

Professionals go back to school

Master's programmes at the Singapore Management University offer students a winning mix of coursework and research that helps them advance in their careers

ESTHER TEO

WHETHER you have been in your industry for a decade or a year, a postgraduate programme can help you to expand your skill sets and make further inroads in your career.

The Singapore Management University (SMU) offers 20 master's programmes covering a wide range of disciplines including accounting, finance, law and information systems.

Two SMU postgraduate students share what they gained from their respective programmes:

Doctor embarks on an 'intellectual marathon'

Patients have always been at the heart of Dr Mark Wong's practice.

Throughout his 17-year medical career, the senior consultant surgeon at the Department of Colorectal Surgery, Singapore General Hospital (SGH) has always sought continual self-improvement to serve his patients and hospital better.

As he was appointed to more leadership roles at SGH, he felt he needed to equip himself with the necessary skill sets to be more proficient and complete as a leader.

Last year, he enrolled in the Executive MBA (EMBA) programme at SMU.

The SMU EMBA is designed to prepare global senior executives for the challenges of leading organisations in rapidly growing Asian markets, and to drive business innovation and growth.

Its innovative curriculum is created with input from more than 100 business leaders in Asia.

Dr Wong, 41, was impressed by the international line-up of the faculty as well as the comprehensive course curriculum.

The course includes overseas

stints at three world-renowned institutions — The Wharton School in Philadelphia, Indian School of Business in Hyderabad and Peking University in Beijing.

Having been in the healthcare field for nearly two decades, Dr Wong also relished the opportunity to meet C-suite executives and top-level managers from industries such as finance, logistics, manufacturing, information technology (IT), hospitality and the arts.

He says: "My postgraduate studies have been a tremendous journey of personal growth.

"My course mates and I learn from one another's wealth of experience and we are guided by the impressive international faculty, whose unbridled passion for teaching has helped make my transition back to class an exciting and rewarding experience."

Going back to school has helped Dr Wong draw parallels and connections between his work and new concepts learnt.

He found the Strategic Marketing Management module particularly illuminating.

"The module's cornerstone idea of creating optimal value propo-

sitions for all stakeholders — customers (patients), collaborators (fellow doctors) and the company (hospital) — enabled me to formulate a robust strategy to reaffirm our hospital's position as a world-class healthcare provider," he says.

In a module conducted during an overseas stint, a professor introduced the concept of "leapfrog challenges" in business, in which traditional mindsets of linear, step-wise growth are replaced by a revolutionary concept of setting an ambitious goal to be an industry leader from day one.

Dr Wong recalls: "The professor explained how a hospital with humble beginnings but lofty goals had applied this business model to surmount what was seemingly impossible odds, to become a world-class facility for all to follow.

"As a doctor, this example resonated deeply with me."

For those considering embarking on their postgraduate studies, Dr Wong says there is never a best time while one is working full-time.

He admits that pursuing the EMBA is an "intellectual marathon".

He has to assimilate all the new information and unfamiliar concepts from the rigorous course within a short time.

The doctor also has to balance meetings for class projects and assignments with the daily demands of hospital work, which often involves several 24-hour shifts.

He says: "Invest time in researching programmes that best suit your needs and aspirations. Speak to the alumni of the courses that you are interested in.

"It is also crucial to speak with your organisational leaders and to get their support and alignment with your personal goals and aspirations.

"Above all, a supportive family and organisation makes it so much more bearable and worth it."

Finance graduate enhances her IT skills

While Ms Yu Hong was interning at a global bank, she realised the importance of technology as a driver and change agent for disruptions and developments in the banking industry.

A holder of Bachelor of Science in finance and international banking from the Shanghai University of International Business and Economics, she became in-



Ms Yu enrolled in the Master of IT in Business programme to gain more specialised knowledge of banking and financial processes with an emphasis on technology. PHOTOS: CHONG JUN LIANG



Dr Wong pursued an Executive MBA to equip himself with the necessary skill sets to be a more proficient and complete leader at work.

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DR MARK WONG
senior consultant surgeon
Department of Colorectal Surgery
Singapore General Hospital

terested in acquiring more specialised knowledge of banking and financial processes with an emphasis on technology.

She enrolled in SMU's Master of IT in Business (MITB) programme in the Financial Services Track in August 2015.

The SMU MITB programme, and its Financial Technology (fintech) Track in particular, are the first and only one of their kind in Singapore and Asia.

The curriculum puts technology in the context of business and balances it with leadership, management and communication skills; equipping graduates and professionals with analytics and financial technology skills.

Ms Yu, 23, is currently a quality assurance team lead in the eBusiness Department at DBS Bank.

She found the programme's banking-related courses — corporate bank and smart contracts, retail banking and mobile technology, and digital banking and fintech — most interesting and practical.

Besides theoretical knowledge, MITB's six-month internship at DBS Private Bank enabled her to gain in-depth exposure to real-life and current industry cases.

She acquired practical knowledge

on banking architecture and operation processes from projects she did.

While balancing the internship and schoolwork was challenging, she increased her efficiency by choosing courses that were more related to her role, so that she could apply what she learnt.

"My studies and internship complemented each other remarkably well and accelerated my overall learning and growth," she says.

Since her graduation last month, Ms Yu says she has significantly broadened and deepened her understanding of the overall architecture and technology and operations in the banking sector.

She has also learnt to adopt a more technology-centric perspective when providing business solutions.

She intends to keep herself updated on domain knowledge and to enhance her skills and expertise in IT project delivery.

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MS YU HONG
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To find out more about these SMU programmes, visit:

- EMBA: business.smu.edu.sg/emba
- MITB: sis.smu.edu.sg/master-it-business