THE BEAUTY OF DREAMS

Highlights

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Dreams, Reality and the Sweet Spot

I recently came across a very interesting and enlightening article in the Insight section of the August 3, 2013 Straits Times1 that featured one of UniSIM’s Business students, Ms Chew Wan Yi. According to Wan Yi: “a degree is a bonus for her, and the value is in the skills she will pick up through it.”

I admire her philosophy and to me that is a teachable moment. The pursuit of her goal is practical where dreams and reality become one as the finishing line becomes clearer in the distance. A broader range of opportunities or pathways will be available to her as a result of the skills and knowledge obtained, and more importantly, as her passion to be a competent adult learner continues to drive her.

It was reported in that same article that Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong had told polytechnic students that by working for a few years or starting a business, one “will gain experience and understand (oneself) better, and then be better able to decide what the next step will be”. Our UniSIM President, Professor Cheong Hee Kiat, who sat on a government committee tasked to examine how the university sector could better provide opportunities for Singaporeans to obtain a university education, said in the same article that UniSIM students with some work experience tend to be “more mature, more motivated and hungry” and have a clearer idea of what they want.

These go to show the very important role UniSIM plays in supporting Singapore’s economic growth by providing skills and knowledge upgrading pathways for adult learners.

On the other hand, according to the results of a survey by the Straits Times and Degree Census Consultancy reported in the main story of this article, 6 in 10 respondents said that a degree is not necessary to get a good job. And Mr Heng Swee Keat, Education Minister, commented some time back that “there is a deep belief in Asian society that we need paper qualifications in order to do well in life. We need to get away from that notion. Instead, students should think about what they are passionate about, and work towards that goal.”

Perhaps the paper chase may be unnecessary for some but with a globalised world without borders already at our doorsteps, the challenges become even more difficult for some and an educational qualification pursued based on what one is passionate about, could give the individual that leg up.

That is the summum bonum of our potential adult learners; that dreams can become reality with passion. Herein lies that sweet spot.

1 “Spouses not hung up about paper chase” by Andrea Goh and Goh Chui Lian (Straits Times, 3 August 2013)
2 (Education Minister encourages students to pursue a goal they are passionate about by Lim Tian Chian (Straits Times, 24 September 2011)

Gregory Athastara Francis | Editor (Alumni Volunteer) | Newsletter Editorial Group

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Alumni Bowling Competition 2013

By Melinda Kaur

Wrapping up the month of August, on the 31st August, the Alumni and their friends gather together at Toa Payoh SAFRA Bowling Alley for a friendly bowling competition. A total of 41 players enthusiastically attended the Bowling Event and many came well prepared and confidently with their personal bowling balls and wrist guards. Grouped in teams of 2 players, there were 9 competing and 2 Fun play teams.

Filling their bellies with the spread of buffet breakfast, the teams were all ready to bowl off with a trial session for the first game. With full of gusto, the players continuously bowl down with bowling balls down the alley. The trial kicked off well, and players were all geared up for the actual 3 games.

The competitors were competing for the Top 3 prizes, $300, $200 and $100 based on the highest scores team and also the top female and male bowlers respectively.

Amazing throws awed the crowd when Mr Peter Chua (Guest of Alumnus Mr Goh Chee Boon) strike almost 7 times in a row within one game!

The friendly competition ended by mid day with a sense of personal achievement felt by each participant.

Top male bowler, Mr Goh Chee Boon, BSc Technology with Electronics, Class of 2007 said “It’s all about timing, focus, how you release the ball and your body posture.” Mr Goh has been playing almost every week for the past 20 years since he was in the bowling league during his younger days in school. Congratulations Chee Boon!
As part of Our Singapore Conversation—a government initiative to engage the public in shaping Singapore, the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) invited members of the public to share their views on Continuing Education and Training (CET).

In response, some 50 people from all walks of life gathered in the afternoon of June 8, ready to engage in issues that mattered most to them. Chapstered by facilitators from the Ministry, participants were split into groups to discuss the notion of lifelong learning.

To many, the acquisition of knowledge creates boundless opportunities, from both their personal and career perspectives. They believe that by sharpening individuals' capabilities, one can be positioned at a notch above their peers and remain competitive in their respective industries.

One of the key concerns raised at the session was employers' attitudes towards learning. Many acknowledged that they can pick up knowledge and skills that are useful to their work by attending training courses, which are unfortunately, at times disruptive to the company's operations. As a result, the management team takes a conservative approach towards CET. Thus, everyone hoped that the MOM could help address this matter.

