away most from SIS, she says, is that every project involves understanding the details, the nuts and bolts. For example, in her final-year-project, or FYP, she had to create documentation for her client to understand the project better and for future reference when it was completed.

"In the past, I hated documentation... I saw it like a waste of time. But now for the FYP, I realise I have to do it because it's necessary," she notes. She says overcoming such obstacles, which she would have resisted had it not been part of the learning process in SIS, has made her steely and ready to take on difficult challenges in future.

Jamorn Ho

Year 4 SIS student, 2005 entry batch

When he was choosing a university to go to more than four years ago, Thai student Jamorn Ho was sure he was going to leave his homeland. He wanted to see the world beyond familiar shores. And in SIS, he got his wishes granted.

Not only did he get a change of pace living in Singapore, he opened his eyes to a whole new environment when he studied in the United States as a part of an exchange programme with Carnegie Mellon University (CMU). He remembers: “I had a really great time there at CMU, where I found that all the students were really fast and very smart. Even with complex algorithms, they tend to teach very fast and students would understand in 5 or 6 minutes... the students actually tell the Prof that he's going too slow!”

Of course, he didn't just study while in the US when he was there between January and April 2008. Being there as a visitor also brought untold rewards for this willing explorer, who recalls: “The coolest part was I went to ski!”

He also notices that the learning attitudes are different over in the US. “In CMU, things are very different from us here in Singapore,” he notes. “They want to learn skills through studying, and not necessarily for a better career like we are so concerned about here.”

Jamorn came to SIS because he wanted to learn not just computing skills but skills needed in the business world. “I'm a hands-on person, so I wanted to do computer science,” he says, “but I also told myself I did not want to do just more programming – I wanted to learn about the business side and that's how I came to SIS.”

He taught himself programming while in Thailand, learning a bit of Java coding in the process. “I had a much easier time with programming courses in SIS, as a result.” On why he came to Singapore, he echoes what many Asean students say: Singapore is affordable while offering a very good education system. “Compared to Australia or the US, Singapore is more attractive,” he notes, adding that he, in fact, got the best of both worlds by enjoying his stint in CMU.

Thus Jamorn has not looked back since joining SIS. During his fourth year, he completed his FYP or final-year-project, a business application for Merrill Lynch. Indeed, he says he now wonders why he had applied for other engineering courses in the past before coming to SMU.

Nguyen Son Tung (“Bryan”)

Year 2 SIS student, 2007 entry batch

When his father was posted to Singapore to work four years ago, Bryan followed him here to study. Coming to Singapore has not been a big change from Vietnam, which is similar in climate as well as culture. And though Singapore offers high-quality education, the cost of living is cheaper than, say, the United States.

After attaining a diploma in the popular electrical and electronic engineering (“triple E”) course, Bryan realised he wanted more than just technical knowledge in hardware – he wished to understand how technology could be applied to business.

That was when he applied to study in SIS. His goal: to get a degree that balanced both the need for technical skills and their use in transforming a company's operations. “I didn't want to be restricted to a single track, one where I only learnt technical skills,” he explains. In SIS, he likes the idea that a student can do both programming and business courses.

He is also impressed that students get hands-on knowledge of the entire process behind a real-world IS project. In year 1, students are required to develop a single online shopping cart. This progresses to a more sophisticated booking system in year 2. As the students progress, they would need to develop applications for enterprises. Only after they have gone through “this pain” of coding and programming the applications themselves, says Bryan, are students given the chance to offer an IS solution, in a latter year-module, to a business problem.

This way, says Bryan, students can give better real-world solutions, because they have got their hands dirty in the nuts and bolts of actual software programming. In other words, they can walk the talk. “This way, when we become project managers after we graduate, we will get a better idea on how to allocate the best resources for a project,” he adds.

Best part of SIS: For Bryan, the camaraderie is what makes SIS unique. Often, students are seen helping one another, especially in years 1 and 2, where those who are stronger in programming mentor fellow students who are less sure about coding, on a peer-to-peer basis. “Sometimes, you also learn by teaching. By making people understand concepts, you are honing your own presentation skills, which are useful when you go out to work in future.”

Wong Deming

Year 1 student, 2008 entry batch

Like most freshman in SIS, Wong Deming came to the school with high expectations of what he wanted to learn. Unlike most freshmen though, he had two years of working experience. Prior to joining the school, he was a civil servant. He had started working after completing his diploma from Nanyang Polytechnic earlier.

What attracted him to SIS was the same reason that attracted so many others – the promising combination of blending business with IT. This gave students an edge in high-skilled IS jobs in demand here. For Deming, the challenge has been to go back to learning mode. “After four years of not studying (two years in national service and two years working), it is not easy to step up so quickly,” he says, adding: “I sometimes wished I’d taken a simpler degree!”

But it was a challenge he was not stepping away from. “SIS is often said to be the toughest course here,” he remarks, but adds: “I told myself, before I get older, I should study. I hear that a lot of other students respect us (SIS students) because we take on such a tough course,” he notes. He does not underestimate the competition, in not just SIS but SMU in general. “In the second week, you realise the library is all full, and the GSRs (group study rooms) are all booked. People are on the ball once school starts,” he says.

