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From School Dropout To Top Graduate, Oliver Sim Rises Above The Challenges

Oliver Sim Wen Hui from the Class of 2022 shares how he overcame the odds to be where he is today.

*Writer: Muhammad Faqih Karamy
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Standing proud with medals slung around his neck, Oliver Sim Wen Hui poses for a picture with the Director of the School of Management and Communication (SMC) Tui Jurn Mun.

Success often grabs headlines. But successes rarely come easy. For Oliver Sim Wen hui, 24, the journey to success has been fraught with obstacles. From an introverted but rebellious teenager in secondary school to a five-time director's list recipient in polytechnic, Oliver has come a long way.

On 5 May, Oliver added another feather to his cap as he received the Board of Governors Award – Most Outstanding Graduate of the Year for topping his cohort in the Diploma in Consumer Behaviour and Research (DCBR) in Republic Polytechnic (RP).

His is a story that shows that one can accomplish great things if he sets his mind to it.

EARLY YEARS

Growing up in a single-parent family, Oliver said his mother raised him and his sister with an iron fist. "She used to discipline me whenever I got anything lower than an A grade," recalled Oliver, on the high expectations his mother had on his academic studies.

Unfortunately, her strict parenting backfired. Instead of driving him to work harder, Oliver began to skip classes in secondary school. And on days that he attended school, he would be dozing off during lessons. This continued right up to the N-level examinations.

Needless to say, Oliver failed badly, so badly that he had limited options at the Institute of Technical Education. He reluctantly enrolled in a medical-related engineering course, only to drop out two days later. Engineering was just not his cup of tea.



Oliver's role as a Public Education Instructor involves him going out to interact with people to teach them life-saving skills, veering from his rather introverted personality back in secondary school. (PHOTO: OLIVER SIM WEN HUI)

TURNING POINT

Soon, the enlistment letter came. The environment in National Service in the Singapore Civil Defence Force (SCDF) was quite challenging due to the strict regimentation and rules were hard to endure.

While taking on the role as a Public Education instructor in the SCDF, he saw how important paper qualifications are. Without a diploma, one would not even be considered to become an officer or sergeant.

It dawned on him that his future was bleak. He was directionless. That feeling was the spark that ignited the fire in him for the next few years.

He plucked up the courage to enroll in ITE's General Education programme during his first year as an NSF. The study programme is catered to students who wished to take N/O levels. He would attend night classes at ITE College Central's campus after his shift at Yishun Fire Station.



Oliver Sim receives the Board of Governors Award for Most Outstanding Graduate of the Year from Education Minister Chan Chun Sing. (PHOTO: OLIVER SIM WEN HUI)

He attained an F9 for his Mathematics during his first O-level attempt. But he persisted and improved to a D7 after the second completion of the programme, just one grade shy of the diploma programme he wanted to apply for.

Nevertheless, he decided to apply to RP's DCBR programme via the Direct Admissions Exercise, a matriculation exercise for students with local or international qualifications who are not eligible to apply for courses under other admissions exercises.

After an interview, he was accepted into the full-time diploma programme.

He recalled: "I was overjoyed, and it made me want to give back to the school (for giving me a second chance)." Little did he know that the acceptance will prove to be the decision that would change his life.



Despite being serious about work and his projects, Oliver strikes a balance to enjoy too. He loves to spending his downtime with his furry friends. (PHOTO: OLIVER SIM WEN HUI)

STARTING OVER

The use of colour psychology to evoke emotions in the consumers or the specific design features of a retail store deeply interested him. School no longer felt like a chore, a far cry from his time in secondary school. The transition from the regimented and strict environment in NS to a toned down and relaxed social setting in RP allowed him to thrive.

“In RP, the casual interaction with your lecturers makes you feel as if they are like your friends, there to help you,” said Oliver.

Oliver never took his matriculation into RP for granted. He would put up solid efforts in class and looked up the daily grading rubrics to see what can be improved.

Along with the consistent and strong efforts he put in class, he took on many projects, including the MILO Case Competition 2019, SUSS Brand Challenge in 2020 and The Nielsen Company: Project Traverse.

For his internship in his final year, he secured a position as a marketing intern at TPG Telecom, where he worked on increasing TPG’s social media presence. He also conducted quantitative research all on his own. He played an integral part in his time in the telecommunications company.

“There are some things you can never learn in school,” commented Oliver about his internship experience. His aptitude in school and in the workplace was evident as he converted his internship position to a part-time marketing assistant position after his internship ended in June 2021.

He credited his performance at work to the Problem-Based Approach pedagogy at RP. He stated that although it may not have directly contributed to the things he does at work, the constant problem-solving in class helped him to rectify issues. Also, the daily presentations made him much more confident in voicing his opinions and ideas.

