

Pursuing her MBA part-time at SMU enables Ms Francesca Tay to apply what she learns at work



PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG

A transformative journey

TEO KUAN YEE

THE world of business and finance has always been a source of fascination for Ms Francesca Tay since her childhood.

After five years with CNBC International, the 30-year-old business news producer decided to pursue a Master of Business Administration (MBA).

Ms Tay, who graduated from Senton Hall University in the United States with a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration and Finance and a minor in Journalism, was also inspired by her parents and grandfather, who holds master's and doctoral (earned in his 60s) degrees.

Last year, she started her 18-month part-time MBA programme with the Singapore Management University (SMU).

She felt that an MBA would harness her managerial skills and motivation in developing the company, and on a larger scale, the industry.

Says Ms Tay: "I wanted to explore new frontiers in the business of media and make informed decisions to improve the enterprise."

"An MBA became the obvious choice because it's recognised globally, and I knew it would give me a wide scope for understanding a variety of fields such as economics, operations management and marketing."

Equipped with the right skills

Applying the principles learnt in her MBA studies has boosted her problem-solving skills in her day-to-day work.

"The MBA programme gives you the knowledge required to perform well in a job, while equipping you with the soft skills you need to transition to a management role," says Ms Tay, who will graduate in December.

Her marketing class has taught her the value of creating brand awareness, while strategic management course work has given her the necessary skills to form the framework needed to sell a brand.

Her studies in organisational behaviour and leadership also helped to improve how she manages a team.

"From communicating vision plans

clearly to keeping people motivated, I was able to navigate the emotions associated with change while making tough calls when necessary," she says.

Effective methodology

It was a fruitful period honing her skills at SMU, where the curriculum is designed with a keen focus on analytical and negotiation skills, leadership and communication, as well as a seminar-style teaching method combined with an interactive pedagogy.

"The people here value participation, and that helps to form a more conducive space for learning and experimenting concepts learnt," she says.

Small class sizes ensure everyone gets equal attention from professors.

Group projects also feature heavily in every SMU module, and are mostly simulated to reflect actual corporate environments. The students are allocated different teams to tackle case studies every semester.

Adds Ms Tay: "That mirrors real world scenarios where we can't really choose the people we work with. The dynamics may not always tickle our fancy, but we just have to find ways to make things work."

"SMU creates experiences and provides avenues to make learning relevant in the real world."

Growing through change

Ms Tay describes her postgraduate studies as being akin to a caterpillar's metamorphosis, where it evolves to a pupa and eventually emerges as a butterfly.

"It's been less than a year since I started my MBA course and already, I've seen the promise of a quality education being met with opportunities to find my own approach to problem-solving. In SMU, we are constantly challenged to discover new ideas and new ways to navigate the world around us — timeless abilities that can be transformative if done well."

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