YOUNG AND RESTLESS

Do not disturb: Cramming in progress

Some undergrads hog school study rooms, others resort to more questionable means

By Nur Amira Abdul Karim

FINAL-YEAR accountancy student Eugenia Tham, 22, spent three days studying in a tiny room armed with cup noodles, muesli bars, sweets and a coffee-maker.

She stepped out only for toilet breaks and to shower – taking short naps on a mattress in the corner because the school library was closed.

The undergraduate was not taking part in a strange dare or challenge.

The three-day cram is a ritual she observes twice a semester – once for the mid-term exam and again for the finals.

She was not alone in her 3m-by-3m school study room when the exams are around the corner.

Other students hog school study rooms – a common phenomenon during crunch time. Some come to school as early as 7.30am to stake their claim, while others resort to more devious measures.

At the Singapore Management University, each student is given a 240-hour booking quota at the start of every academic year.

They may use it to book group study rooms, seminar rooms or classrooms.

The minimum booking period is 30 minutes and the maximum, three hours at a stretch for each student.

One group of friends has found a way of working the system to its advantage.

Third-year business management students Ian Chia and Marcus Ooi, both 23, and Li Min, 21, do not book a study room in clean hourly blocks.

For instance, instead of booking it from 1pm to 4pm, they reserve it from 1pm to 1.30pm, 2pm to 2.30pm, and so on.

Ian, who thinks his group’s plan is foolproof, said: “No one in their right mind would book the room for just half an hour – so the room is ours for an unbroken stretch, and we end up not exhausting our quota.”

Like Eugenia, he and his friends are veterans in overnight study marathons – and they come prepared on Friday nights with a change of clothes, towels and snacks.

They shower in the school gym and return home on Sunday afternoon.

Marcus said that the study rooms help them focus better as they are away from the many distractions at home – such as television and video games.

He said: “It’s quite fun. There are always many people in school who are studying – we give each other support when needed and leave each other alone when necessary.”

It all sounds very hunky-dory, but there is an ugly side to pre-exam periods, too.

Recent National University of Singapore dentistry graduate Khoo Mei Ting, 23, recounts how theft of study notes, textbooks and even laptops occurred weeks before her final exams.

The thieves were extremely audacious: nicking items from lockers and even hostel rooms, as many students left their doors open while studying in the hallways.

In the end, the thieves were caught and made to repeat the semester.

STUDY MARATHONS: To get maximum time to study, some students at the Singapore Management University book school study rooms in blocks. Some cook in the study rooms and shower in the gym toilets. Above, a posed picture of students eating cup noodles while mugging for the exams.

Unlike Eugenia, her friend Govin, 22, made a pact with a friend to cheat on a test.

The friend, whose tests were scheduled three days before Govin’s, would disclose the questions to him. In return, Govin would complete a graded assignment for the friend.

Govin’s understanding was that the questions on his test would be similar to the one his friend would take.

However, his friend disclosed the wrong questions and even the wrong chapters to study for. As a result, Govin failed his test.

He said: “You cannot trust people in school to help you. If you do well, they may lose out because the grades are moderated on a bell curve.”

While pre-exam desperation may harm friendships, stress from last-minute cramming may also have adverse effects on a student’s health.

In May this year, NUS electrical and electronic engineering honours student Mr Syukor Ali, 24, was hospitalized for three days after experiencing heart palpitations.

The self-confessed “mugger” and his friends survived on little more than Panadol Extra tablets and Coca-Cola for two weeks while studying for their exams.

This took a toll on Syukor, who was eventually hospitalised a day after he completed his papers.

Yet, the ambitious student seems unperturbed.

He said: “It’s just a temporary pain to achieve my goal. I’ll give up all the bad habits in a year, when school ends.”

The writer is a third-year political science and law student at the Singapore Management University.