The innovative and mesmerising infrastructure that springs up time and again is the result of the hard work of many individuals dedicated to shaping our nation’s urban landscape.

In an ever-growing country like Singapore, the built environment plays an essential role in constructing homes and buildings for us to live, work and play in.

Enter Lew Ying Tong and Chong Meng Tak, 23 and 25 respectively, who are key players in shaping the extravagant landscape of our sunny island.

A UNIQUE PATH

Ying Tong, an Assistant Contract Manager at Land Transport Authority and Meng Tak, a Project Manager at SIPM consultants Ptd Ltd are leading a fulfilling career, having amassed invaluable knowledge and skills from the BSc (PFM) (Honours) programme. Offered by the NUS Department of Building, the programme is the only one of its kind in Singapore.

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Ying Tong agrees and adds, “In this degree programme, you get to learn about sustainable building technologies, costing, contracts, risk-management,
finance, and many more. It is about how to put them together to build and manage a facility. Essentially, the curriculum encompasses a wide range of courses and fields available out there! This unique selling point definitely sparked my interest and compelled me to enrol in the programme.”

Ying Tong also reveals that her interest was further strengthened by her grandfather, who is a former subcontractor. “During my childhood, I used to accompany my grandfather on his site visits. It was really fascinating to witness a building take shape and form. Naturally, I wanted to follow in my grandfather’s footsteps!”

BUILDING YOURSELF THROUGH OPPORTUNITIES

As the BSc (PFM) (Honours) programme encourages students to explore different disciplines, Ying Tong and Meng Tak had the opportunity to be involved in numerous exciting prospects.

Meng Tak explains, “Apart from lectures and tutorials, students get to be involved in various hands-on activities, excursions and overseas exchange programmes, all of which make learning fun and interesting. We also had the opportunity to go on site visits and speak to industry experts to broaden our perspectives. Such trips were insightful and fed us with knowledge beyond the four walls of a typical classroom.”

Meng Tak adds that students of the BSc (PFM) (Honours) programme get to hone their project management skills through small- and large-scale group projects.

“A particularly memorable project I worked on was a cooking experiment for my Project Scheduling and Control module. We were required to concoct a cooking recipe, complete with specific timings and details! After which, we had to cook the meal following this recipe. Through the project, we learnt that a cooking recipe is largely similar to construction scheduling in a sense that both require detailed planning,” says Meng Tak.

Ying Tong seconds that and goes on to share about her favourite excursion trip. “I had the opportunity to visit NatSteel, one of Singapore’s leading manufacturers of steel products and solutions for the construction industry. Observing the entire process of steel production was undoubtedly an eye-opening experience!”

Both Ying Tong and Meng Tak agree that apart from mastering the hard skills, they have acquired presentation, communication and application skills through the developmental opportunities and programmes offered by the degree course.

Other than the fun-filled lessons, students of the BSc (PFM) (Honours) programme get to do internships. It was through this avenue that Ying Tong and Meng Tak were able to put their skills to practice and acquire new ones, further equipping them for the challenges in the built environment.

DEMOLISHING CHALLENGES IN THE WORKING WORLD

During the course of their studies, Ying Tong had the opportunity to intern at UGL Premas and CBM while Meng Tak was attached to Tiong Seng Contractors. Though the nine-week internship provided them with valuable industry insight, Ying Tong and Meng Tak still faced challenges as fresh graduates.

“As someone new to the working world, I had to overcome corporate jargon by being proactive, asking questions and doing research. The biggest challenge was handling feedback from disgruntled residents or clients. Dealing with people on a regular basis moulded my interpersonal skills and taught me how to maintain professionalism even in the most difficult circumstances,” reveals Meng Tak with satisfaction.

Ying Tong nods in agreement and adds, “Dealing with people can be tough, especially when there are so many parties involved in a project. We need to manage and balance the expectations of all parties hence negotiation and communication skills are very important.”

ON THE RIGHT TRACK

Graduates of the BSc (PFM) (Honours) programme can look forward to a wide range of career opportunities in project management, contract management, facilities management, event management, and cost management in the private and public sectors.

Meng Tak says, “Personally, I feel that students should enrol in the BSc (PFM) (Honours) programme if they want to try something new and dynamic. Upon graduation, students can choose to work in Singapore or venture overseas as project managers, facilities managers, and quantity surveyors, among other career paths. I even have friends who work at banks and airline companies!”

Ying Tong concludes with a smile, “Through the BSc (PFM) (Honours) programme, students will be equipped with essential skills and knowledge to become industry leaders – ones who are able to make decisions, shape policies, solve strategic and operational problems and implement best management practices in the built environment.”