

Publication: The Straits Times Online

Date: 24 August 2021

Headline: SMU graduation ceremonies begin virtually, with 2,978 getting degrees

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As the first from his family to graduate from university, Mr Fakhru Fais Sirat is seen as a class act by his three nieces and younger sister.

While the humble 26-year-old said he does not hold himself up as a role model, he said they still consider him as their tutor and adviser.

"I just try to support them and tell them that they can do whatever they want to do in life," he added.

Mr Fakhru is among 2,978 Singapore Management University (SMU) graduands who will receive their degrees from Tuesday (Aug 24) to Thursday. The commencement ceremony is held online for the second year in a row due to Covid-19.

This year's is the 18th and largest batch from SMU, which was established in 2000 as Singapore's third autonomous university.

The class of 2021 comprises 1,908 people getting bachelor's degrees, 1,009 master's and juris doctor degrees, and 61 doctorate degrees.

The ceremony kicked off at 9am on Tuesday with the dean of the School of Computing and Information Systems Pang Hwee Hwa presenting degrees to undergraduates from his faculty.

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He told them: "Just like we evolve in anticipation of technology trends and industry demands, you will have to keep updating your knowledge and skills throughout your career... You have laid a solid foundation but you will need to continually reinforce that foundation and develop on top of it."

Minister of Finance Lawrence Wong addressed SMU graduands through a pre-recorded message embedded on the website hosting the graduation ceremonies.

He congratulated them on finishing their studies through the pandemic and called on them to think about others as they move forward in life.



He said: "Think of the many who have made countless daily sacrifices throughout this pandemic - from our front-line and essential services workers, to the silent heroes who have gone out of their way to help the vulnerable in our midst."

Mr Fakhrul, who is graduating with a degree in information systems, said that growing up, it was not always easy financially. He is one of five children whose father is a forklift driver and mother is a cook.

He said he was given the support and platform to thrive at SMU and also reach out to others.

"SMU sparked my interest in community service by giving me the opportunity to go overseas to Malaysia in 2019, where I helped out at learning centres for children," he added.

He took on a leadership role in the same project last year but was unable to travel due to the pandemic.

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He said: "It's something that I'm looking forward to carry on with in the future, after I settle into working life and the pandemic situation improves."