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Headline: Double the advantage on the fast track

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HAVING a deep interest in infocomm technology (ICT) and yet wanting to keep her career options open made the National Infocomm Scholarship (NIS) a perfect choice for Ms Beh Min Yan, 20. The NIS, which is offered by the Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore (IDA), offers four possibilities — a full overseas scholarship, full local scholarship, mid-term overseas or local scholarships and a fast-track Bachelors-Masters scholarship.

Under the fast-track programme, Ms Beh will spend two years at Singapore Management University (SMU), followed by two years at Carnegie Mellon University (CMU) in the United States. She is studying for a double degree, the Bachelor of Science (Information Systems) and Bachelor of Business Management.

“This is a great opportunity to get the best of both worlds: an overseas education grounded by industry exposure in Singapore,” says Ms Beh. “Not only can I obtain rewarding internship and research opportunities in SMU, these experiences will be greatly value-added in CMU, which is also one of the top universities in the world reputed for its courses in technology.”

Nearing graduation, scholars will be matched to a company matching their aspirations. They will be able to choose to work for any company in IDA’s list of recommended industry partners, which includes start-ups, local enterprises and multinational companies.

Freedom to choose

“My scholarship has a four-year bond, but I have the freedom to explore my choice of companies during my studies,” says Ms Beh.

The NIS covers her tuition fees at both universities, and provides living allowances, computer allowances and return airfare. She can also go for career-related developmental courses approved by IDA. Currently in her second year at SMU, she enjoys the programming, database management and software engineering modules and relishes project work, which requires her to work in teams.

She is also taking modules from SMU’s business school — such as financial accounting, finance and decision analysis — to learn fundamental concepts in interpreting business decisions and performance. To build her business skills, Ms Beh has taken part in case competitions, where she conducts company and industry analyses of actual companies and presents her findings. She also participated in data analytics competitions, and learnt how to generate business insights using analytics software.

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As part of a technopreneur study mission organised by SMU, she visited start-ups in India last year. Her trip was sponsored by IDA. "It was a great opportunity to learn first-hand the numerous struggles that start-up founders faced in developing their technologies and penetrating their target markets," she adds. Last year, she went to Cambridge University in Britain for a three month summer exchange programme, sponsored by IDA, to pursue her other interests in philosophy and advanced discrete mathematics.

On her own initiative, she landed an internship for next year with Palantir Technologies, a Silicon Valley software and services company specialising in data analysis. Ms Beh's passion for IT has also motivated her to engage in further research. She is currently working with Assistant Professor David Lo, who is with SMU's School of Information Systems, to study using automated feedback for assignments in programming.

Passion for IT

"Outside the classroom, I am eager to challenge myself in applying what I have learnt as I find it important to get myself acquainted with real-world contexts. "A keen passion in IT goes a long way in motivating me to seize various opportunities to engage in research projects and developing simple applications during my own free time," she says. Next year, she plans to do a master's degree in computational data science at CMU under the NIS to prepare for a career in business intelligence through the use of data science.

She says: "ICT has profound applications and disruptive potential in today's world, and the need to be equipped with advanced information technology (IT) literacy is of compelling importance. "IT has the potential to provide immense value to almost any industry, which will allow me to penetrate any industry of interest. "I hope to contribute my technical expertise to make more intelligent business decisions, and to facilitate existing workflows to enhance productivity in organisations." For those keen on a career in ICT, she suggests finding out more and trying their hand at it.

"There is a wealth of resources online for you to get started, be it joining an online community or interest group," she says. "You can pick up a new programming language, or get started on your first project through a guided online tutorial. "There are plenty of hackathon events and talks for amateurs to expand their networks and learn more about their specific areas of interest."