

More varsity students heading overseas for internships

Those with overseas experience 'stand out naturally' during interviews: PR agency exec

Gracia Lee

While students face challenges when they go abroad, they can also develop and demonstrate qualities like resilience, independence and risk-taking – qualities desired by many employers, said Mr Sim Cher Young, director of SMU's Dato' Kho Hui Meng Career Centre.

While many of his peers remained in Singapore for their internships, Mr Tan Rui Feng, 24, packed his bags and left for Uganda.

The third-year business and social science student from Singapore Management University (SMU) had spotted a sales and marketing internship opening there on his school's career portal, and decided to give it a shot. He spent 10 weeks from May last year at a consumer goods firm, where he learnt its manufacturing processes and how to tackle issues faced by its retailers and sales partners.

Like Mr Tan, more students from lo-



Mr Tan Rui Feng (right) with sellers at a local retailer he visited during his internship stint in Uganda. The Singapore Management University student spent 10 weeks from May last year at a consumer goods firm there. PHOTO: COURTESY OF TAN RUI FENG

cal universities are venturing beyond Singapore for their internship stints. This includes his university, which has seen about 150 to 250 SMU students going for overseas internships annually in the last five years.

In the past three academic years, the National University of Singapore (NUS) saw an average year-on-year increase of about 22 per-

cent in the number of overseas internships completed.

Last academic year – between August 2016 and July 2017 – NUS students completed close to 490 internships in over 40 countries, said the university's senior vice-provost for undergraduate education, Professor Bernard Tan. Overseas stints provide students with the chance to "develop a global perspective and mindset, while at the same time increase their confidence in interacting with people from diverse cultures and nationalities", he added.

Nanyang Technological University (NTU) also saw a 13 per cent increase last academic year in students heading overseas for internships, compared with four years ago. In the last three academic years, an average of 165 students went abroad annually for internships and work attachments that count towards their graduation, said the school's deputy provost for education, Professor Kam Chan Hin.

At Singapore University of Technology and Design, the number of students with overseas internship experience increased by 4 per cent from last year. They visited countries including Brazil, Cambodia, Portugal, Vietnam and Sri Lanka.

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Mr Ethan Tan, director of public relations agency Tate Anzur, said that while the firm does not actively seek candidates with overseas experience, it notices that those who have it are "more vivacious and more daring with their perspectives during interviews". He added: "That made them stand out naturally."

This year, the Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT), which began offering its own degree programmes in 2014, launched an Overseas Integrated Work Study Programme, which provides students the option of completing their compulsory work attachment overseas.

The programme's pilot rollout is only available to students from the hospitality business course, but there are plans to extend it to other degree programmes. The university estimates that it will eventually see a 30 per cent participation rate annually in eligible cohorts.

Final-year SIT hospitality business student Roy Lim decided to

spend his eight-month internship at a professional conference organiser in Taiwan.

"I wanted to experience something beyond my comfort zone, validate and strengthen my knowledge of the MICE (meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions) industry and improve my Mandarin," said Mr Lim, 25.

He added that the experience allowed him to "immerse himself and adapt to a vastly different culture", and also helped to improve his command of his mother tongue.

Ms Tan Shu Yu, 23, said working in an international environment was a valuable experience she took away from her internship in Paris, where she worked at a petrochemical multinational corporation.

The final-year renaissance engineering programme student from NTU, who was the only Singaporean in her department, said: "I found it very interesting and insightful to interact with my fellow colleagues as their experiences were vastly different from mine, and thus we had quite different perspectives of things."

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