More varsity students heading overseas for internships

Those with overseas experience ‘stand out naturally’ during interviews: PR agency exec

Gracia Lee

While many of his peers remained in Singapore for their internships, Mr Tan Rui Feng, 24, packed his bags and left for Uganda.

The third-year business and social science student from Singapore Management University (SMU) had spotted a sales and marketing internship opening there on his school’s career portal, and decided to give it a shot. He spent 10 weeks from May last year at a consumer goods firm, where he learnt its manufacturing processes and how to tackle issues faced by its retailers and sales partners.

Like Mr Tan, more students from local universities are venturing beyond Singapore for their internship stint. This includes his university, which has sent about 150 to 250 SMU students going overseas each year in the last five years.

In the past three academic years, the National University of Singapore (NUS) saw an average year-on-year increase of about 22 per cent in the number of overseas internships completed.

Last academic year – between August 2016 and July 2017 – NUS students completed close to 490 internships in over 40 countries, said the university’s senior vice-provost for undergraduate education, Professor Bernard Tan.

Overseas stints provide students with the chance to develop a global perspective and mindset, while at the same time increase their confidence in interacting with people from diverse cultures and nationalities, he added.

Nanyang Technological University (NTU) also saw a 13 per cent increase last academic year in students heading overseas for internships, compared with four years ago. In the last three academic years, an average of 165 students went abroad annually for internships and work attachments that count towards their graduation, said the school’s deputy provost for education, Professor Kam Chun Hin.

At Singapore University of Technology and Design, the number of students with overseas internship experience increased by 4 per cent from last year. They visited countries including Brazil, Cambodia, Portugal, Vietnam and Sri Lanka.

While students face challenges when they go abroad, they can also develop and demonstrate qualities like resilience, independence and risk-taking – qualities desired by many employers, said Mr Sim Cher Young, director of SMU’s Dato’ Kho Hui Meng Career Centre.