

Choose what you love in studies & career



Accounting, hotel management, nursing or IT? AT SIM GE's open House, prospective students discuss their study options in the light of career goals

WHICH comes first – deciding on a career before your university enrolment, and then basing your studies on this decision, or choosing a discipline that you're interested in, and deciding on a career only after graduation?

For many young people, according to Kritika Jhunjhunwala (first-year Management student at SIM-University of London), they are fairly sure of the broad areas of work that they want to pursue, such as engineering, business, teaching or medical, and the academic course that they would be enrolling.

"After secondary school we know roughly what we want to be, or not to be," Kritika says. "For me, engineering or the sciences are out. I want to be in business or management after I graduate, so I need to study these subjects."

Most of her study pals who enrolled this year and are now preparing for their very first exams, share the same sentiments. While they are not sure of the exact jobs that they may get after graduation, they are sure they want a career in management, business or the financial services.

Career counsellors agree that prospective students should know the general subjects they want to pursue before they enroll. Broadly speaking, these include business, management and finance, computing and technology, the hard sciences, life sciences, humanities and the arts, and the social sciences.

If a student has a creative bent, but shows no aptitude nor interest in figures and calculations, it is advisable that they go for subjects that they will enjoy and shine. Of course they may change their mind as they discover new interests in the course of university studies.

Outgoing sportswoman and Judoka, Jamie Ng (SIM-RMIT Bachelor of Business in Logistics and Supply Chain Management), for example, first enrolled in UOL, studying Economics but after one term, she changed her mind and switched to Logistics and SCM at RMIT as she felt that these disciplines are more suited to her personality.

Importance of research

Jamie's case illustrates the importance of doing your homework before you decide if an area of studies is appropriate for the general career path you have in mind. Most prospective students and their parents focus on the status and quality of the universities they have in mind but it is also important to investigate the academic disciplines and their demands.

For instance, some people think that to be accepted into medical school is like striking the career jackpot. "Who wouldn't like to be a doctor, earning pots of money?" is the reaction that folks have when they heard so-and-so's son or daughter has become a medical student.

Now, if you're a parent with a kid who has done extremely well in secondary school, don't automatically assume your son or daughter is set to go into medicine. Do your research: Can you afford the high school fees? Does your child have the inclination and

mental energy for long hours of study and practice? Is he or she capable of interacting with sick people day in and day out?

In contrast to the life sciences are the creative and performance arts that include acting, dance, music, film, painting and other glamorous subjects. The bright lights, the applause of the audience and the adulation of fans can be bewitching.

Behind the glamour, however, there are long hours of practice, practice, practice, whether it is to perfect a dance movement or to play an instrument. Some people just don't have the discipline, drive and determination to sacrifice their leisure and social life to attain such perfection.

Demands of Economics

On a more prosaic level, even "popular" disciplines like business and management studies require skills in writing, argument and analysis, as well as a reasonable command of language. Some courses require submission of case studies involving project reports of up to 10,000 words, complete with charts, graphs and data tables. Many students find these materials unappetising, and their compilation even more distressing.

Economics is a field that some may think is less demanding than, say, medicine. Nonetheless a careful scrutiny of the UOL BSc (Hons) in Economics reveals that the programmes include rather challenging subjects such as Macroeconomics and Econometrics. And according to Senior Economics Lecturer Dr Seet Min Kok, it will be good that you learn a variety of economic theories, grasp their underlying logic, and apply them appropriately to different economic situations.

One student who loves Economics is final-year SIM-RMIT student and president of the SIM Economics Society Louise Han, 21. She scored several distinctions in the previous two years' modules, attributing her grasp of both the meaning and logic of Economics to the fact that she was already studying it in her Junior College days.

A sub-discipline in Economics that intrigues her most is Game Theory – strategic decision-making using mathematical models – which she will be taking in the next semester.

Studying and understanding Economics is not something students could do overnight. According to another Senior Lecturer Dr Zhang Jianlin, to truly master economic theories and concepts, students would have to write essays and complete project-based assignments regularly until the subject matter has been ingrained in their mind.

Agreeing with this observation, Louise says she herself has done many Economics-writing projects since her JC days. And her current RMIT modules require many real-world studies of the financial health of companies.

Be mindful of your pals

While you go about achieving high grades in your studies, be also mindful of other students around you. Help each other, share and contribute. As successful banker Lim

Mun Seng puts it: "Learning is not a zero sum game. We do not become poorer when we give others more knowledge. In fact, by sharing what we know, we increase our own knowledge," echoing a famous scholarly saying of the Classical World, *crescat scientia; vita excolatur* ("When knowledge increases, life is enriched").

Mun Seng himself climbed the academic ladder the long way, starting with an SIM Diploma in Management Studies in 2000 and a University of London BSc Management (2nd Class Hons) in 2003.

Burnish your resume

One practical advice from Human Resource executives is that you should not be too tense over whether the choice of your academic pursuits will help you attain your long-term career goal. Know in general the kind of profession you like to be in after your studies, and meanwhile, during campus days, relax and take part in sports, social events and even intellectual activities such as talks, training workshops and seminars.

Participate in student interest clubs and offer your time and energy in helping to launch initiatives and programmes such as a musical performance or sport competition, an exhibition or industry networking evening.

If, say, you're responsible for the marketing and promotion of a ticketed student production or you've won a nationwide university debate competition, mention this in your resume which otherwise would be quite slender.

Of course, go for internship stints whenever the opportunity presents itself. And during the holidays, apply for part-time work.

So, when you go job-hunting after graduation, you have much more to write about in your resume, other than exam transcripts. Employers do look for details of CCA involvement, internship and part-time work because they know that as a fresh graduate, you have little job experience.

Look for sunrise professions

While immersed in textbooks and student activities, do not forget the world outside. Three or four years of tertiary study can be a long time, and there will be major political, industrial and technological shifts. Certain careers will vanish, new ones will appear, and your perception about your work future during your enrolment will have to be radically revised by the time you leave university.

A noteworthy point is that there will be many "sunrise" professions which did not exist when you were in secondary school. These include digital and social media marketing, renewable energy R&D and even unmanned flights to Mars. They need young people with imagination and knowledge, energy and skill-sets. Then, there are other traditional professions that have been transformed and are becoming important again as innovations and new technologies change our lives and work.

It is a wise strategy to find out how your majors can equip you to work in jobs that are related to these industries.

Consider healthcare. When a society is facing a rise in its aging population, professions such as medical social workers, nurse educators, counsellors or hospital ward administrators, will be in demand.

If you have IT qualifications, you shouldn't limit yourself to Web design and programming or simply managing computer systems. You can go into the brave new fields of Social Media marketing or search-engine consultancy.

If you're good in communications and have a flair for writing, continue to develop these skills even if people tell you that print newspapers and magazines worldwide are shutting down every day. There are countless opportunities for writing online, and job openings abound for Web journalists, editors and contents producers. Businesses and institutions want a strong Web presence, and so they need such people to beef up their Web sites and refresh their Web contents regularly.

Love what you study

A final word from Lo Kien Foh, managing director of Continental Automotive Singapore and a graduate of SIM-RMIT's Master of Finance in 2010: "My advice to prospective students is to pursue the area that you have a passion in. A course that fits your interest and strength will set you on a good and lasting learning journey.

"Pursuing your goal in your area of interest will last you a life time. Seek every opportunity to learn, to get involved to contribute," Kien Foh adds.

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