



How he's making a mark on his own terms

SIT scholar Francis Swee proves that perseverance and a growth mindset make it possible to overcome initial setbacks

TEXT BY EMMY ABDUL ALIM

If Mr Francis Swee had taken his O-level results at face value, he would not be where he is today. He is close to completing his engineering degree and kicking off his career at a multinational company as a software engineer.

In 2013, when he first received his results, he immediately thought that going to a polytechnic was out of the question, let alone university.

Scoring an E8 for English meant that he could not apply for any of the polytechnic courses. But when Nanyang Polytechnic granted him entry on the condition that he improve his English grade during his diploma programme in Mechatronics, he knew he had been given a chance to turn his academic fortunes around.

Upping his grade steadily by putting his shoulder to the wheel

gave him the confidence to apply for a scholarship at his university of choice, Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT), in 2018.

Today, Mr Swee, an SIT Scholar, is graduating with a Bachelor of Engineering in Systems Engineering (ElectroMechanical Systems). This four-year direct honours programme has since been renamed Bachelor of Engineering in Mechatronics Systems.

"I decided to apply for the scholarship as a way to show others that just because you didn't get the grades required to get into the schools of your choice doesn't mean you can't get ahead later in life," he shares.

"If I had given up then and believed that university wasn't meant for me, I wouldn't have put in the effort to press on. It was through hard work and perseverance that I managed to achieve results."

BEYOND ACADEMICS

Having discovered a preference for practical, hands-on lessons while at polytechnic, the 26-year-old gravitated towards SIT, which specialises in applied learning and equipping students to integrate knowledge and skills in the real world.

During his studies, he also learnt that being a scholar not only meant maintaining good grades, but also developing the skill sets required to become an effective future leader. To help him flourish in that area, he was given opportunities to attend professional development workshops, such as for communication skills, and motivational tea sessions with guest speakers.

In his third year, he spent eight months on attachment with information and communications technology firm AIT Technologies for the Integrated Work-Study Programme (IWSP), designed to prepare undergraduates for the working world.

There, Mr Swee found that he had even more to learn. "During my IWSP, I took the opportunity to practise a 'growth mindset' when I had to pick up new programming languages or develop software I was unfamiliar with. I saw it as a way to grow and acquire skills that could be important or could come in handy one day."

A PROMISING FUTURE

While his path to university was not "smooth sailing", the road ahead looks bright.

Recalling a time at poly when he and a teammate built a "social robot" called Ruth to interact with seniors living alone, Mr Swee says that was when he knew he wanted to use his interest and expertise for good.

"Back when we were developing Ruth, we were unable to make her move around the house," he says. "Now, armed with more knowledge and experience, I can enhance my designs with more autonomous features."

Later this year, Mr Swee will embark on a career with multinational information technology company NCS as a software engineer.

He adds: "With my skill sets, I hope to be able to contribute to the community and help to lighten people's loads."

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