Esther Au Yong

Being able to pursue your passions in life is not a privilege granted to everyone.
That is why National University of Singapore (NUS) architecture student Cheng Mun Yi (right) feels fortunate to have been awarded the NUS Global Merit Scholarship for her undergraduate studies.

Ms Cheng, 20, says: “The scholarship has allowed me to pursue my passions, by freeing me from basic financial concerns.

“For example, with the scholarship, I could afford to go on an immersion programme in Germany for a month this year. It would have been much more expensive overall if I had to pay NUS tuition fees.”

The NUS Global Merit scholarship covers the undergraduate scholar’s tuition fees, besides providing an annual living allowance of $6,000 and an annual accommodation allowance of $2,000.

A one-time computer allowance of $2,000 is also provided. If a scholar chooses to participate in the Student Exchange Programme or the NUS Overseas College Programme, it will be sponsored.

“I also have the opportunity to apply for an enrichment grant to participate in local or overseas enrichment activities.

“I appreciate these opportunities very much, as they open up the world to me through NUS,” she adds.

Ms Cheng, who represented Singapore in Weiqi in the 2007 SEA Games in Thailand, is pursuing architecture because she wants to be “able to better lives and inspire people through architecture.”

“I have always been very interested in art and design. “Architecture is the design of our spaces and environments. And consequently, it impacts the people who live in and interact with these spaces,” she explains.

“I hope to design spaces that address the needs of people and the environment,” she adds.

And already, she has been given the opportunity to witness and analyse for herself how changes in a community’s surroundings can impact their daily lives.

Recalling a study trip to Malacca in Malaysia, she says: “During my first year in NUS, I visited Malacca with the rest of my cohort for an architecture project.

“It was very memorable as we saw the city in a new light, when forced to examine it from an architectural standpoint.

“I also spoke to the locals and asked them for their opinions on their built environment and the new developments in Malacca.

“It was a different way of seeing Malacca from the ground, instead of the perspective a tourist would normally take.”

She says that being a scholar gives her more motivation to work better and harder to excel in her chosen field.

“I do not enjoy privileges over other students simply because I am a scholar, whether in my course or in other matters such as university housing.

“I have to earn my rights alongside my fellow students, and perhaps I also have the onus to work harder and prove myself worthy of the benefits I receive from my scholarship.

“I believe this helps to ground me in reality and develops my character positively,” she says.

When asked if she has any advice for potential scholars, she says that, ultimately, having passion for one’s chosen path in life should be a priority.

“Apply for a scholarship that suits you and will allow you to develop your potential.

“Do not take one up purely for prestige or job security alone when you have no passion or you don’t fancy yourself in the career that will follow.

“I believe that, as a scholar, one must be committed to and be responsible for what one signs up for.

“If you are unsure of which path to take but would like a scholarship, then one without a bond, such as an NUS scholarship would be an option that will allow you to explore more possibilities,” she says.

PHOTO: CHENG MUN YI