

Top poly students gave JCs a miss

Specialised courses and hands-on approach among attractions cited

BY AMELIA TAN

MR THOMAS Lim's O-level score of seven points for six subjects landed him in a top junior college (JC), but his heart was set on going to a polytechnic.

One and a half months into his theatre studies and drama programme at Victoria Junior College (VJC) three years ago, he switched to Singapore Polytechnic (SP) to study applied drama and psychology.

Mr Lim, 20, will be graduating in two weeks as the top student in his class of

about 40 students.

He is among several of this year's class acts at the five polytechnics who chose not to enrol at JCs.

They told The Straits Times that they were won over by the polytechnics' specialised courses, hands-on nature of education and opportunities outside the classroom to explore their interests at a deeper level.

They did not feel that a polytechnic diploma would put them at a disadvantage in getting a place at the local universities, which are opening up more places for polytechnic graduates.

It was reported that 7,000, or 33 per cent, of the O-level students who qualified for a place in the JCs last year took the three-year polytechnic route instead.

Six years ago, 29 per cent of JC-eligible

students chose the polytechnic path.

Mr Lim, who attended Catholic High School, said he went to SP because he wanted to learn how to use drama as a platform to reach out to the community and address issues.

This is not a focus of the theatre studies and drama programme at VJC which concentrates on teaching drama as an art form.

"I've grown more mature from being able to put myself in the shoes of the characters that I take on and learnt how to understand different points of view. And I would like other young people to gain from drama too by holding classes and workshops," said Mr Lim, who hopes to pursue drama at the University of Manchester.

Ms Aemilia Widodo, 21, did not apply to JCs as they did not offer digital animation courses. The former Crescent Girls' School student said: "I was certain that I wanted to pursue a career in digital animation and felt that Nanyang Polytechnic would help me to achieve that goal."

She is Nanyang Polytechnic's top digital media design (animation) diploma student.

Ms Widodo, who is from Indonesia, became a Singapore citizen recently and hopes to study digital animation in the United States.

The top students said the three years spent in a polytechnic also gave them leeway to explore other interests.

Ms Lim Hui Yin, 21, who is SP's top aerospace electronics student, did an internship in China, went for overseas community-service trips and practised wushu and kickboxing.

"There are only two years in JC and I think I would have been mugging most of the time," said Ms Lim, a former Presbyterian High student who is aiming to take electrical and electronic engineering at the Nanyang Technological University.

Mr Thng Kai Yuan, 19, who is SP's top aeronautical engineering student, found time to tutor juniors at his alma mater Gan Eng Seng School, attend leadership camps and go overseas for an internship and a community service trip.



(From left) Mr Thomas Lim, 20, Mr Thng Kai Yuan, 19, Mr Li Yan, 22, and Ms Lim Hui Yin, 21, are among the top students at Singapore Polytechnic this year. They chose to go to the polytechnic after their O levels instead of a junior college. PHOTO: SINGAPORE POLYTECHNIC

"Balancing my studies and other activities did not feel like hard work because I enjoyed what I was doing," said Mr Thng, who hopes to study engineering in Britain on a scholarship.

Other top students said they found their calling at the polytechnics.

SP's top information technology student Li Yan, 22, scored a lacklustre 18 points for his O levels but managed a straight-A record in polytechnic.

"My grades improved tremendously in

poly. I realised it was because I was doing computer programming which I enjoy," said Mr Li, an alumnus of River Valley High School who will be studying information systems at the National University of Singapore.

Yesterday, Republic Polytechnic held its first of several graduation ceremonies. The rest of the polytechnics will do so over the next few weeks.

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