



Singapore Management University undergraduate Sammie Lim Yi Xuan is packing her varsity years with not only a double degree in economics and business management, but also several co-curricular activities, overseas exchanges and internships.
ST PHOTO: GAVIN FOO

Get the most out of varsity life

Sandra Davie
Senior Education
Correspondent

Q I have already secured a place in a university to study law and am looking forward to starting my university studies in August. What can I do to prepare myself and how do I get the most out of my university life?

A Congratulations on getting into one of the most competitive faculties.

Along with you, in August, some 17,000 of your peers will be headed to the six universities here. Many will also be heading overseas and to private education institutions such as the Singapore Institute of Management and James Cook University, Singapore.

A significant part of the undergraduate experience involves grappling with big questions such as: Who am I? What do I want to do with my life? How can I land a job that enables me to earn a living but which also has meaning and purpose?

A university education also offers opportunities for growth. While it should prepare you for a career, it can be far more than that.

The undergraduate experience can be transformative. Take the time to reflect on your goals. Write down a list of things you would like to achieve. Then think about which ones are the most important to

you, break them down into achievable chunks and think of the steps you can take to achieve them.

It is also very important for you to take responsibility for your learning.

This is not about acquiring new facts or demonstrating expertise in classroom settings but about learning to use your mind.

When writing your papers, think about how you can make a thoughtful, persuasive argument.

Researching topics requires formulating good questions, critically examining lots of evidence, analysing one's data and presenting one's findings in a succinct way.

Branch out and take a class in an obscure topic that interests you. This will make you think differently and potentially inspire you in the future in unexpected ways.

I am reminded of Apple founder Steve Jobs, who took up a calligraphy class that ended up influencing the typography for Apple.

Do not restrict learning to just the classroom. If a course that you want to take up conflicts with your schedule, consider enrolling in an online course. In universities such as the Singapore University of Social Sciences, you can take up evening classes with working adults who study part time. Mixing with them can give you new insights and perspectives.

These years offer you the chance to indulge freely in your hobbies

askST
you ask. we answer.

and connect with people from diverse backgrounds, so do not be afraid to try new things.

You would be surprised at how many opportunities there are for students to get involved on campus.

If you enjoy playing a sport, you should look into how you can continue playing it. Sport is a great way to acquire soft skills like teamwork, grit and determination that employers look for.

Enjoy playing music or singing? Consider becoming a member of the university's band or choir.

Do you want to try your hand at entrepreneurship? Several of the universities have entrepreneurship programmes. The National University of Singapore's Overseas College Programme has bred many successful entrepreneurs, who have gone on to launch start-ups.

Take on internships and work attachments. Those are a great way to test-drive jobs you may be interested in and acquire job skills and experience that employers look for.

Universities here provide rich opportunities. It is the responsibility

of students to seize them.

Take, for example, Singapore Management University undergraduate Sammie Lim Yi Xuan. The third-year, double-degree student taking economics and business management has been involved in several co-curricular activities, including providing consulting services to non-profit organisations and social enterprises in Singapore and mentoring younger students.

She has also gone on two overseas exchanges, including to the Asia Institute for Political Economy in Hong Kong, to learn more about how politics and economics intersect.

She has undertaken three internships, two of them at consulting firms. Later this year, she is heading to another consulting firm for a work attachment.

The 22-year-old said she has not had much free time or holidays, but does not regret "packing her university years to the brim".

"I really believe your university years are the best years to grow, learn new things, discover more about yourself and find your passion. And all the activities I took up helped me to do just that."

I know you have landed a place in a coveted faculty, but the value of your education will depend on your input than on your university professors or curriculum.

Make the most of it.

sandra@sph.com.sg