Participants would also like to see more avenues in the following areas: career guidance for students and National Servicemen, creation of more opportunities for the ageing population, definition of career paths from courses, course governance, and enhancement of the current learning subsidy plans.

Rounding up the afternoon, a representative from each group presented a summary of their views to all attendees. Mr Tan Chuan-Jin, Acting Minister for Manpower, who graced the session, gave his comments following the presentations.

He shared that the MOM is working closely with the Ministry of Education to build a robust training framework. This is because the government wants to ensure that an individual's learning journey continues to be fulfilling while enabling one to make meaningful contributions as an individual progresses from the classroom to the workplace.

Minister Tan opined that the curricular development of CET depends on the economy and that a shift in the industrial landscape will re-shape the learning model. He encouraged everyone to keep learning, be innovative and impart skills to benefit the workforce and society.

Addressing the varied public expectations on government aid, Minister Tan pointed out that there are many assistance plans available already. Yet, the government is still looking into additional areas, which will need to be reviewed carefully. He also explained why learning is every individual's responsibility and assistance has to be measured—necessary move to give everyone equal opportunity in learning and success.

Minister Tan ended the session by thanking everyone for their contributions and added that the MOM will work closely with the general public and industry to ensure that its initiatives stay relevant and beneficial to everyone.

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"The Constant Gardener"—
Levelling the Playing Field
Our Singapore Conversation session on “Giving Singaporeans Fair Consideration for Jobs”.

By Gregory Athastaraj Francis

I suppose the saying “Sowing the best for last” would be apt in describing the concluding session of MOM's Singapore Conversation series. It was a vocal and no-holds-barred dialogue as participants ploughed through the job landscape to dig up anecdotals of seemingly unfair employer practices as examples in the debate of providing Singaporeans with fair consideration for jobs.

Participants from various backgrounds and different industries shared their perspectives on employment practices that reflected Clint Eastwood's "the good, the bad and the ugly" and saw "guns blazing" as the debate progressed.

Issues raised included the need for fair consideration by employers when job opportunities arose for Singaporeans, or Singaporeans being overlooked for promotion. Managers preferring to hire candidates of the same nationality, or Singaporeans losing out to foreign talents who are willing to work longer hours and for lower wages were also shared.

On the other hand, some supported the need for foreign talent as more companies were setting up their headquarters in Singapore, which is a boost for the economy and where the transfer of skills is an important aspect of such investments.

A sharing session which summed up the responses from the various groups provided an overview of the Conversation. Mr Tan Chuan-Jin, Acting Minister for Manpower then addressed the participants where he shared his views on the challenges facing the government in this area of national concern. The balance to allow foreigners to complement the local workforce and the assurance that Singaporeans are given fair job opportunities needs to be carefully reviewed and nurtured like a garden where flowers, plants and trees can grow and thrive harmoniously in a cosmopolitan landscape.
**Dialogue and Dreams**

Dear Alumni,

In this issue, I would like to talk about UniSIM's D & D for 2013. No, it's not the annual Dinner and Dance but two important aspects of happenings in this quarter: dialogue and dreams.

Our students and alumni were invited to dialogue sessions for Phase 2 of the national Our Singapore Conversation. Two of our alumni were specially invited to two of these sessions on issues that are close to the hearts of UniSIM students and alumni, i.e., Helion education and job opportunities. Do read their reports in this issue.

On Aug 29, Education Minister Heng Swee Keat also visited UniSIM for an update on the University's progress and future development. During his dialogue with students and alumni, Minister Heng was especially keen to hear the participants' views on their experience of juggling a part-time degree education with work and family commitments; the usefulness of pursuing a degree after having gained some work experience, as opposed to pre-employment training; some key concerns and needs of working adults when pursuing a part-time degree; and the impact of a UniSIM degree on career advancement. This open sharing gave participants a chance to express their views and concerns and all found the time spent, fruitful and interesting.

Another highlight in recent months relate to dreams or more specifically, the realisation of dreams. UniSIM continued with plans to offer full-time university places, a move that will help many realise their dream of further education. We are also busy with convocation preparations for October to celebrate the success of a fresh cohort of graduates and look forward to welcoming them to our alumni community.

