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**K**AVIYARASU Elangkovan was an excellent science student, both during his secondary school years and his foundation year in Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM).

Because of his outstanding SPM results, he was allowed to undertake the eight-month fast-track foundation programme where he scored an A- for Physical Chemistry and an A for Organic Chemistry.

Towards the end of the foundation programme, Kaviyarasu had to choose his preferred degree course.

"My father badly wanted me to study engineering, while my mother was hoping for me to become a medical doctor," he said.

"But I knew I wouldn't be happy being stuck with these subjects for the next few years in the university."

"I decided to follow my gut feeling and applied to study Economics, although I didn't have any concrete reason for doing so."

"I just knew that if things didn't turn out well, I could still change my course after one year."

As he was then only 18 years old, he did not feel any pressure over making his choice.

"My first revelation: If you are a prospective undergraduate student, always follow your instinct," he said.

"You have to be happy with what you are studying, so don't just simply do what your parents ask you to do."

"Whatever you decide for yourself, your parents will still hope for your success. Nothing will make your parents happier than seeing you happy."

Kaviyarasu's first year in Economics turned out to be "fantastic".

"Although I was new to the subject, I put in a lot of hard work to understand the topics well," he said.

"Many of my friends had an Economics background; some even did a Diploma for three years. I was worried in the beginning of being at a disadvantage."

"However, I managed to overcome that feeling when I started to realise that this was not a competition."

"My primary aim was to achieve personal perfection, and not to be the best among my friends."

Kaviyarasu said one of his mentors, Tan Sri Syed Jalaludin, once told him: "Don't rush to achieve anything. Keep it slow and steady, because it's not a matter of when you achieve it, as long as you achieve it."

With that in mind, he achieved a perfect GPA score of 4.00 in his first semester.

"My second revelation: Nothing is impossible unless you say so yourself."

From his freshman year itself, Kaviyarasu began to take part in various competitions.

"The first competition I joined was probably the Global Social Venture Challenge, a social innovation competition," he said.

"During this time, I was not only encouraged by my mentor Dr Ahmed Razam Abdul Latiff, who believed in me and also gave me the chance to work with his brilliant MBA students."

"We were the sole finalist team from Malaysia and in the final round in Bangkok, Thailand, we bagged the Best Sixty Seconds Pitching Award."

"My third revelation: Don't limit yourself to academic work, but also get involved in competitions to widen your knowledge and exposure."

"The connections you make in the process can come in useful in the later part of your life."

Kaviyarasu was also mentored by Professor Datin Paduka Aini Ideris, who was then UPM's deputy vice-chancellor of academics and now the university's vice-chancellor.

"She was ever ready to offer valuable advice when needed, while her humility is something that I have always admired," he said.

"She was the one who guided me to apply for study abroad to widen my experiences."



(Left) Kaviyarasu Elangkovan with teammates during the ICAEW Business Challenge South-east Asia. (Below) Kaviyarasu Elangkovan with parents Elangkovan and Dr Vijayaletchumy.

## CLASS REP

# Life lessons learnt in varsity



## KAVIYARASU ELANGKOVAN

### POSITION

President, Perdana Fellows Alumni Association

### GRADUATED

Economics degree from UPM

### WORKING ON

Becoming an ICAEW chartered accountant

"Well, I was at one time assigned as a Mathematics tutor and my job was to guide a student preparing for his GCSE examination for one hour on Saturdays."

"This student had scored a C in his first assessment before starting his sessions with me, and I knew that by merely teaching him the subject matter, he would not score an A."

"I then constantly motivated him while guiding him in the subject; there were occasions when I spent more time on motivation and that led to him taking on a more positive outlook and attitude."

"He scored an A for his trial examination, and that was a win for both of us."

"So, my sixth revelation is: Don't forget to give back to society as well. Volunteering is not about getting something for yourself, although you definitely won't be losing out."

Kaviyarasu is also a firm believer that no man is an island, and everyone needs to have friends.

"I may not have that many friends, but I have good ones; those who will be there whenever I need them and they don't expect anything in return," he said.

"I have faithful friends from my childhood days, and those forged during my undergraduate years."

"There is one guy whom I met only a year ago, but we became close less than two weeks after we first met. We would hang out at mamak restaurants and just have endless discussions about world affairs."

"That's how beautiful life can be."

"And that's my seventh revelation: How you will be in five years' time is also determined by the people you hang around with today."

Kaviyarasu graduated with a first class degree and is studying to become an ICAEW chartered accountant.

He is also president of the Perdana Fellows Alumni Association, and recently attended the townhall dialogue with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak concerning the 2050 National Transformation (TN50) plan.

Kaviyarasu spent his second year in Queen Mary University of London under the Study Abroad programme.

"Living in London was exciting as the people there were friendly and I also enjoyed the winter cold for a change of weather," he said.

"Before I went, I often heard people say that Malaysian graduates were not performing well overseas. To me, however, it's not about where you study but how you study."

Kaviyarasu said he made the time and effort to read the entire *Money and Banking* textbook, which was 480 pages thick.

He also took on a part-time job at McDonalds, even though he had enough money to sustain himself, just for the experience of working part-time.

He said: "I still remember the day when my manager asked me: 'You are studying in Queen Mary, why are you here?'"

"My time in McDonalds was an eye-opening one."

"Most of the workers in McDonalds worked really hard for a living. Their salaries were not high, but they were always happy while at work."

"My fourth revelation: Money doesn't guarantee happiness, which is what lies inside your heart and is not to be found outside."

Following his return to UPM from London, Kaviyarasu was accepted into the Perdana Fellowship programme and placed as an executive intern under Datuk Abdul Rahman Dahlan, at that time the minister of Urban Wellbeing, Housing, and Local Government.

"The time spent with him as my mentor was a confirmation to me that students should undergo internships for valuable job exposure that will serve them well in launching their career later," he said.

"My fifth revelation: Having a good mentor is as valuable as your four years of studies."

Kaviyarasu said that a UPM lecturer once told him: "In your journey through life, it's not your brains alone that will bring you to greater heights, it's your good deeds as well."



Basketball is Kaviyarasu Elangkovan's favourite sport.