

SMU graduation ceremony

A-level 'straight C' student finds success in SMU after 3 gap years

She worked after initial rejection from school, then won scholarship and excelled in studies



Jolene Ang

By all accounts, Ms Lim Geok Shan is the quintessential academic over-achiever, with a scholarship from the Singapore Management University (SMU) and a place on the dean's list for three years running from 2016.

But the 26-year-old is quick to point out that she was nothing like that before enrolling in the Bachelor of Science (Information Systems) programme in 2016.

She scored straight Cs in her A levels in 2012, and was rejected when she first applied for a place in SMU's information systems programme the next year.

Ms Lim said she "felt like a failure in life" because, with two older brothers suffering from visual impairments, the weight of expectations was on her young shoulders.

She eventually gained entry into SMU, and was one of 1,884 graduates to receive their bachelor's degree last Friday from the university, which held a virtual graduation and career fair to mark the occasion.

Of the group, 56 graduated with double degrees. There were also 989 master's degree and Juris Doc-

tor degree graduates, and 48 others who received their doctorates.

Ms Lim said that in the three years after her A levels, she did everything from working in a coffee shop to running a blogshop.

"Apart from practical skills like learning to deal with people from different walks of life, and coping with stress and time management, it really helped me grow as a person."

She had started the blogshop with a friend when she was in Anderson Junior College.

For about a year after the A levels,

FINDING SENSE OF SELF

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MS LIM GEOK SHAN, about the three years she spent working before reapplying for a place in SMU's information systems programme.

she ran the online store by sourcing for clothes and various tech gadgets on Chinese e-commerce site Taobao.

A good day would see her make \$500 a night.

Ms Lim later helped run her uncle's coffee shop, where she managed staff, some of whom were three times her age, and coordinated with suppliers.

In the third year after her A levels, she worked in an administrative role for a real estate company.

There she learnt that her university-graduate colleagues were earning significantly more than her.

Ms Lim decided to try for a place in SMU again, although she was aware her straight C grades did not meet the cut-off for the information systems programme.

As a back-up plan, she also applied to read science at the National University of Singapore and biomedical science at Nanyang Technological University.

By then, Ms Lim had saved up almost \$30,000 to pay her way through school. Her father is a technician and her mother, a clerk.

SMU replied and said she had to sit a technical assessment test in basic programming skills, which she passed.



Ms Lim Geok Shan on a study mission trip to London (above) in 2018 and during a summer exchange programme in Hong Kong (left) last year. The 26-year-old was one of 1,884 graduates to receive their bachelor's degree last Friday from the Singapore Management University. PHOTOS: COURTESY OF LIM GEOK SHAN

During the three-year break, she had honed her skills by taking up ad hoc Web design assignments.

Next month, Ms Lim will be joining DBS Bank's Skill Enhancement Education and Development programme—a 24-month training programme for engineers in the tech and innovation industry.

"Society places a lot of emphasis on results and outcomes. But looking back, so what if I didn't do well in the A levels?"

"We tend to form our identity

based on these results or track records, but it's more important to find our sense of self," Ms Lim said of the three years she spent working.

SMU said last Friday's event was meant to offer graduates a platform to relive the best moments of their university experience, as well as interact with potential employers.

Physical commencement ceremonies will be held at a later date, when allowed, the university added.

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