Semester at sea buoying learning for undergrads

Programme on 'Floating uni' allows students to sail around the world while taking classes

Yueil Sin

For three months during the summer of 2018, National University of Singapore (NUS) student Ng Yi Hyong, 21, sailed and studied in the Galapagos Islands, Chile, while scoring a double degree from the University of the Andes in Santiago, Chile.

The 60 students and staff on voyage around the world each semester meant an average of 2,600 students and staff on voyages around the world each semester.

The programme is one of the most innovative in the world, where students can take courses from students from other faculties and even other countries to score credits towards the programme.

A typical 10-week summer voyage covers about 13,000 nautical miles, but there are planned stops to visit various cities in Asia, Europe, and North America.

There was also a greater sense of camaraderie on the programme, with courses tailored to the students' interests and have a chat or a meal with them. It was all very communal, she said.

Professor Michael Mathias, who heads environmental studies at Yale-NUS College, has taught on the same voyage program twice.

He initially rejected the idea of the programme, which "sounded more like a Big Brother type of adventure", but became interested after being introduced to the programme by a colleague.

"I saw more growth among the students who worked on more than once," said Prof Mantua.

"It requires a commitment to community and the capacity to be flexible and adaptable, and that's exactly what they are doing in the three months on the sea.

"It's also really the case that SAS courses don't offer as much material as normal courses back home, but what is covered is dealt with intensely and deeply.

"It's a great opportunity for students to grow and blossom. It's definitely a once-in-a-lifetime experience."