

✓ news education

Blind student thrives in poly, thanks to support

Republic Polytechnic has about 300 special-needs students

✓ CHARMINE SOH

He lost his sight after surviving stage four eye cancer when he was two years old.

But that is not stopping Republic Polytechnic (RP) student John Danesh, 18, from pursuing his dream of becoming a lawyer.

The diploma in social enterprise and management student is among about 300 special needs students in RP and the first who is completely blind.

Yet, John, who is in his second year, topped three modules in his course.

He attributes this to the support network he has at school.

He told The New Paper: "I am grateful to my mentor, lecturers and friends who have helped me in school, be it with classwork materials or navigating around the poly."

The problem-based learning approach — where students

work in teams to solve problems in class daily — has also been a boon to him, as he gets to research topics on his own.

"The (problem-based learning) experience has been enlightening... most of my modules are interesting," he added.

Beyond that, RP has a support system to help students with disabilities.

John, for example, is exempted from course modules that are heavily visual-based.

Teaching methods and materials are also customised to accommodate his learning needs.

He has a software installed in his laptop to decipher content, and the programme chair of his course and lecturers will reformat materials for him.

For instance, pictures will include captions so John can understand the content.

Graphs can be converted to Braille.

Mr Fong Yew Chan, RP's senior director of student services, said: "In RP, we have an inclusive learning environment, students with special educational needs are given the necessary support and accommodation to pursue their studies unencumbered."

RP's support system has benefited students such as John. He contributes to team assignments and presentations like any other student, said Mr Peter Lee, his mentor and lecturer.

Mr Lee told TNP: "I was initially worried as I had no experience, but the school is supportive and it sends us for training to learn how to interact with these students and teach them."

"He (John) is just like any other student who is hardworking, knowledgeable and up to date with current affairs."

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John Danesh (right) benefits from Republic Polytechnic's support system, where his lecturer Peter Lee is trained to teach students with disabilities. TNP PHOTO: WENDY LIM

How RP aids students with disabilities

With about 300 students with disabilities, Republic Polytechnic (RP) has in place measures to help them adapt to the rigours of their courses.

Before completion of enrolment, the student, parents and staff discuss recommended courses and potential challenges faced.

The school determines the type of support given to students with disabilities based on five categories — visual, hearing, physical impairment, neurodevelopmental disorder and learning challenges.

Some accommodations are made during exams, such as

having a personal invigilator, bigger fonts in the exam paper or extra time, depending on the students' different needs.

These students will also have counsellors to provide them with emotional support, on top of the mentors which all RP students are assigned.

And for lecturers to learn how to interact with the special education-needs students, there are training and workshops by an external group iC2 Prehouse, a charity that supports students who are visually disabled so they can smoothly enter the mainstream education system.

— CHARMINE SOH