Pursuing his passion

National Infocomm Scholarship holders have the freedom to choose to serve their bond with any company in IDA's list

by douglas chew

A PASSION for computer science and an interest in how information technology (IT) can be an enabler for businesses drew Mr Bong Jun Hao, 24, to the scholarships offered by Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore (IDA).

Under the Integrated Infocomm Scholarship (IIS), Mr Bong successfully completed his diploma in financial informatics at Singapore Polytechnic. The IIS is awarded to outstanding O-level students who pursue polytechnic-cum-university studies in digital media and infocomm-related courses.

These scholars can continue their university studies under the IIS or apply for the National Infocomm Scholarship (NIS), also offered by the IDA, for the sponsorship of their university studies if they wish to study abroad or pursue the Fast Track Bachelors-Masters Scholarship.

Mr Bong chose the Fast Track to pursue both a Bachelor of Science in Information Systems Management at the Singapore Management University (SMU) and a Master of Science in Information Technology from Carnegie Mellon University (CMU) in the United States. He will be able to complete both degrees within four-and-a-half years, while enjoying overseas exposure during his master's degree studies at CMU.

"I feel privileged and grateful to be given the opportunity to fully explore and prepare myself for my future career with the support of this scholarship," he says. "I think it is important not to take a scholarship for granted, but to seize the opportunities and make the best of it."

Other tracks under the NIS are the full overseas scholarship, full local scholarship and mid-term local or overseas scholarship.

Applicants must be Singapore citizens, have a good co-curricular activities record, outstanding results and possess a strong interest in carving out a career in infocommunications.

The scholarship covers the tuition and other compulsory university fees, along with a one-time computer allowance, annual living allowances, and settling-in, attachment and warm clothing allowances during a scholar's overseas stint.

Currently in the first semester of his studies at SMU, Mr Bong is learning how the design and deployment of IT solutions can address real business problems. One of his modules examines case studies of companies implementing IT solutions to meet their business requirements.

"Looking at these examples made me realise information systems is not just technical stuff such as software coding and implementation, but about how technology can greatly improve the productivity of a company and lead to a tangible outcome such as reduced costs or increased profits," he says.

He is looking forward to the networking and attachment opportunities with leading IT organisations that are regularly organised for IDA scholars. The IDA also has funds devoted to professional development courses for its scholars, and Mr Bong intends to sign up for these to further his technical skills.
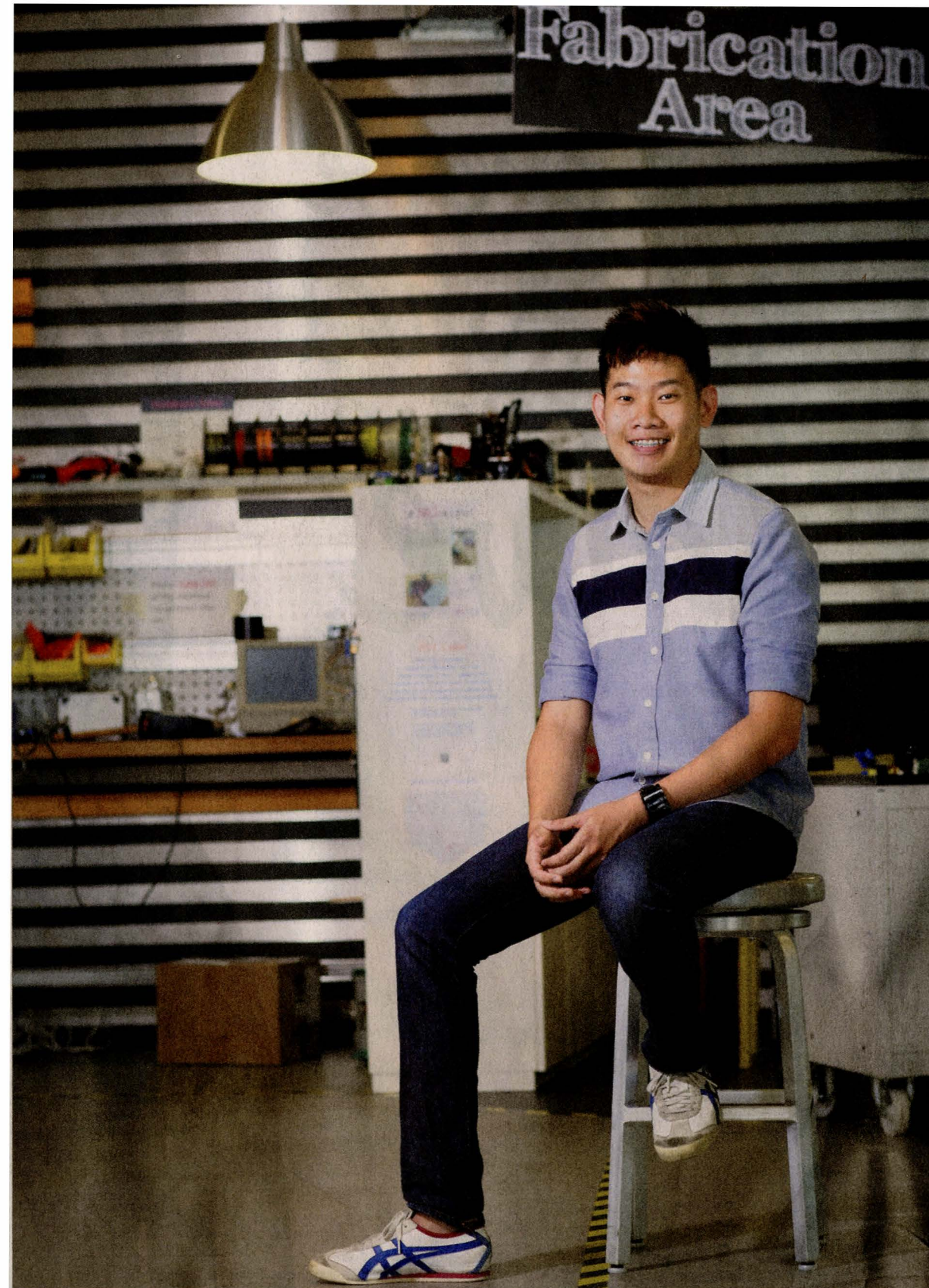
His scholarship comes with a four-year bond and allows scholars to serve it with any company they choose in the IDA's list of industry partners, which comprise start-ups, small and medium-sized enterprises and multinational companies. Mr Bong can even source for a company he would like to work for, subject to the IDA's approval.

"This gives me a lot of flexibility and freedom to choose a company that I would really love to work in and contribute to the best of my ability," he says.

"As such, I don't see myself as being bonded, but empowered instead. I am being provided with many opportunities to explore and find an exciting career within the IT industry that would be personally meaningful and rewarding to me."

He hopes to be a "groundbreaker" in the IT industry one day, in line with the objectives of the NIS to develop future leaders for Singapore's infocomm sector.

For those thinking of applying for scholarships, Mr Bong says: "It is important to think about your goals, interests and aspirations and find out where your area of interest and passion lies. Find something you are enthusiastic, excited and passionate about and pursue it."

Mr Bong looks forward to networking and attachment opportunities with leading IT organisations. PHOTO: TED CHEN