Several alumni also attended a talk by Mr Ron Sim, founder and Chief Executive Officer of OSIM who took time from his busy schedule to share his entrepreneurship journey and how he realised his dream. One of our alumni, Ms Tinah Lee, made it to the Miss Singapore Universe pageant finals, realising her dream of building confidence and being in the glamour spotlight. I am certain that there are many more "dream chasers" among our alumni.

Regardless of your involvement in these events, I hope that each alumni will in your own sphere and circle of influence continue to have impactful dialogues with those you interact with and pursue your dreams with passion. A university education goes beyond increasing one’s competency in a specific discipline. More importantly, it’s the training of the mind for more critical thinking and expression.

I urge all alumni to partner UniSIM, through impactful dialogues and pursuance of your dreams, to bring the University to greater heights!

Best wishes,

**Evelyn Chong**

Director, Office of Student and Alumni Relations

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**Minister for Education Heng Swee Keat Visits UniSIM**

On Aug 29, the Minister for Education Mr Heng Swee Keat visited UniSIM to learn more about the University. Accompanying the Minister were Ms Indranee Rajah, Senior Minister of State, Ministry of Law and Ministry of Education; Ms Chan Lai Fong, Permanent Secretary (Education); and Mr Neo Kian Hong, Permanent Secretary (Education Development).

At a boardroom presentation and discussion, they were given an overview of UniSIM's programmes, including the e-Learning support available to students, as well as UniSIM's future plans. The MOE delegation had the opportunity to exchange ideas with Prof Cham Tao Soon, Chancellor and Chairman of UniSIM; Prof Cheong Hee Kiat, President of UniSIM; and other senior management members.

The MOE delegation also interacted with UniSIM students through a project presentation and a class observation. Mr Heng and Ms Rajah then proceeded to a dialogue session with students and alumni, which was moderated by Prof Tsui Kai Chong, Provost of UniSIM. The engaging dialogue threw up many thought-provoking views, allowing the delegation a good appreciation of the participants and for the participants to better understand the issues we face as a nation.
Grab anyone on the street and ask them, "What determines who wins a beauty pageant?" and you are likely to get "A pretty face" as the answer. To determine if looks really determines the winner, the Newsletter Editorial Group (NEG) turns to Miss Universe Singapore 2013 finalist and UniSIM alumnus, Ms Tinah Lee, for her opinion!

Ever cheerful Tinah completed her Bachelor of Business degree last year amidst a concurrent commitment of school work, modelling assignments and work. According to Tinah, the key to what is involved in beauty pageants are Confidence, Resilience and Attitude.

Tinah has often been teased about her lack of poise since young. In 2007, an acquaintance encouraged her to participate in a local pageant and she emerged as the winner. With the newly-gained confidence, Tinah took part in The New Paper New Face competition the following year. She said: "I was judged along with close to 400 other contestants in an 'open-door' audition." Tinah added: "There were 100 contestants left at the next round, and then 50 at the following round. The final 20 contestants were selected after an intensive photoshoot session on that same day. Witnessing fellow contestants getting eliminated with each passing round was daunting and it took a hard hit on our confidence. All of us could hardly concentrate because there was fear within us that the next contestant to be eliminated could well be ourselves!"

Adding to Tinah's anxiety was the extensive media coverage on the competition. One can imagine the amount of confidence one must have to face the judging panel and the media time and again without losing composure.

As a working polytechnic graduate, it is no surprise for someone like Tinah to pursue a part-time degree at UniSIM. Steadfast and pragmatic in character, Tinah explained: "In today's fast-paced society, working experience is as important as academic qualifications. As I did not wish to give up my banking job, I figured that UniSIM was an appropriate platform to further my studies. What attracted me to UniSIM was its unique academic system in providing a holistic tertiary education for working adults and this is something that not many institutions can offer."

Her testament of UniSIM as a university for adults came true when she successfully juggled her career as a Business Relationship Manager and school work. Tinah is quick to also credit her parents for her academic success. She beamed: "My parents were very supportive and they actually the ones who encouraged me to study in UniSIM!"

