



Ms Siti sets clear and reasonable goals for herself each term and works towards achieving them. PHOTO: NUBALING

Shuttling between two degrees

Reading a dual degree is not easy but SUTD-SMU student Siti Nurhayati Rahim strikes a balance between work and play

by suki lor

SHE is in the pioneer batch of students enrolled in a double degree programme run by two local universities and volunteers at the Muscular Dystrophy Association Singapore (MDAS). An avid badminton player, she took part in the Asean University Games last year, and hopes to pick up windsurfing and open a student-run café in between classes for her undergraduate course.

Meet the indefatigable Siti Nurhayati Rahim, who will turn 20 this year. She is one of 26 students reading engineering at the Singapore University of Technology and Design (SUTD) and business at the Singapore Management University (SMU) under the SUTD-SMU Dual Degree Programme (DDP) in Technology and Management. She wants to design products to help the disabled after she graduates.

Ms Siti says that after completing her A levels at Raffles Institution (Junior College), she made an impulsive decision to enter the dual degree programme, but it is one she does not regret despite the challenges. The programme enables her to study two fields that she finds interesting.

"This programme stands out as it involves a collaboration between two different universities, specialised in their respective fields – SUTD for engineering and SMU for business. This collaboration allows us to experience campus life of both schools and widen our connections," she says.

Upon completing the four-year course in 2018, students will graduate with a Bachelor in Business Management from SMU and a Bachelor in Engineering from SUTD, with a major in one of the three engineering pillars of Engineering Product Development, Engineering Systems and Design or Information Systems Technology and Design.

Ms Siti says her family fully supported her decision to enrol in the DDP, but they were worried about whether she could cope with the workload. And indeed, a dual degree is no walk in the park.

"There is an additional workload, and holidays are minimal. Due to this, I sometimes feel overwhelmed and have very little time for myself. To get through this, one must be very self-motivated."

Having to adapt to the requirements of two vastly different fields of study was also a challenge initially. "But it gets better over time, especially with the support of academic staff and peers," she says.

Knowing her limits, she sets clear and reasonable goals for herself each term and works towards achieving them. "Through proper planning and prioritisation on a regular basis, I manage to strike a balance between my academic workload and my other interests."

Soon after matriculating at SMU last year, she joined the university's badminton team and one thing led to another. She became a member of the SMU girls' team

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which competed in the Singapore University Games badminton tournament and came in second. Subsequently, she passed the selection trial to join the Singapore girls' team in the Asean University Games held in Indonesia. The team came in fourth.

Now, she is learning a new sport – windsurfing. She and a fellow DDP student plan to start a windsurfing club at SUTD through learning how such a club at SMU is being run. "This is just one of the many cross-university initiatives we hope to see in the DDP batch," Ms Siti says. She is also keen to pursue an interest in the arts.

Driven to excel

Ms Siti describes her "double life" at two campuses as an amazing experience. She gets to encounter a wider spectrum of people. "At SUTD, we meet people passionate about technology whereas at SMU, we get to meet people who have an interest in management. I think the exposure to people with different mindsets develops us to be more critical in our thoughts and opinions."

Being in the first batch of the DDP, she is looking forward to the students developing their own DDP culture.

Academically, studying at two universities pushes her limits. The huge difference in the content taught requires students to be more flexible in their thinking and to view situations from a variety of angles, says Ms Siti. "Because of this, it develops me personally to be more critical and grounded. It also teaches me to be more responsible and mature."

Mindful of the importance of giving back to society, Ms Siti has been volunteering at the MDAS since her junior college days. She says MDAS staff opened her eyes to the possibility of studying engineering to help the disabled through designing products to make their lives easier. "Before this, I'd always been stuck with a narrow mindset that the only way to help people is by working with them directly."

Upon graduating, Ms Siti foresees working in a healthcare- or medical-related field. By then, she hopes to be equipped to find a role requiring both engineering and business skills. One possibility is to marry the two skill sets to design products while applying business acumen in analysing market trends to ensure the relevance of the creations, she says.