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Scholarship boosts 15-year-old at UBC

At age 15, Cheng Xie is not old enough to buy a pint at the pub, but he'll be attending the University of B.C. this fall on an \$80,000 scholarship. Xie is the youngest recipient of the prestigious Schulich Leader Scholarship, awarded to 40 outstanding students across Canada to pursue undergraduate degrees in science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

BY THE PROVINCE AUGUST 19, 2014

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He's slightly nervous about starting his applied science in engineering program, not because he'll be younger than most of his peers, but because it's a new experience.

"I'm really looking forward to the environment there," he said. "Age doesn't matter. It's an environment of creativity and innovation where really smart people in a field come together and say, 'We can do this.'" Xie will be one of 50 students aged 16 or younger entering UBC this fall. The university accepts about 6,000 first-year students each year.

He is enrolled in economics, calculus, math and other courses, totalling 36 credits - 30 is the norm - because he had trouble choosing which classes he liked best.

It's par for the course for the German-born teen, who completed high school in two years in the accelerated UBC Transitions program, invented environmentally friendly soap made from waste oil, and this summer created a software program in his family's living room that detects and reads handwriting and translates it into a text file.

"It's a basic program," a "beginner" project for anyone who wants to go into the field of automation, said Xie, who has lived in Germany, China, Switzerland and Ottawa.

Xie credits his interest in science to his father, a researcher at UBC who creates software that models how nuclear waste affects the environment. The teen's long-term goal is to be an entrepreneur in software technology, but for now he's just happy to be able to focus on school.

"The scholarship was really important for me," said Xie, who had originally planned to take a year off due to financial constraints. "It enabled me to do what I love and pursue my interest and passions."

One university experience he'll have to miss out on, however, is living on campus.

"I'm not old enough," he said. "But next year, I'll live in residence."

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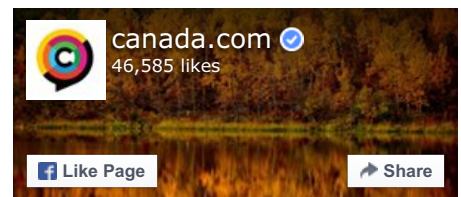
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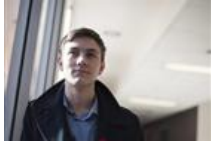
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