Record numbers apply for varsity here

Local varsities still affordable despite recent fee hikes

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A RECORD number of A-level and diploma holders are vying for a place this year in the three local universities despite the recent fee increases.

The National University of Singapore (NUS) received 20,000 applications for 6,000 undergraduate places. Nanyang Technological University (NTU) also received 20,000 applications for its 4,700 slots by April 1 closing date.

Both institutions raised their fees by 5 per cent — or an extra $280 per year — this year.

The Singapore Management University (SMU), which increased its fees by 15 per cent — or about $570 a year more than the other two — has also drawn a flood of applicants. It will close its applications only on Tuesday. It has already so far received close to 9,000 applications for its 1,100 places.

Students say that despite the fee hikes a university education here costs much less than one obtained abroad.

Mr Colin Tan, 22, who is eyeing a place in SMU, said: "At $6,500 a year, it adds up to about $25,000 in fees over four years. The same course in Australia would cost me three times more in fees alone. Living expenses would cost another $100,000. So the local universities are still a bargain."

Mr Tan and his classmates from Anderson Junior college also welcomed the growing options available to them locally, such as NUS' double-degree programmes and NTU's new fine arts course.

Ms Felicia Toh, 19, who applied for the course at NTU's School of Art, Design and Media, said she jumped at the chance because it would cost her much more to go overseas.

NUS came high on the list for some students because of its double-degree course combining law and economics. Students will graduate with a Bachelor of Social Sciences as well as a Bachelor of Laws which will be recognised for admission to the Singapore Bar.

Said one applicant, Miss Jeanette Tan, 19: "I had thought of going to Australia to study for a double degree. Thankfully NUS is offering it."

She sees it as giving her greater career flexibility: "I can go into many different jobs, even if there is an economic downturn."

For many students like Miss Anna Lim, 19, SMU's city campus was a draw because of its closeness to shopping centres, cinemas and theatres.

She said: "I was all set for SMU, until it announced its fee hike. I thought it was a bit too much. But after I went for its open house at the new city campus, I couldn't resist it."

This year also saw large numbers of applications from polytechnic students. NUS drew 7,000 out of its total of 20,000, while NTU had 10,000 out of 20,000 applicants.

Recognising their high calibre, NTU and NUS had gone out to woo more of them through talks and open houses.

NTU hopes to take in 1,300 this year, up from 1,100 last year. NUS also hopes to raise its intake from 500 to 800 by opening up courses once closed to them.

Said Ngee Ann Polytechnic business student Selene Lim, 20, who wants to study psychology and sociology: "Like my poly mates, I had plans to go overseas because the universities here seem to prefer the JC students. But that seems to be changing. So I applied to all three this year."