It pays to be a GEEK!

Fresh IT grads make more than Art, Design and Media grads: Survey

REPORT: LESTER HIO
lesther@ph.com.sg

Super Geek Bill Gates set the tone by being one of the richest in the world.

Face it, IT geeks make big money.

And judging by the results of the 2009 Graduate Employment Survey conducted by the Ministry of Education (MOE), they do well as fresh graduates too.

Graduates of Information Systems Management at the Singapore Management University (SMU) have the highest median monthly salary at $4,000.

And the creative types?

Those in the Art, Design and Media course at Nanyang Technological University (NTU) have the lowest at $2,300.

They also scored the lowest in terms of permanent employability across the three public universities.

The course was started five years ago and its first batch of students graduated only last year.

The annual MOE survey was started in 2008 and last year’s findings were released last month.

Previously, the three universities conducted their own surveys and released the results on their own.

Survey results

In the 2008 survey, SMU accountancy graduates had the lowest monthly median pay of $2,400.

Last year, 96 students graduated from NTU’s School of Art, Design and Media.

And they’ll have you know the survey isn’t telling the whole story.

The school’s spokesman told The New Paper: “In this industry, work undertaken such as feature films, game development and corporate branding are often on a part-time contract or a project basis as the projects typically last less than a year.

“Therefore, measuring full-time permanent employability may not aptly capture the amount of work or income of these graduates.”

Ms Jenny Tan, 24, who graduated from the school last year, agreed.

“The pay from their ‘fixed jobs’ may be low, but they choose to take up freelance projects or do their own creative projects,” the graphic designer said.

“Most of their income comes from payment from freelancing. They take a low-paying permanent job to gain a foothold in the industry.”

She said Art, Design and Media programs may be poorly paid only at the start.

“The industry is very competitive and most companies will offer a one- to three-month contract to see how good you are,” she said.

“During that period, the pay is low. But if they offer you a job, your pay will increase.”

Although Ms Tan decided to reveal her salary, she said it was more than $2,300.

Ms Jeonina Song, 22, who is studying for a degree in Fine Arts in Visual Communication at the school, said graduates may be entering an industry where demand is low and competition is fierce.

“Some of us even sign up for unpaid internships at creative agencies just so we can gain work experience,” said the third-year undergraduate.

The good news is that those in the creative industry are getting a leg up from the Government.

Acting Minister for Information, Communications and the Arts Lui Tuck Yew said on Friday that the industry would be given a boost with grants and tax breaks.

The Straits Times reported.

It is part of the Government’s push to attract more people to join industries such as the arts, design, film and animation.

One of the incentives is a $3 million Creative Industries Apprenticeship Scheme to be run by the Singapore Workforce Development Agency.

The scheme will co-fund about 150 apprenticeships over two years.

So are undergraduates like Ms Song worried about their prospects?

She said: “We’re happy with what we do and are not just looking for monetary gains.

“We’re compensated by liking what we do.”

Yes, they have job satisfaction.

But the IT types get more money.