Found job? Uni allows 'part-time switch'

UniSIM's curriculum offers full-time students flexibility to change to evening classes

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SIM University student Abdul Fareed Mustakin went on a six-month internship last year and impressed his bosses so much that he was asked to continue working, in a permanent position.

The 25-year-old decided to seize the offer after UniSIM dons told him he could work and study at the same time, because the university's flexible curriculum allows students to switch to evening classes.

The marketing degree student, who now works as a business development associate in ServisHero, a platform that connects cleaners, electricians, handymen and other household service providers to customers, felt the job was too good an opportunity to pass up.

He said: "I picked up a lot of skills, especially people skills, and gained a lot of confidence. And when my boss offered me a permanent position, I felt it was a good opportunity to continue learning."

UniSIM president Cheong Hee Kiat said the university is able to allow this flexibility as it runs part-time degree courses for working adults in parallel with its full-time degree courses.

"If a student gets a lucrative job offer or a job that he is really interested in midway through his course, then we are able to allow him to switch to evening classes."

He said UniSIM was also looking at awarding credits to knowledge and skills gained at work.

"If a student takes up a course while working, then we are looking at whether we can evaluate the course and grant him credits which will count towards his degree.

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"Alternatively, if the student takes on a work project, the university will see if it can be converted into his final-year project."

The university has made internship a requirement for its full-time degree students, and close to 200 of them, from the accountancy, finance and marketing courses, have gone on six-month internships.

Students must also complete a project based on a work-related issue in their final year.

Professor Cheong said: "We must not think of university education as being separate from work, but try and combine it as much as possible.

Work attachments enable students to apply what they have learnt in the classroom and see the relevance of it."

He added that alternating semesters of work and study is good preparation for the future. "Increasingly, workers will have to alternate between periods of work and study."

Employers welcomed the longer internships.

Mr Daniel Thong, the country manager of ServisHero, said the six-month period enabled him to try Mr Abdul Fareed in different roles. "The usual two, three months' internships are too short.

Six months is a good amount of time for firms to assess students' strengths and see how they can use them well," he said.

Another student, Mr Joseph Yap, 25, took up a part-time job with business solutions company Getz Group, which he interned with.

"I felt that continuing to work will be useful as it will expose me to other aspects of the business and I will pick up valuable skills," said the third-year marketing student, who helps clients with their website development and installation.

UniSIM, set to be Singapore's sixth autonomous university, will add two new full-time degree programmes in early childhood education and business analytics, and raise its intake to 580 this year.

The unique feature of the early childhood education course is the extensive field requirement for students, amounting to a whole year.

Students will have to do a six-month attachment at a kindergarten or childcare centre, and for the other stints, they can be attached to places that offer children's programmes, such as museums, children's theatre groups and zoos.

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