



ST PHOTO: NURIA LING

Students in shorts, bermudas and flip-flops at a bus stop outside Ngee Ann Polytechnic recently. Poly students say they dress for convenience and comfort in Singapore's heat and want dress codes on campus banned.

Shorts, flip-flops and off to school

Debate returns on poly students' casual wear; they say they dress for comfort

**Heather Marie Lee
 Kon Xin Hua**

The girl wore a short skirt and a top with straps that left much of her back exposed.

The pictures – supposedly snapped at Ngee Ann Polytechnic and posted on citizen journalism site Stomp – have once again ignited debate on how one should dress for class in polytechnics.

This issue last made headlines in October last year when several Republic Polytechnic students were given e-mail warnings that they could be banned from lectures if they were dressed inappropriately.

A Sunday Times check at all five polytechnics last week showed that students were turning up for class in informal attire. Almost half the girls wore shorts while the boys mostly favoured flip-flops.

While polytechnics do have dress codes that expressly ban shorts and flip-flops as well as revealing and offensive attire, the students said they had never been

hauled up and would like to see such rules abolished.

They said informal wear passed the test as a convenient and comfortable way to deal with the hot weather. Said final-year communications and media management student at Temasek Polytechnic Mohd Shaari, 23: "On days when lessons are only one or two hours long, it's a hassle to dress up."

Liphin Ong, 19, a Ngee Ann Polytechnic final-year business studies student, said what image students want to project is best left to themselves to decide.

The polytechnics noted that while students would like to stamp their own fashion identity, inappropriate attire could lead to unwanted injuries, especially in laboratory and workshop-related courses.

Students and staff required to work in these settings are not allowed to don slippers or shorts.

"Our focus is more on the safety aspect where dressing is concerned, particularly in laboratories or workshops or during outdoor activities," said a Singapore Polytechnic spokesman.

Students said the rules are fine in certain scenarios.

As Foo Jiamin, 19, a third-year student from the chemical and pharmaceutical technology course

at Nanyang Polytechnic, said: "When we have laboratory lessons, we go for jeans and shoes so as to prevent injury from chemical spills."

Those who flout the guidelines are generally given verbal warnings and counselling.

But Ng Hui Juan, 19, a third-year student in the biotechnology course at Republic Polytechnic, said: "I don't think it works on us students any more. Maybe in secondary school, but not now, when we're older."

The polytechnics, in noting that most of their students do dress appropriately, said counselling those who overstep the boundaries is sufficient for now and there is no need to review the rules.

Over at the universities, one – Singapore Management University – does not enforce a dress code.

In treating students as "responsible adults", it also expects them to "take pride" in their appearance, a spokesman said.

Nanyang Technological University relaxed its "no shorts, no slippers" rule in October last year, allowing for "smart shorts" that are of a length "not deemed to be indecent", said Associate Professor Lok Tat Seng, its dean of students.

✉ lheather@sph.com.sg
 ✉ xhkon@sph.com.sg