The tumultuous experience of working and studying at the same time became the foundation stone to Tinah's resilience at the Miss Chinese Cosmos 2012 pageant, which she participated in right after her graduation from UniSIM. Tinah said: "In the course of two-and-a-half-weeks in Kuala Lumpur (where the pageant was held), we went through an intensive regime of modelling, etiquette and grooming courses. We only managed to catch a couple of hours of sleep each night and we had to travel to different towns to attend different events. The schedule was hectic." She added: "Discipline and punctuality were constantly emphasised and our meals were closely supervised. Our diets consisted mainly of vegetables and we were not allowed to have any sugar. By the time the pageant actually began, all 20 of us had shed several kilos! Throughout the training, many of us felt like giving up and going home." But she persisted, saying: "It is the resilience that made me decide to continue to 'rough it out', and the Miss Chinese Cosmos pageant offered me an experience that local pageants were not able to match."

Having taken part in other pageants does not mean a walk in the park for participation in the Miss Universe Singapore pageant. As Tinah puts it: "Although appearance, height and etiquette are standard criteria in the selection of participants, the focus on attitude and people relations have become increasingly important after one clears the elimination rounds." She advised: "Beauty pageants look beyond the surface. One needs to be very clear on why she is joining the pageant. Once the goal has been established, she needs to remain focused." Tinah cautioned: "The Miss Universe Singapore pageant is a very high profile event and one must be able to accept unkind remarks or criticisms. Having a mentally and emotionally strong character is a must! Whilst the catwalks, turns, poses and speech can be perfected with practice, people relations are equally important."

On retiring from the catwalks and runways, Tinah explained: "I am nearing the maximum age eligibility. So there will be no more pageants for me. "She added: "I have witnessed my own transformation from the first pageant that I participated in. Contrary to the general belief that participants or models in the pageant circles are superficial in their thinking, I would say that the contests have shaped me positively. The need to excel at every pageant has made me more confident and resilient as a person. Knowing that there are people who are better than me have made me realised the importance of embracing my shortcomings. I have benefited from the pageants and I hope that others will also experience them in the same way as I had."

While the runway is no longer the centre of Tinah's life, she has kept herself busy with the demands of her job, which she candidly admits is "hard work and competitive." But I am satisfied at my current organisation. My core values - Confidence, Resilience and Attitude - have kept me going," says Tinah.
On July 6 afternoon, UniSIM had the honour of Mr Ron Sim, founder and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of OSIM International Ltd’s presence to share his entrepreneurial expertise and the journey to establishing his business empire.

Ron began by asking the audience of 47 eager alumni and students what they wanted to know. Encapsulating his 35 years of global business experience into a one-and-half-hour talk, he aimed to benefit the audience as much as he could.

Ron then briefly introduced himself sharing that he started as a trader, buying and selling with cash before spring boarding to buying factories. As a trader, he felt marginalised by fierce competitions. He decided to become a “builder” thinking of the brand, concept, product line and services required to build his niche. Purchasing in volume helped to create value for his merchandise and demand.

Forging ahead, he focused on his strategy to create new products every three months, giving him an edge over his competitors. As the leader of the pack, OSIM became the clear winner in business conquests. When Ron shared his goals, he stressed that one’s highest objective is being able to meet his targets.

Although success was always exhilarating, there would also be downtime including unforeseen circumstances such as recessions. During his first encounter with recession in 1985, he learnt two important lessons, i.e., Singapore’s market was too small and its tiny population was not significant enough to generate the volume of sales. Ron decided that he had to expand his business globally.

As the leader of a company, Ron could not run away from his failures. He believes that he must face up to the challenges, bite the bullet and adopt a “come what may” attitude to ride the storms. “In failure, one may feel stupid, but must not act stupid,” he added.

Ron felt that one of the greatest aids to managing his business well was his human touch. According to him, the principle behind it was to “harvest and harness” the strong points of his staff. He looks for characteristics, capabilities and competencies. To him, “business is about how we lead the people, not about hiring good workers.” He believes that leaders can change workers in constructive ways and that a diverse pool of staff is required.

According to him, there are no right or wrong people, as everyone has their own potentials and skills.

Moving on, he explained the use of the acronym “MACDOWL” and why he welcomes it at OSIM. He explained that MACD was for “Mindset, Attitude, Drive”. He said that a CEO’s mind does not stop thinking about building up his business. He must have a goal-oriented attitude and have the drive to persist to reach his ultimate vision. “OWL” refers to Courage to take a position, face failures and even humiliation, Openness to adapt, and Willingness to like what was not likeable.

He also shared another important lesson that is to be non-relentless on banks where having cash at hand is just as important as cash is king. In closing, Ron reminded all not to complain or give in to any crises, downturns, tipping points and re-shuffling as they would come anyway.