By that time, it was no surprise that he achieved the Director’s Roll of Honour, five times and won multiple Module Prize awards. Also, he was awarded the REPUBLIC Award in recognition for leading several school-wide initiatives.

LOOKING AHEAD

Right from the start, his family had always been his motivation for pushing himself to achieving academic excellence.

He said: “I don’t want to burden my mother and at the same time, I want to be a role model for my sister, who is studying in RP as well. And is doing quite well too.”

Oliver applied for and received multiple offers from local universities including the National University of Singapore, Nanyang Technological University and Singapore Management University, along with various scholarship offers.

He aspires to specialise in marketing in university and looks to work at a prominent company.

“I want to work in a big company like Google that provides a good working environment for employees. Some other companies even have napping stations. I do not want to work for the sake of it. Also, a conducive environment helps me to be more productive,” he shared.

Humans Of RP: National Player Nur Izzati Juggles Studies and Football

Nur Izzati, a Sports Exercise Science student, shares her experience playing an Asian Cup Qualifiers tournament in the midst of the pandemic and her aspirations for the future of Singapore football.

Writer: Wong J-Min
Page Designer: Aditya V. Verma



Nur Izzati, a Diploma in Sports Science student, in training. She trains everyday after school. (PHOTO: Football Association of Singapore)

For as long as she can remember, Nur Izzati Binte Rosni, 22, has been playing football. It started with her brothers when she found herself enjoying the challenge and tried her best to beat them.

Izzati continued on this path of passion and has not looked back.

Even the idea of being the only girl in a team of boys did not deter her, and eventually she found

herself in the squad for Singapore's under-16 girls' national team.

Recently, she represented Singapore in the Asian Football Federation Women's Asian Cup Qualifiers, which took place in September 2021.

But this journey was filled with challenges. Among them, Izzati, a final-year Sports Exercise Science student, has had to balance studies as she made her mark in the national team.

THE BEGINNING OF A JOURNEY

Since being scouted for the national team at a young age, football has been an integral part of Izzati's life. Joining her father's team in the JSSL (Junior Soccer School and League) National Youth League at the age of eight was a springboard to national recognition.

By the time she entered lower secondary, she was already on the national Under-19 team.

But at the age of 16, things took a turn as Izzati suffered a partial anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) tear. While rehabilitating her knee, she continued to play football seriously, and eventually ended up with a full ACL tear within 2 months.

It was a truly challenging time, but her experiences rehabilitating her knee with the Football Association of Singapore (FAS) sparked her interest in sports exercise science.

"The reason why I ended up at SHL studying sports exercise science is because I was doing my rehab at FAS, and the science behind the rehab journey interested me," she said.



Nur Izzati (No. 10) representing Singapore at a tournament in Thailand. The midfielder has been a fix on the women's national team for around 6 years. (PHOTO: FA Thailand)

Being a national footballer while studying for her diploma also meant that Izzati had to cope with a heavy workload while maintaining her level of play.

At first, Izzati found it challenging to cope with school, following the transition to Republic Polytechnic from the Institute of Technical Education (ITE).

Her first semester was "a little bit messy", after travelling to two countries for tournaments and missing a number of lessons. Her Grade Point Average (GPA) after that semester served as a wake up call.

"It's tiring, but I realised that I needed to spend some more time with my studies. I want to be both a good student and a good athlete," she said.

As time passed, she was able to adapt to the schedule.

"Since I train everyday, I die die need to finish my Reflection Journal (RJ) before training. Otherwise, there's just no quality work if I do it after, because I'll be so shag."



Nur Izzati at Republic Polytechnic campus. As a student athlete, Izzati has to balance schoolwork and sports, which proves to be challenging at times. (PHOTO: Nur Izzati)

FIRST NATIONAL TOURNAMENT IN TWO YEARS

Izzati's football career took a hiatus during the pandemic, and the Asian qualifier in September 2021 was the first international tournament that she and her fellow teammates had attended in almost two years.



Nur Izzati (No. 10) playing for the national team. (PHOTO: Republic Polytechnic)

“We were very worried at first, because we didn’t play together [as a team of 11] until about two months before because of restrictions. We were playing in teams of five and we had to adapt to a 11 person team in that short while,” she said. The lack of friendly matches for practice due to no international travel also meant that the team could not gauge their standards.

Despite this, the team continued to give their all. Izzati recalled finishing her internship and practising late in the night. She remembered being unsure how to tell her father about making the team, and worrying about the Covid-19 situation.

On the way to Dushanbe, Tajikistan, where the tournament was held, the team did the necessary, wearing their masks and sanitising their hands.

“I remember people would not wear masks while we were in transit in Dubai, and it was quite scary and concerning. So we just tried our best to remain safe,” Izzati said. The team also did not manage to go sight-seeing in Tajikistan.

