

Tracking infocomm trends

Ms Winnie Kwan keeps track of global ICT developments to research how they can benefit Singapore

by mike lee

A FAST-TRACK Bachelor-Master scholarship from the Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore (IDA) was an opportunity Ms Winnie Kwan could not pass up.

When she was in her second year of a double degree in accountancy and information systems management at Singapore Management University (SMU), she was invited to apply for the SMU-CMU Flagship Masters Scholarship (now known as the Fast Track Bachelors-Masters Scholarship) under the National Infocomm Scholarship (NIS) programme administered by IDA.

The SMU-CMU programme lets candidates complete a bachelor's and pursue a master's degree in their final two years at Carnegie Mellon University (CMU) in the United States.

Checking out the companies offered in the NIS, she became interested in IDA for its wide-ranging scope of work and potential for exposure to the infocomm industry.

"When IDA offered me the scholarship, I was excited about the opportunity to experience life in the US, fast-track my studies, and start my career in an organisation I was interested in," she says.

Ms Kwan recalls that the intense scholarship interview process was quite stressful initially, but the interviewers took some

of the pressure off by keeping the discussion informal.

"I remember being able to candidly share my aspirations with my interviewers, as well as clarify my concerns regarding the scholarship and find out more about IDA as an organisation," she says.

Overseas stint

Her experience in the US helped her grow as a person through the many "firsts".

For instance, she taught a class as a teaching assistant and helped fellow CMU students with their tax returns as a tax volunteer. She also got to travel and work with people from diverse cultures and nationalities.

The myriad of extreme weathers contributed to her unforgettable memories of living in the US and made her more appreciative of how fortunate it is to live in Singapore.

She encountered high snowfall in Pittsburgh, a heat wave which hit 40 deg C, and then the high alert for Hurricane Irene during her summer internship in New York with Deutsche Bank, where she worked with its enterprise services team.

She also participated in the Financial Women's Association Wall Street Exchange programme, which exposed her to the importance of soft skills.

Her first internship was with the Infocomm Security department in IDA, where she developed a knowledge-sharing



Ms Kwan says it is satisfying to translate ideas into initiatives and deliver better services to Singaporeans. PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG

portal for security consultants. Besides gaining domain knowledge, she found out how it would be like working in IDA and got to know potential colleagues.

Continuous learning

Under the Flagship Masters Programme, Ms Kwan spent two-and-a-half years in SMU. Although that was insufficient for her to complete the accountancy degree, she completed the required modules to secure a second major in the subject.

When she returned to Singapore in January 2012, she interviewed for available positions and decided to start her IDA career with the Government ICT (Information and Communications Technology) Strategy team in the Government Chief Information Office.

"A significant part of my job involves sensing the latest trends and developments in public sector ICT around the world and exploring how these ideas could be applied in Singapore to improve the experi-

ence for our citizens and businesses," she says.

"The public sector ICT domain is very broad, encompassing many sectors including health care, finance and education, and my work has opened me up and gave me a glimpse of the various sectors."

She adds: "Relating our research back to how it could be relevant for Singapore and seeing our ideas translate into actual initiatives to deliver better services to our citizens is extremely satisfying."

The broad-based nature of the ICT sector is reflected in IDA's environment.

"In line with the rapid changes in the infocomm industry, the organisation is also continuously evolving as new areas and technologies emerge in IDA, creating a very dynamic environment," she says.

She tells aspiring scholars to "seize the opportunities and make the most of them. Do what you enjoy, and enjoy what you do".