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Alumni Sharing Session: Inspiring Work Experience and Covid-19 Pandemic Challenge

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(29[th]of December, 2020) --Due to Covid-19, UTM was unable to hold a face to face alumni sharing session but they found an outstanding way of holding the sharing session in Cisco Webex. The talk was comprised of newly graduated UTM former students who are currently working at a well-known place. Among them, Tan Yong Keong was a software engineering student at UTM and is currently working at Micron Semiconductor Asia as a data engineer. Mohammad Zamarul Akmal Bin Mohd Hussin is a data engineer who is working at PPG Coating (M). Batrisiya Binti Azman Shah is working as Social media Data Analyst at TM One. Finally, we were supposed to be introduced to Teo Wen Long but unfortunately, he was absent throughout the whole period. The moderator during the talk was Dr. Johanna Ahmad (Senior Lecturer of school of computing, UTM).

The talk was organized to mainly inspire the current UTM students and teach them what exactly is needed to be done to standout in the corporate life and what qualities one needs to have in order to get a good job.

All the alumni share their stories about how they were able to land a job after graduation. Tan Yong loved to participate in a lot of competitions and he also gained some achievements by participating in a lot of competitions which led him to gain some professional skills and presentation skills. In addition, he did a few freelance jobs that helped him gain some technical skills. He also got an internship at Vitrox. He got the interview through a competition so he eventually was able to gain an interview as well as achievements. Nonetheless, Tan Yong was honored with the chancellor award.

Tan Yong also describes what an employer sees in a person. He said that since we are fresh graduates, we do not have much experience, so their questions will mostly be focused on final year project, postgraduate project and also some side topics including competitions and hobbies. Mainly all the contributions we have made during our studies. There are also questions about coding because our technical skill needs to be adequate to succeed as a software engineer.

Zamarul's story of getting a job is different than Tan Yong; he has gotten a job as a permanent staff in his industrial training company. He exposed himself by constantly sharing valuable ideas and opinions. In the current company he works for (his internship company), during his internship, he was proposed to create monitoring dashboard. The company was using big data company environment, so there was a lot of data being transferred through every day but at that moment they were using manual monitoring by using a big data tool. Zamarul proposed to create a system that can monitor all jobs at once with a single click. This proposal became his FYP. From there, he saw his supervisors started giving him more attention. Even though the company wasn't hiring, his supervisor approached him with a job offer as permanent staff. That is how he started working for the company.

Batrisiya had a case similar to Zamarul. She was offered a position after her internship. During her internship, she put in a lot of effort into joining real life projects. From there on, her supervisor wanted her to join the company to further the project. Batrisiya made the dashboard for the project and her efforts were greatly appreciated. Her project was a social media project. She had to gather social media data and interpret that information into a dashboard for the company's clients. The dashboard was then used to improve the clients' marketing -oriented branding.

Since Tan Yong is working at a Semiconductor manufacturing company, his job is to deal with factory loading optimization and data gathering. He also needs to optimize market demand based on current factory tools.

Tan Yong also advised us students to simply apply for one or more jobs and to tailor our resumes. Companies tend to hire technical proficient applicants. Batrisiya says that when a task is given and you do not know how to do it, you should not wait. Rather, you should try and find a solution for it, or even ask your colleagues. We should not limit ourselves and should learn new things. For her, she always mingled around with people and contributed to places where she could which helped her learn a lot of things.

They also shared the secret of their confidence. Tan Yong participated in a lot of competitions where he needs to present his ideas so he needed to show confidence to present his work well. During Zamarul's university life, he joined a lot of programs. He exposed himself to talking with others to grow his confidence. Batrisiya also joined a lot of programs which led her to present her ideas, increasing her confidence in the process.

Zamarul also suggests how students can spend their time while quarantined due to Covid-19. New technical skills can be learned along with the fundamental ones taught in university. Also, soft skills can be improved. Since we are in a pandemic right now, we can take online courses or learn new things for the purpose of attaching it to our resumes. We can also join training programs. Data star can be joined if the person is interested in data engineering. Zamarul stated that we cannot run from soft skills so we need to have adequate communication skills. A few examples include: idea sharing, teamwork skills, the ability to be easy going and to be able to plan with people. It will be easier to handle errors and solve issues if discussed with teammates.

Some of the question asked and the answers provided are given below:

What does Zamarul prefer? Work life or University life?

He is a fresh grad and has been working for 6 months. He enjoyed university life. During university life, he had free time. He could do part-time jobs but in work he does the same thing over and over again and does not have semester breaks. He has responsibilities in work life, if someone makes a bad mistake, it will affect their future career.

Does CGPA matter?

In private sectors they normally ask about skills. In government agencies, people are assigned different roles even though the applicants graduate with the same degree. Private sectors do not look at CGPA in contrast with government sector. All things considered; a minimum CGPA of 3.0 should be maintained.

Will we be rejected for losing a competition?

We will not be rejected if we lose because we actually gain experience, meaning it is still considered a win. The management of Batrisiya said that they do not look at wins or losses. They simply want to see if an employee can work well in a team.

How is motivation to work attained?

Love for work. Mindset – "create something that help the world "- Zamarul. He adds that not everyone gets the chance to work at a company like his so he should love his work.

First of all, it was a perfect conference for us. It was presented to us online in this pandemic. Most freshmen tend to be overwhelmed within the first year of the semester because of that we rely on our seniors in campus. But they themselves are also busy with their own work, assignments, and studio purpose that they unfortunately cannot invest a lot of time among us. With that in mind, we can turn to ex-students; the so called, alumni will become the perfect stepping stone for us. They are able to guide us in a way so that we won't lose our foothold and this was the bright side of the meeting because now we are well informed on what we should or shouldn't do.

Overall, the meeting was really informative, though there was one thing that was a bit lacking. We got all the information from our immediate seniors that have just graduated. But we were not able to hear the older and more experienced alumni's thought on the matter. Just so that we can get in to more detail. Another key point that was missing was that none of the alumni talked about what they went through during the pandemic and how the whole covid-19 situation affected their work life. However, it was good and informative nonetheless.

The main point we've learned from the Alumni Sharing Session is to not lose hope and confidence when we fail and we should be active as much as we can. The secret to doing all of this is working hard effectively. Another point is that we have to learn how to communicate in all kinds of situation, in other words adaptability. It's a vital skill that will help in both university and career. Because the more we communicate the more we are able to see our mistakes, and from that we can learn from them. Also, for a student of engineering we should learn all new kinds of things such as new techniques, new skills and how to develop them effectively. Because learning new things means you become more open to change. By developing a growth mindset and believing you can learn new things you will be more adaptable to the changes happening around you and your workplace; you will be more willing to take on new ways of working especially in this age. It's the age of competition. Of course, grades matter but if we don't have practical experience then having theory won't help much.