Picking up practical skills

Industrial attachment is a crucial component of the Graduate Diploma in Systems Analysis programme offered by the Institute of Systems Science.

Mike Lee

All A specialist training institute of the National University of Singapore, the Institute of Systems Science (ISS) has been actively providing industrial attachment opportunities for its students over the past 30 years from its Graduate Diploma in Systems Analysis programme.

While designed primarily for non-IT graduates to craft a career in IT, many IT graduates have also benefited from the programme by honing and developing their skills, notes ISS deputy director Dr Ang Lian Foo.

The continually evolving programme offers the option to focus on mobile programming and web application development - areas in strong demand by Singapore companies.

The curriculum is practitioner-oriented, whose lectures are augmented by workshops, laboratory sessions, and industry projects. ISS provides students with the technical and professional grounding for the 20-week industrial attachment (60% of the time), the rest of their 13-month full-time programme.

Dr Lian Foo says: “The link is a very important part of the programme and in the students need to quicken what they acquired during their time with companies' working environment, pick up new technical skills and domain knowledge, improve problem-solving skills, and most of all, develop and deliver the solution to the satisfaction of their clients.”

Strong industrial support

CIMB Information Services Asia Pacific has supported the internship programme since 2007 and is rated one of the best companies by interns. In 2009, a project team attached to the company won the Accenture Prize for the best internship project.

Dr Lian Foo says: “We also receive support from the Institute of Industrial Training and the National University of Singapore’s School for Social Sciences and Organization Development, and the programme is managed based on the number of students to ensure that students are adequately covered over the initial period.”

Interns, who are effectively also “academic ambassadors” for the company, receive the same rights and opportunities in employment, notes Dr Lian Foo.

The contact that interns have with the semiconductor industry, considered the “industry of industries,” will prepare them to be tomorrow’s leaders and enable them to be accepted at the company, notes Dr Lian Foo.

The programme offers an internship in a diverse and dynamic environment where the organisation’s IT infrastructure continues to grow, with more than 20 countries in Singapore, he notes.

“IT skills are high, from IT management to system design and development, and require a high level of knowledge and experience,” notes Dr Lian Foo.

Gaining valuable experience

Mr Zhou Yuan (below), a computer science student at the National University of Singapore, is currently involved in designing a mobile application for OCBC Bank, when she designs mobile applications.

Before taking up the programme, she worked for a year as a mobile application developer in an international trade e-commerce company. The 20-year-old graduated from the University of Singapore.

“The past three months with the OCBC Tech team have been an enriching and valuable experience for me,” she says. “There is always something new to learn which is a big plus, and no lack of things to do so I have a chance to learn and apply my knowledge.”

She adds: “My supervisor and colleagues are appreciative and always ready to guide me. Their willingness to involve me in their projects has given me a chance to learn more. I am grateful for the opportunity and the feedback on projects. It also helps that the bank takes an interest in their career planning, says Mr Zhou. Besides the OCBC Tech team, she shared work experiences with the intern.

“Now, I am more attuned to my interests and strengths,” she says. “This is important to me as I am giving the gesture clarity on the career paths I wish to pursue in the future.”

CIMB Information Services Asia Pacific’s head of framework, Mr Mohd Faiz, says: “This is a quick learner and finished her tasks at hand quickly. Young and creative, she brings a fresh perspective to our business.”

One of the key skills in the design was to understand the customer’s needs and, we have decided to make it a mobile user interface which will be adopted going forward,” says Mr Zhou, who will graduate in September. The programme has helped me to realize my career goals and I am more focussed on the professional path.

“As for the internship, it offers a valuable opportunity to gain hands-on experience. It also helps me to understand my strengths and weaknesses which can better direct me to take.”