

Ready for the future

Pursuing an MBA allows Ms Veronica Ho to embark on a new career in corporate banking

MARY LIM

FOR Ms Veronica Ho, experience is as important as education.

"Many aspects of business have changed and evolved over the years. It would be good to be immersed, and pick the brains of lecturers who have studied in depth in these areas," says the 28-year-old.

"I also found it necessary to develop a broader network to move beyond my current circle of friends and acquaintances, and to gain from the experiences of others. As clichéd as it sounds, knowledge is power. Learning from these elite in their own fields would allow me to become better-rounded and help me progress in my future career."

Ms Ho, who has a Bachelor of Science in Business Studies from Loughborough University in the UK, left her job as a senior business relationship manager at Standard Chartered Bank to pursue her postgraduate studies in January last year.

She is considering a career in corporate banking, business development or consulting. These jobs, she says, require more problem-solving capabilities and the ability to learn fast and assimilate information in order to make validated recommendations.

Choice decisions

Ms Ho chose a full-time Master of Business Administration (MBA) programme at the Singapore Management University (SMU), which caters to working professionals or business owners with at least two years of working experience. It offers an accelerated schedule and can be completed in 12 months.

There are 18 modules: eight are held during working hours and the other 10 after work hours and on weekends.

"SMU enjoys a good reputation among prospective employers, who value and support its graduates. When I met Ms Georgette Tan, group head of communications for

Asia/Pacific at Mastercard, at a talk, she encouraged me to apply with the school too," she says.

"At an information session by the university, I learnt it incorporated not just Harvard business case studies but also several Asian ones that had been developed in-house. I felt that these would be more useful and more relevant to working in Asia."

Ms Ho, who completed the MBA in December, says the programme taught her to be more aware of different perspectives. As such, she is now able to consider more angles to find the win-win situation for different parties.

She explains: "There are no clear-cut right or wrong answers — the success of a strategy depends on various factors and the ability to implement it."

Helpful faculty

Ms Ho feels she has improved in skills like management and decision-making, especially since she can now draw on resources to consult or explore ideas.

She says: "There were a number of outstanding lecturers such as a professor who used to teach at Harvard, an investment banker, an accounting professor, as well as a marketing professor who has close ties with France-based luxury goods company, LVMH Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton SE."

"The professors were approachable and willing to put in additional hours to help us, especially for subjects that were not our previous field of study. As time for class discussions is limited, most of the preparation had to be done before class, so I found the readings and prep work chosen by the professors really useful and relevant."

"Once, a professor gave us a scenario and, based on data, asked if it was worth taking the risk or playing it safe. Most chose to take the risk but to our horror, it resulted in the



Ms Ho (below, second from right), chose SMU as it enjoys a good reputation among prospective employers. PHOTOS: SMU, VERONICA HO

deaths of people. So we learnt that as future managers, our decisions could have serious consequences — we should take calculated risks only after considering every scenario thoroughly and carefully."

Not just rote learning

The MBA programme included an exchange programme. Ms Ho attended the IE School in Madrid, Spain, for a week in October. She had to visit, research and present proposals to the city's small businesses on ways to expand their business.

"It was unique and enriching, as we learnt how to build a brand. We had to differentiate between luxury and premium goods, and to identify and ride the trends to grow a business. We got to understand how

these brands grew to where they are, and how they maintain the delicate balance between expanding their customer base and staying exclusive," she says.

Being on the dean's list capped what was a meaningful learning journey for Ms Ho, who attributes her academic success to her background.

"I'm able to relate to and understand the lessons taught faster because of my business degree and my working experience in financial institutions," she says.

"The key to doing well is understanding — there has to be a rationale behind everything so it helps to have an inquisitive mind to always question why. It helps me to remember better so I don't have to memorise blindly."

The MBA is available on both full-time and part-time basis. The full-time one-year course commences in January 2017 while the 18-month part-time schedule begins in July this year. Visit www.smu.edu.sg/programmes/postgraduate/mba for more details.