Ms Sandra Au, Class of 2003, BSc Computer Science programme, who was attending her first alumni event, shared that she came hoping to obtain practical tips and was glad that Ron’s talk was about “proven experiences and not just theories from the book”.

Mr Reyes Leow, a final year student from the BSc Business programme said that he has learnt from Ron’s sharing on how he built his business and overcame challenges.

From these comments, it is evident that the audience had benefited from Ron’s experience and about his “MACDOWL ranch” at OSIM.

Ms Josephine Oei, an alumnae volunteer with the Events Group, was accorded due recognition for her dedication in reaching out to the youths in Anglo-Chinese School (Independent) [ACS (Independent)] as the school matron. On December 2013, Josephine was honoured and overwhelmed when the principal of ACS (Independent) read out her citation for the Outstanding Contribution Award for staff, making special mention of her studies at UniSIM.

Josephine, who decided to enter nursing school instead of the university, held on to her dream of being a degree graduate and took up UniSIM’s offer of that opportunity when she was selected to be among the inaugural batch of Bachelor in Counselling programme students. Josephine shared that this programme equipped her with the confidence and competencies on how to engage adolescents in her daily work.

She has now set another goal for herself and that is to complete a full marathon before she reaches 50 years old. Josephine quipped: “I believe that if one has the will to achieve one’s goals, there is always a way to do it and this ACS (Independent) family member also believes that “the best is yet to be.”
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CONTEST GIVEAWAYS!

We are giving away an exclusive UniSIM bag to 10 lucky winners. Simply SMS the answers to the two questions below to 9113 6795 in the following format:

Newsletter<space>IC number<space>Email address <space>Answers for Q1 and Q2

Example: Newsletter S1234567X alumni@unisim.edu.sg Answers for Q1 and Q2

QUESTIONS

Q1 List the two topics discussed at the two “Our Singapore Conversation” sessions.
Q2 Name two upcoming alumni events.

Closing Date: October 15, 2013

Congratulations to the Contest Winners of Issue 22!

WONG CHEW YEN SXXXX479G
FOO T’SIAng CHYE ALSON SXXXX013Z
FOO YU REN SXXXX822B
PONNANA CYNTHIA SXXXX689H
WEE KIM HUAT LEONARD SXXXX717C
CHIANG HOCK HAI SXXXX439Z
FREDERIC TAN CHEE BENG (CHEN ZHIMING) SXXXX002J
TAN KIA HENG SXXXX950J
ONG JIANI SXXXX726C
RAIHANAH BINTE ABDUL SAMAD SXXXX310E

For advertising enquiries, call 6248 9215 or email alumni@unisim.edu.sg
Graduates’ Night 2013

Date: October 26, 2013
Venue: Club Avatar, Marina Mandarin Hotel
Time: 7:00pm to 10:30pm
Fee: $28 per ticket / $100 for four tickets*
*Prices are inclusive of 7% GST. Each alumnus can register for a maximum of four pax.
Registration: www.unisim.edu.sg/alumniportal

Halloween at Universal Studio Singapore

Date: October 19, 2013
Venue: Universal Studios Singapore, Resorts World Sentosa
Time: 7:00pm to 1:00am (ticket collection at 6:00pm, Sentosa Express Waterfront Train Station)
Fee: $30.00 per Alumnus / $54.00 per Guest* (Public Price: $68)
*Prices are inclusive of 7% GST. Each alumnus can register for a maximum of two pax.
Registration: www.unisim.edu.sg/alumniportal

Sentosa Spooktacular

Date: October 19, 2013
Venue: Fort Siloso, Sentosa
Time: 7:00pm to 11:00pm (ticket collection at 6:00pm, Sentosa Express Beach Train Station)
Fee: $20.00 per Alumnus / $46.00 per Guest* (Public Price: $66.60)
*Prices are inclusive of 7% GST. Each alumnus can register for a maximum of two pax.
Registration: www.unisim.edu.sg/alumniportal

Mummy: Secrets of the Tomb

Date: October 19, 2013
Venue: ArtScience Museum, Marina Bay Sands
Time: 10:00am to 10:00pm (ticket collection at 9:30am, entrance of the ArtScience Museum)
Fee: $58 per Alumnus / $111 per Guest* (Public Price: $115)
*Prices are inclusive of 7% GST. Each alumnus can register for a maximum of two pax.
Registration: www.unisim.edu.sg/alumniportal

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