He believes SIS, in particular, offers a tough course, and those joining should have no illusions this is a programme that is rewarding but comes with steep challenges. For one, there is little spoon-feeding. Students are expected to take their own initiative and ask questions if they do not understand a point – and for many of them, there are a lot of questions for a new topic like Java programming, for example.

Things are also very practical, notes Deming. “Aside from business courses, I also need to learn the technical part, that is, coding and programming until you get the drift of it. If you don’t know anything at all, you really have to pick it up quite fast, either by learning from fellow students in the group or learning on your own. Sometimes, in a project that has a tight deadline, the stress is definitely there.”

Ernest Cai

Year 1 student, 2008 entry batch

Three weeks to complete a complex project – that was the first challenge that freshman Ernest Cai faced after being fresh out of national service and having not studied for two years. It was his first experience of SIS, and a lasting lesson that the pace here is not one that was leisurely. “Things move fast, and learning time is short. For those without any prior programming knowledge, you really need to ramp up very fast,” he says. “The syllabus is okay, but the pace is tough,” he adds.

Like most Year 1 students joining the school, Ernest says the pace of learning was the first thing that hit him. The second was the unfamiliar environment. Professors, he notices, often give the very basics to get students started. The learning really starts when they get their hands dirty in a project. And therein lies the challenge.

For those like himself, who do not have any prior programming experience, Ernest says it requires a good attitude to learning new things. He adds: “You basically have to be able to do your own learning. Some of your first-year friends who are better at coding will help you, but you cannot be a burden to the team.”

Indeed, friendships forged through such tough times are what keep him motivated. During nights when groups of them stay in school to complete a project, it is often a collective effort to get past the obstacles. For him, the bond goes deep. Seniors, he notices, will sometimes drop by to offer help if they see freshmen stumped over a project. “Even after just 11 weeks, it is hard to leave the friends you have made by going through the hardships here,” he says.

“When I do work until I can’t take it, I’ll go to Ice Cold Beer (pub located within SMU) to have a beer,” he admits. So far, it has been a process that has served to toughen his character, says Ernest. “If you can endure these four years, then you can surely endure real working life.”

Deeraj Jagdish Karnani

Year four student, 2005 entry batch

When he first joined SIS, the only programming experience that Deeraj Jagdish Karnani had was a little dabbling on Microsoft FrontPage, a Web design software that many beginners use to create their own customised websites. Thus when he was thrust into the strange world of Java programming and other unfamiliar IS courses in his first semester in SIS, he was bewildered, to say the least. "I was so stressed, because my project group consisted of people who didn't know coding," he says, recalling one of his first projects in SIS. "The first semester was tough... I didn't know how to manage time and workflow," he notes of those difficult times.

The result: he had to learn to swim, or rather, code, pretty fast. "In the end, the entire project I had to do a lot on my own, while learning everything new along the way," notes Deeraj.

Like many students without a programming background, he had come to SIS not expecting such a steep learning curve. It was, as he remembers, a dive into the deep end of the pool for a non-swimmer. Once he became more confident swimming, or rather, coding, life became a little easier. At least the deadline crunch was not a shock any more, as the projects now piled in. Thus, Semester 2 was "easier".

By the time he reached Year 3, he understood why the learning curve was steep at the start. It was to ensure they had the foundation for more challenging and interesting courses in the latter years of the programme here. He remarks: "It's okay as long as you've got a passion for IS. I asked the Prof a lot of questions whenever I didn't understand something... you just cannot expect to be spoon fed here in SIS."

The most valuable lesson, learnt straight from Year 1, is not the technology details, but rather, the ability to adapt to a new and changing environment. Deeraj emphasises: "Whether you're from JC or poly, it's important that you are able to pick up new things... it's about training you in the soft skill of learning to learn. If a student were from a regular JC or high school background or from Chemical Engineering, and had to learn Java for the first time... it would show that he or she was adaptable and flexible," he adds.

His SIS experience has given him the confidence that he really can learn how to learn and acquire new skills as needed. Deeraj highlights the importance of this ability, noting that in an economic downturn, he can adapt to changes in the industry.

Beyond the classroom, Deeraj took part in an IT and Business Case Competition in Canada in February 2008. Though his team came in second in this international

competition, he and SIS classmates Yang Kangwei and Darren Toh were so encouraged by the experience that they are organising a new IT and business case competition for the region. Called the Apex Business IT Case Challenge, it will bring together the top brains from tertiary institutions in the region to propose an IT solution and a supporting business plan for a real-world client.

It's an event that Deeraj cannot wait to see take off, even though it takes a lot of time to manage this effort, in a schedule that is already packed with schoolwork. He finds it all rewarding, because it involves building relationships and learning outside the classroom – valuable things to pick up while still in school. “The soft skills you learn and friends you make here... they will be very important when you go