The tournament was such that Singapore would face Indonesia in a home and away format, and according to Izzati, her team put up a good fight despite losing each match by a solitary goal.

“Before the match we would just tell each other, let’s play our best. We just wanted to have a great time and see how we would do.”

FUTURE HOPES

With another tournament under her belt, Izzati said she looks forward to seeing how far she can go in the national team, and would perhaps try out for an overseas league team.

After graduating from RP, she hopes to further her studies overseas while still pursuing football, and improve herself both as a player and a person.

As for her hopes for the national team, Izzati wants to do better so that the sport can get more support from the Government and Singaporeans.

“I remember the tournament in Tajikistan, there was some support from Singaporeans. FAS live-streamed it and people actually watched and left comments,” she recalled.

“And it was quite touching, and I hope that the support keeps coming, so there will be better football in Singapore.”

Not sure what to wear to campus? For those struggling with body image, it's not an easy choice

Are you letting your body stop you from wearing what you want?

Writer: Sofia Ysabel Concengo Tapanan

Designers: Soh Yu Xi and Ashley Tan Tze Chyi



According to the International Medical Clinic, 8 in 10 Singaporean teens want to change the way their body looks. (Photo: Pexels)

When I started my first year at Republic Polytechnic, I was told that I should prioritise doing pre-reading and reflection journals.

But I've spent more time pondering over the same thing I ask myself every morning, "What do I wear today?"

We're all back on campus and to me, that just means I have to mull over mixing and matching clothes to come up with different looks every week.

Adapting to a school environment has been tough for those transitioning from secondary school to polytechnic, and being back for face-to-face lessons has been tougher for some.

Every single time I pick out an outfit, I try to envision how it would on me. Usually, I would think it would look decent, but as I try it on, what I see in the mirror irks me.



The style evolution from the days of secondary school to polytechnic. (Photos: Sofia Ysabel Concengco Tapanan)



“WHY DO I LOOK LIKE THAT?”

I would pinch the parts of my body that I think makes the outfit look worse than I imagined.

If the problem was my arms, a jacket could cover it up. If the problem was my legs, I would just wear jeans or trousers. If the problem was my stomach, a baggy shirt and a huge jacket would work.

Dealing with this every single morning, I felt drained, and I know that I was not alone.

So I asked 100 fellow republicans how they felt about their body image and how it affects their clothing choices.

I found that 83% of the respondents often let their body image prevent them from wearing what they desire.

I asked how they felt about their body image, and 17 responded as feeling strongly negative while only one said that they felt strongly positive about it.

The second question I asked was: Are you comfortable with your body size? Fifty per cent of the respondents said “no”.

From these two questions alone, I wondered how these people styled themselves everyday. Style is based on one’s comfort and confidence in the clothing they wear and with such negative results, it made me wonder what else they let their body image struggles restrict them from?

We are all familiar with Singapore’s signature hot and humid weather. We would expect to see outfits consisting of t-shirts or tank tops with flowy pants or shorts, but instead we see people in jackets and sweatshirts.

74 out of the 100 respondents said that they covered themselves up despite the weather in Singapore. The reason? Their discomfort over their bodies.

Jackets are meant for insulation, not as a solution.

Even if it was hot, I find myself wearing long sleeves to cover up my “flaws” because of society’s sharp labels. Jackets, flannels, sweatshirts are my go-to over any cute shirt I have because I don’t feel comfortable.

We are meant to express ourselves through fashion, not hide.



Beating the heat, by looking cool! The weather is never a reason why we should sacrifice style. (Photos: Sofia Ysabel Concengco Tapanan)



Clad in long sleeves despite the weather. (Photo: Sofia Ysabel Concengco Tapanan)

YOU ARE NOT ALONE

Beauty standards have asked many things of our generation, and it seems that it is almost impossible to reach them all.

One respondent said: “Society is just cruel. If you’re too skinny, eat more and gain some weight, but if you’re too fat, eat less and lose weight.”

“It’s like you’re never enough for society.”

It’s okay to not fit into the beauty standard, and it’s more than okay to just be you with the body you have.

But this mindset isn’t the norm apparently - 65% of the respondents said that they would change their body purely for aesthetic purposes while 25% said “maybe” and only 10% said “no”.

A lot of feelings come with struggling with your body image and they can be mentally and physically draining. Don’t let it consume you.

Republic Polytechnic offers resources to help you through it. You can speak with your mentors or peer supporters. Don’t hesitate to turn to your friends, your family, and even Government organisations or agencies. Don’t be afraid to reach out because you are not alone in this. Don’t suffer in silence.

You aren’t meant to fit into clothes, clothes are meant to fit you.