

**Publication: The Straits Times Online**

**Date: 15 December 2021**

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Mr Berwin Chua, 26, had tried three times before he was accepted into Singapore Management University's (SMU's) law school and even attended the orientation camp for business school at another institution, assuming that was where he would be going.

But on the last day of the camp, he got an offer from SMU and promptly switched over.

Mr Chua also clocked double SMU's 80 mandatory hours of community service over the course of his degree studies by volunteering regularly at a legal clinic in Chong Pang Community Club.

His interest in law and community service stemmed from his national service in the Singapore Police Force.

He said: "I saw first-hand that there were many people who required legal aid as they did not have a complete understanding of the nuances and implications of the law.

"An understanding of the law made me realise how the world works, and I felt the world open itself to me. My curiosity was piqued, and I decided to pursue my dreams."

The lawyer was one of 2,921 SMU students who graduated in 2020 and are finally having their much-delayed graduation ceremonies.

The ceremonies will take place over six days. They were meant to be held in July 2020 but were postponed due a spike in Covid-19 transmission in Singapore then.

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Also graduating this week is Ms Norullayaley Mohd Ikbal, 24, who earned a degree in psychology and public policy and public management.

She is the first in her family to go to university and the eldest of seven siblings.

Ms Norullayaley, who is now working at GovTech, told The Straits Times that while her family is proud of her achievement, they have always supported different routes to success, and her siblings are finding it in other fields such as fashion.

She said: "My parents never pressured me to do well or go to university, it was something that I wanted for myself - to follow through and go in-depth with psychology."

She added that she is thankful for SMU's course structure, which allowed her to do a double major and discover her passion for public policy.

Ms Norullayaley initially found her job search difficult, she said, but learnt that GovTech, the central agency behind public sector tech transformation, was looking to hire people with experiences outside the tech field.

She said: "Before joining, I took it upon myself to read up on and take some courses on tech so that I would be up to speed to start work."



Defence Minister Ng Eng Hen spoke at the first ceremony on Wednesday (Dec 15), where he told graduates that the world is their oyster, and that they have much to look forward to, including starting their careers and families.

SMU chairman Ho Kwon Ping in his speech told graduates to stay positive and open to career opportunities, and to remember that careers are now rarely linear.

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He said: "The world has changed since you graduated and so has your future in it. You face a world of economic and social challenges, a world where the status quo is being challenged and disrupted by unforeseen circumstances."

He added: "Broad experience and evidence of drive will always be recognised. And stay curious, keep on learning and build up your treasure trove of knowledge, skills and experience which have been imparted to you."