

# What to consider when choosing a university

As part of a three-week askST series on university education, The Straits Times addresses questions on how to choose the right university



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My son has offers from three universities, including my alma mater, Nanyang Technological University (NTU), where I received a solid undergraduate education. But it has been more than two decades since I was there. What can I tell him about the standing of the university now and the benefits of studying there? Besides the academics, what other opportunities should he be looking at in considering a university to attend?

NTU, as a world-class research and teaching university, has a lot to offer.

Let's start with its standing and reputation worldwide, which has grown by leaps and bounds in the last decade. NTU is one of the world's leading universities, based on the QS World University Rankings and other independent global indices, including those by Times Higher Education and the US News and World Report, all of which include NTU in the top 40.

It is especially useful to look at subject rankings. You will notice that NTU features regularly in the top 10 in various global subject rankings. This includes the fields of artificial intelligence, engineering, materials science, and communication and media studies.

I would suggest that you visit the NTU campus with your son and talk to the students there. Its smart campus is impressive and a testament to the transformative experience that students have had there.

It is called a smart campus because it is a living test bed for some of the latest technologies, including self-driving electric buses and food delivery robots.

I have been advising students on the importance of interdisciplinary learning, and NTU has embarked on it in a big way. It introduced the Interdisciplinary Collaborative Core (ICC) in August 2021 that makes it a requirement for students to take seven courses from the core curriculum.

Students from different disciplines are put together in small groups to discuss and present their views on different topics, which range from social media regulation to sustainability. This creates an environment



As part of the interdisciplinary core courses, students from different disciplines are grouped together to discuss topics such as climate change. PHOTO: NTU

where students continuously interact with peers outside their discipline and develop social networks that eventually become their source of intellectual inspiration and creativity.

Students are also encouraged to deepen their knowledge beyond their chosen majors through electives, minors and second majors in areas from entrepreneurship and environmental sustainability to data analytics and economics.

NTU has also increased its interdisciplinary degree offerings, such as the Data Science and Artificial Intelligence (AI) degree programme, which has been listed among the top 10 AI and data science undergraduate courses globally by Forbes.

Professor Ling San, NTU's acting president and provost, said the aim is to train students to tackle real-world issues and solve complex problems that go beyond the boundaries of a single discipline.

He said: "They not only pick up transferable skills such as critical thinking and communication, but also discover the value of integrating insights from different disciplines - skills that are critical in today's workplace."

"For instance, an engineering student learns to go beyond figuring how a product works to consider its implications and unintended consequences on society."

As I have always said, a good university experience cannot merely be defined by the academics. NTU students are encouraged to participate in various activities to challenge themselves and put their ideas to the test.

For instance, students from various disciplines come together every year to design an energy-efficient car that will race at the annual Shell Eco-Marathon. At the 2022 event held in Indonesia, NTU's hydrogen fuel car Nanyang Venture 12 won two coveted awards.

Students are encouraged to make the most of internships, which have been mandatory since August 2021.

With NTU's strong ties with industry, students also get the

chance to work with heavyweights such as Alibaba, Rolls-Royce and Continental, and be at the forefront of innovation.

For certain degree programmes, going overseas is par for the course.

Second-year students at the Asian School of the Environment, for instance, head to Bali in Indonesia for a two-week field experience.

Journalism students get to experience the challenges of operating in different countries, from Timor-Leste to Germany, through overseas journalism electives offered by the Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information.

Ms Isabel Kua, a 22-year-old final-year student, was among 14 students who went to Berlin, Germany, as part of the Going Overseas For Advanced Reporting module in 2022.

During the two-week trip, she learnt how to be adaptable and dogged as a journalist working in a country with a different culture and language.

She produced two stories at the end of the trip, including one on Sri Lankan Tamils who have been trying to preserve their heritage while fitting into German society since fleeing civil war.

These experiences are invaluable. Students have the opportunity to immerse themselves in a different culture, forge meaningful networks and widen their perspectives. All this prepares them for careers in a global workplace.

NTU graduates continue to be a top choice for local and global employers, with healthy overall employment rates over the last five years.

In 2021, more than nine in 10 NTU new graduates were employed within six months of completing their final examinations. More than eight in 10 were in full-time permanent employment.

Let me highlight two students whose education both in the classroom and outside of it helped them land top jobs.

One is Ms Nithya Krishnan, 25, who graduated last year from NTU's flagship interdisciplinary undergraduate engineering programme called the Renaissance Engineering Programme.

During her time at NTU, she was exposed to different forms of engineering. She went to Imperial College London as part of NTU's exchange programme, and also did an internship with McLaren.

These opportunities helped her to get a job in global investment bank and financial services company Credit Suisse as a technology analyst, where she utilises her software engineer-

ing skills to fix system bugs and work on or create new banking features.

Another example of getting a great first job after completing his studies is Mr Ken Loo, 25, a business degree graduate.

He went on five internships, including one with McKinsey & Company, where he landed a full-time job as a business analyst upon graduation.

While in NTU, Mr Loo was also active in non-academic activities.

He was the captain of the touch rugby team for his hall of residence and a member of the NTU rugby team, which he says helped him develop in other ways.

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Ms Nithya Krishnan, who graduated from NTU's Renaissance Engineering Programme in 2022, went to Imperial College London as part of the university's exchange initiative. PHOTO: COURTESY OF NITHYA KRISHNAN



Mr Ken Loo, who graduated with a business degree from NTU, was active in sports. PHOTO: COURTESY OF KEN LOO



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