

Broadening her horizons

Pursuing her MBA at SMU instils confidence and determination in Ms Nurul Jihadah Hussain

MARY LIM

A POSTGRADUATE education was an eye-opening experience for Ms Nurul Jihadah Hussain. It helped to open doors and lead her on a path to her future goals.

The 29-year-old, who has a Master of Arts degree in Politics and Arabic from the University of Edinburgh in Scotland, completed a Master of Business Administration (MBA) programme last year.

"I grew up in a family that believes education is very important. After my university studies, I took some time to explore different careers, including teaching in Singapore and Japan. My family encouraged me to pursue an MBA as they felt it would help expand my career options," she says.

Ms Nurul chose an MBA programme at Singapore Management University (SMU) after hearing about the positive experiences of her friends who had pursued their undergraduate studies there.

She was also drawn to SMU's commitment to diversity, internationally recognised faculty and strong alumni network. Having spent six years abroad, she wanted an education that offered a solid community at home too.

Meaningful experience

To avoid the hassle of having to juggle work and school, she opted for the full-time 12-month curriculum.

From January to April, students are taught the eight core subjects, including Corporate Finance, Operations Management and Decision Analysis. From May to December, they select 10 electives from a wide range of subjects such as Global Strategy and Meditation and Leadership.

These electives, which are constantly refreshed, help prepare the students for long-term management careers in complex and dynamic environments in business development and consulting, among others.

Many classes revolved around case studies, but for those that did not, such as Marketing Analytics and Ethics, the varied teaching styles ensured effective impartation by the lecturers, says Ms Nurul. She also appreciated efforts to invite external speakers and even clients, who gave the topics more relevance with their real-life expertise.

All this made the learning experience more meaningful for her, especially since she had "very little experience with mathematics, no engineering background, and barely any familiarity with software like Microsoft Excel", she says.

In fact, she thought she would fail, or have to drop out, from the Decision Analysis module when she was just into her third week into the programme.

Personal growth

Extra coaching from her lecturer and coursemates helped, as did her decision to complete every question assigned. As she gained more confidence, she also became more determined.

"Even if you can't complete 100 per cent, you have to stretch yourself and hit 90 per cent in order to do well, instead of 60 per cent to just get by," she says.

For her Digital Marketing module, one of the assignments was a digital marketing strategy project with beauty and skincare retailer Sephora. Students were divided into groups, each attached to a mentor from a digital marketing agency.



Ms Nurul was drawn to SMU's commitment to diversity, internationally recognised faculty and strong alumni network. PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG

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MS NURUL JIHADAH HUSSAIN
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Ms Nurul's team, which worked with FleishmanHillard, came up tops.

Describing it as one of the best moments of her MBA experience,

she credits the success to "a great team made up of very diverse people who had different strengths and were willing to compromise in order to get the best results".

While other students were attracted to exchange programmes with partner universities, Ms Nurul found the programmes in Singapore too tempting to pass up. One that she attended was Brand Management, which was part of SMU's tie-up with luxury conglomerate LVMH.

"The opportunity to learn from a marketing and branding expert like Professor Mark Ritson, and hear from the LVMH team was incredible," she says.

In January, she founded The Codette Project, which aims to attract more minority women to work in the tech industry. By facilitating training, internships and mentorships, she wants to help empower women in Singapore.

The Codette Project is the ex-

pression of her desire to give more women the access to opportunities she had while pursuing her MBA.

She has been working on this full-time since then. But come July, she will start work as an analyst in group strategic marketing and communications at DBS Bank.

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"I'm in touch with some of my professors, who have given me great career advice, and look to the SMU Alumni Association as a great resource."