Last Saturday, I sat for my last exam as an undergraduate. It was a great feeling. Four years of a very exciting learning journey had come to an end at the Singapore Management University.

Four years after I took the plunge to be in the pioneer batch at the newly-formed School of Information Systems (SIS), I’m glad I took that decision.

I’m always inclined to go off the beaten track and that was certainly one of the riskier major decisions that I had taken.

It was the interview that totally bowled me over, with a panel of five interviewers, including the dean and some senior professors and staff.

Initially, I was a little apprehensive about the proposition of a business-IT degree, but what won me over was the conviction I sensed in my interviewers to make this experiment a huge success.

By the end of the hour-long interview, I was convinced that in four years from then, SIS would be a force to be reckoned with, and I wanted to play a major role in that. Well, so far, it seems that my gamble has paid off.

The university experience that I got turned out to be quite different from my expectations. I had expected to be taught by a professor in a lecture theatre packed with students.

Instead, we were studying in seminar-style classes and doing lots of projects in small groups.

One of the most interesting courses was the first I took. Not only did we have to acquaint ourselves with IT-industry lingo, but were also made to teach these concepts to our peers.

And this is a group of first-year students fresh out of JCs and polytechnics we’re talking about here.

Difficult as it may sound, the high standards required in this course turned out to be a blessing in disguise, preparing us very well for the rest of the degree programme.

The best part was that everyone was treated equally when it came to technical competence. I was not too comfortable with computer coding, but working in a team was a big boon.

Helping one another when we got stuck shaped some very close friendships. These bonds only strengthened when project work required us to spend our nights on campus.

I was also touched by the university’s receptiveness to change. At the end of first year, a group of students was called in for a session with the lecturers over lunch and we gave them our frank opinions on how the course could be improved.

To our surprise, almost all of the changes were incorporated for the next batch of students.

When I chose to study at a local university four years ago, there was a constant niggle in my mind that trying for a university overseas would have been better.

After all, many of my smartest friends were heading overseas.

Now that I am close to graduation, I can say that the opportunities I received by staying here were no less inferior.

We only need to be willing to capitalise on them, which I did in earnest. Going on international exchange for a term was really a blessing.

Exposure

It’s something I feel every student should participate in, and given the increasing number of overseas collaborations local universities have, a stint overseas is becoming commonplace.

Such exposure unquestionably widens our outlook.

The most important ability I acquired during these four transformational years was learning to learn, one of the tenets of SIS. If I were to travel back in time, I would definitely do this degree all over again.

For those embarking on undergrad studies soon, my advice is: keep your eyes open and make the most of all the opportunities that local universities have to offer.

I did, and it has certainly been one of the best experiences life has offered me.

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