Ronel's Story

A University Partner Success Story

Why did you choose VUW Foundations Studies Programme?
Unfortunately, my GCSE A-Levels results did not meet the Victoria University of Wellington undergraduate degree entrance requirement. The Victoria University of Wellington Fast-Track Foundation Studies Programme was an easy choice as it provided me with the additional credit that I required with a guaranteed entrance into my chosen undergraduate degree- after successful completion.

Why did you choose Victoria University of Wellington?
I wanted to open my cultural horizon and experience education overseas as I lived in Singapore most of my life. I decided on New Zealand as it is known for its beautiful greenery and welcoming environment. After doing some extensive research I found out that Victoria University of Wellington is highly regarded for its humanities programme and is situated in the political and cultural hub of Wellington which was perfectly aligned with both my personal and career goals.

Why did you choose to pursue your studies with VUW Foundations Studies Programme online?
Travel restrictions due to COVID-19 hindered my initial plan to undertake the programme onshore. I did not want to waste any time, so I decided to take up my courses online instead. This allowed me to start my courses as planned and continue to my degree as soon as the borders open. Studying online meant that I was able to reduce costs on flights, living and accommodation. I was also able to apply to an earlier intake as I did not have to apply for my visa or arrange my accommodation which meant I could start at an earlier date.

Student Profile

STUDENT NAME
Ronel Giam

NATIONALITY
Singaporean

PROGRAMME
University of Wellington Foundation Studies Programme (Fast Track), January 2021

UNIVERSITY DESTINATION
University of Wellington, Bachelor of Arts

"I received immense support from the teachers and was encouraged to give and seek help from my fellow students which led to a close-knit virtual community"

How has your online experience been so far?
I was worried that some of the information would be lost in translation and there will be less support online but instead the learning environment exceeded my expectations. I received immense support from the teachers and was encouraged to give and seek help from my fellow students which led to a close-knit virtual community. I was also encouraged to take more ownership of my learning and improve my time management and organisational skills which will be invaluable for my future studies and career.

How are you finding the learning experience with your teachers in the online environment?
My teachers were lovely and well-versed with the online tools which made communication seamless and effective. They take great care of their online students and are always available for consultation, even working beyond school hours to accommodate the different time zones. Depending on the subject, classes may be a mix of onshore and online students to maximise teachers time and resources. This means that you already get to meet and be friends with students who are already in New Zealand. The more I studied and received guidance from my teachers online, the stronger my confidence in my academic ability grew which inspired me to choose Geography as my career pathway.

What systems/applications do you use every day? Are they easy to use?
Microsoft Teams, Outlook, and Blackboard are the essential daily applications for studying at UP Education online. They are extremely easy to use – for those not familiar with Blackboard, it is a relatively easy platform to pick up and is a great tool for online learning and hosts all the needed information that you need for your course.

Did you win any scholarships? If yes, what scholarship did you win and how did you achieve it?
I was delighted to win the UP-Education Study Award Scholarship of $5,000 provided by Victoria University of Wellington. I was advised that the scholarship is awarded to one student per term for displaying excellent grades, attendance, student mentorship, and commitment to studies across multiple criteria. I place huge importance on giving back and helping others as it is embedded in my core values. During my studies, a fellow student faced a natural disaster that prevented them from having access to the internet. To alleviate the students stress I took in-depth notes and dedicated some time to assist them in catching up. I also assisted my fellow mandarin speaking students by providing additional translation and feedback to help them achieve their academic goals. When I received my scholarship, I was advised that my intrinsic nature to help others was a large contributor to my nomination for the award. Therefore, I place a huge emphasis on helping others as kindness always pays you back one way or another.

Can you describe your everyday schedule for us?
I woke up at 6:30 am every day and started my day by checking emails to note assignment tasks and important announcements. Then I would usually have breakfast and work on my homework or prepare for my first morning live lessons. After my lesson ended, it was usually lunchtime for which I took an hour break to eat and rest. I would then spend the afternoon revising and completing any additional assignments. If I had spare time, I would then go for runs to keep my physical fitness up and get some fresh air. My evenings would typically consist of practising the piano and completing schoolwork. Once I have ticked off most of the things on my to-do list, I would then head off to sleep at 11 pm.

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What do you do in your free time?

I was and still am studying piano, so most of my free time was dedicated to practise. However, on occasion when I do have a spare moment, I do enjoy cycling, photography, hiking, listening to classical music, and reading books.

What are the benefits that you noticed about studying online?

The largest benefit of online studies is the added flexibility of self-paced learning. Since some lessons are recorded and materials are always ready weeks ahead of the deadlines, students can plan their school around their personal commitment which results in a healthy work-life balance. Online study also enhances your communication skills and develops your global perspective as you are required to work with students from all over the world. The online environment also encourages you to use your time wisely and improves your ability to work with others as you are unable to physically meet with your peers. I found online learning a great experience that motivated me to push myself out of my comfort zone and experience education from a modern and tech-savvy perspective.

What was the biggest challenge that you had to overcome during your studies?

I was preparing for the ABRSM Grade 8 Piano Exam while studying online at the same time. I found it challenging to allocate sufficient practice time, especially during assignment and exam packed weeks. Eventually, I adjusted my timetable and managed to squeeze in some practice on weekends, breaks and any spare time I could manage, it just meant I had to compromise a little on my free time.

If you could do anything differently, what would it be?

I found myself spending too much time on my studies as I tend to double-check my work despite knowing that I have already met the grading requirements. Having more confidence in my academic ability would have saved me more time for other commitments.

What is the next step for you, career-wise and in education?

I believe that industries focused on climate taxonomy, circular economy and environmental conservation is the next booming job sector as our world works towards carbon neutrality goals. I aim to become an urban planner, environmental consultant, or GIS analyst as I hope to contribute to shaping sustainable living for future generations. Thus, I am pursuing a Bachelor of Art, majoring in Geography, and minoring in Environmental Studies to obtain the necessary skills and knowledge for my future career aspiration. This field fits well with my interest as a lover of all things nature.

If you have any advice for other students who also want to study online, what would it be?

The best advice I could give to students who want to pursue their studies online is to acknowledge their mistakes, adapt, and move on. Do not dwell too much on the little things but think of it as growth and a learning opportunity. I found that although studying online does offer time flexibility you should still be prepared and develop a study plan. Regardless of how disciplined we are, we still procrastinate and need to have a somewhat direction to keep us on track with our goals. I would suggest crafting a weekly schedule that suits you and sticking to it. You would find that adhering to your plan yields good grades and more free time, than if you did not. Lastly but not least, leverage the online experience to widen your international contacts. The Victoria University of Wellington Foundation Studies Programme is a great way to meet a wide spectrum of students across the globe. Be kind, keep an open mind, and make new friends – you would be surprised at the knowledge you gain by interacting with others, and they may serve as a springboard to meet other amazing individuals who may have a large contribution to the success of your studies and career.

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