One path, many avenues

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He captained its windsurfing team. He played violin and viola with its string ensemble.

You wouldn't be wrong in labelling Singapore Management University (SMU) graduate Tong Junjie an over-achiever because he was also active in community work, and had been to China in 2006 to teach English as part of SMU's overseas community service outreach programme.

For all that and for maintaining a perfect 4.0 grade point average (GPA) in his four years, he was the salutatorian at SMU's sixth commencement ceremony for 1,374 graduands, the largest batch so far.

That academic title is traditionally given in the United States to the second-highest graduate of the entire graduating class of an educational institution, and is based on grades, the GPA as well as extracurricular activities.

The 24-year-old's grades also placed him on the Dean's List and helped him clinch the Deloitte Meritorious Award in 2006, 2007 and 2008.

Mr Tong, who was from Victoria Junior College, graduated Summa Cum Laude (the highest honours attainable) with a double degree in Accountancy and Economics.

"When I entered SMU, I just wanted to complete my accounting degree and become an auditor," he said. "However, the university entrusted us to make our own choices, and our simple path to a degree evolved into multiple avenues."

Mr Tong with his proud parents at SMU's commencement ceremony at Suntec City. PHOTO COURTESY OF TONG JUNJIE

His engineer father and auditor mother are both retired.

In September, Mr Tong starts work as a business analyst with management consulting firm McKinsey & Company. He is the only Singaporean hired this year in McKinsey's Corporate Finance Asia Practice.

But his involvement with SMU has not stopped. Mr Tong's graduating class is making a collective Senior Class Gift to SMU, and contributions will be channelled towards a new Graduating Class of 2009 Scholarship to sponsor the tuition fees of an undergraduate for one year of study.