

# A home away from home

Ms Nguyen Thi Thu Trang found a place to call home in her pursuit of a Master of Business Administration at NUS Business School

BY BRYANT CHAN

For all the knowledge she gained and valuable lessons she learned in the course of pursuing her Master of Business Administration (MBA), Ms Nguyen Thi Thu Trang still values the relationships she forged along the way most.

Among course mates in the National University of Singapore's NUS Business School are engineers who made short work of technical problems; accountants and finance experts who were wizards with numbers and marketers with the most compelling stories.

But they weren't just engineers, accountants and marketers to her. They were people: An ex-delinquent who became a civil servant. A yoga master and healthy living promoter. A chief executive of multiple start-ups. In spite of their differences, each of them became a fast friend and a source of support.

"Getting to know these wonderful people has been one of the best parts of my MBA journey," says the 25-year-old.

Ms Nguyen credits the closeness of her cohort to the way the MBA course is structured. The MBA programmes her other friends had enrolled in placed emphasis on job hunting and kept classroom interaction to a minimum, resulting in fewer opportunities for course mates to build up connections in school.

By contrast, all full-time MBA students in NUS Business School spend 15 hours a week together in core modules — not including the time spent on collaborative projects and study sessions. As a result, Ms Nguyen and her course mates were able to forge more meaningful relationships.

This proved indispensable to her learning; working together with them on case competitions and school projects provided several valuable learning points. Ms Nguyen was also afforded the opportunity to share her own expertise, particularly from her three-year stint as deputy manager for Qatar-based retail and service conglomerate Mannai Corporation.

Even with her wealth of experience, she still found that she had much to learn from her course mates, who opened her eyes to many other possible career paths.

She had enrolled in the MBA programme last August with the intention of entering the tech sector, a market that was booming in her native Vietnam. In just three years, e-commerce and infocomm technology had muscled their way into the top three growing industries, she says, citing a study by human resources consultancy First Alliances.

But with her background limited to the areas of retail and strategy, she feared that she lacked the necessary experience to join a tech company, particularly in a sector growing as quickly as South-east Asia.

The NUS MBA soon put her mind at ease. Throughout the course, she was given the chance to attend networking sessions, alumni-sharing sessions, industry talks, speakers series, and even a digital banking project with consulting firm PricewaterhouseCoopers that gave her valuable real-world experience — which ultimately landed her in a strategy role in an artificial intelligence start-up.

"I wouldn't have dreamt of this day before joining the MBA programme, but because of it, all these opportunities presented themselves to me in less than a year," she says. "I'll be forever thankful to the NUS MBA programme for helping me build myself up to this point."

She loves the work she does now, but not a day goes by when she doesn't look forward to seeing her friends again.

"Despite being so different, we came together, supported each other when times got tough, and helped each other strive to do our best every day.

"I wouldn't have been able to know all these great things about my friends, if the NUS MBA hadn't given me the opportunity to interact with them on such a deep level."



PHOTO: TED CHEN

## MASTER OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

National University of Singapore, NUS Business School

- Full-time: 17 months
- Part-time: 24 months
- Maximum candidature: Four years full-time or six years part-time