Of Satellite Dishes, Green Energy Sources and Lions

A CN Yang Scholar discusses the finer points of thriving under pressure.

BY JEREMY KIU  PHOTO: ADAM YEOH

For 22-year-old CN Yang Scholar Jeremy Kiu of NTU’s School of Chemical & Biomedical Engineering (SCBE), dealing with multiple responsibilities is simply part of a complete academic experience.

When asked what he was working on as an Associate Engineer with ST Electronics, the company he joined after completing his National Service, the 22-year-old CN Yang Scholar Jeremy Kiu stated: “I was working on satellite dishes.”

And to answer the question above, to complete my education as an engineer, I provide me with the technical knowledge and I felt that studying at SCBE would help me to assimilate back into academic life. The job gave me a clear picture of the structure of an engineering company, hence, when I was looking for a topic for my research project, I was immediately attracted to the subject of photocatalytic water-splitting techniques, which put me under the tutelage of Asst Prof Xu Rong of SCBE.

Upon coming to NTU, I had mixed emotions – happy that I was back in school, but feeling lost at having to hit the books again after so long. Then I was accepted into the CN Yang Scholars Programme, and I soon found that what it offered was a competitive environment to kick-start my university education. My fellow participants were highly-motivated and had excellent academic results, and the programme programme allows us to gain research experience right at the start of our freshman year. Over the past three semesters, I have made many friends amongst the programme participants, and they were the ones who helped me to assimilate back into academic life.

The highlight of the programme for me was the research module that we had to do in our second semester. I have a special interest in clean energy sources. Hence, when I was looking for a topic for my research project, I was immediately attracted to the subject of photocatalytic water-splitting techniques, which put me under the tutelage of Asst Prof Xu Rong of SCBE.

Doing research requires a lot of patience. You can plan what you want to achieve from day one to day 10, but sometimes you end up having to start from scratch when something goes wrong on day nine. It takes perseverance to get even the least result. The commitment required of us was enormous, but I learnt a lot through the project and am glad to have been given the opportunity to conduct independent scientific research.

In October, we had the chance to display the fruits of our labour to Prof CN Yang himself when he came to receive his honorary degree. Learning how to present our research results was a good experience for us, and it was an honour to meet Prof Yang, as well as interact with President S R Nathan at the convocation ceremony.

I am currently the Chairperson of the Dragon and Lion Dance Troupe of the NTU Cultural Activities Club, and right now, we are all hard at work on our major event for March 2009, the 5th NTU Institutional Lion Dance Competition. Some undergraduates find that taking part in extra-curricular activities is unnecessary. I beg to differ. Books and lectures can only teach us so much, other skills such as interpersonal communication, conflict management and planning require practice in real life. For many of us, the university represents the last training ground before we start work. That’s why we should take this chance to train ourselves to handle increasingly difficult demands.

As my third semester in university comes to an end, I will be completing the programme curriculum. How time flies; I believe I speak for most of the programme participants when I say that the current semester is the most difficult ever, only to find the next semester even worse. But then, isn’t that what real life is like, and that as we get older, there will be more difficult decisions to make, and greater responsibilities for us to shoulder?

The answer is what I was working on as an Associate Engineer with ST Electronics, the company I joined after completing my National Service.

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