SMU takes out ads urging them to decide for sake of those on waiting list

By Sandra Davie
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WITH offers from three universities, Ms S. Liew is taking her time deciding and making hundreds of other university hopefuls wait anxiously.

Ms Liew, 19, applied to study business at the National University of Singapore (NUS), Nanyan Technological University (NTU) and the Singapore Management University (SMU), and received offers from all three late last month. She knows where she wants to go, but has not accepted or rejected any of the offers yet.

Ms Liew, who scored one A and two Bs, declined to reveal her full name. She said: "I have till June 6, so why hurry?"

But SMU said that students have every reason to hurry. It has even taken out advertisements to move things along. The ads urge students to make an early decision, to show a sense of social and ethical responsibility.

SMU officials said that applicants like Ms Liew not only slow down the admission process, but they are also being inconsiderate to the hundreds of students on the waiting list.

SMU's admission director Alan Goh said: "If Ms Liew rejects our offer, then we can immediately consider another student on our waiting list."

"We have had over 9,400 applications for our 1,100 places. So we have a few hundred on our waiting list."

The three universities have set a common acceptance deadline of June 6, so there would not be a repeat of last year's situation.

For the first time last year, students could apply to all three universities and receive offers from all. But the new process ran into problems because all three had different deadlines for acceptance. By mid-June, about a month before the term was supposed to begin, 1,500 students were still holding two offers, leaving 1,300 on waiting lists.

This year, applicants can register their decision on a common website between May 3 and June 6. If they change their minds, they can still change their choice — before June 6.

The three universities said the bulk of offers for the 11,000 places went out in the last two weeks of last month. But acceptances are only trickling in; admission officials expect the bulk of them to come in just before June 6.

Of the three, only SMU seems to be taking issue with students holding on to the offers. NUS and NTU admission officials feel that some students are justified in taking more time.

NUS admissions dean Tan Thiam Soon said: "Students could be faced with having to choose between their first-choice course in a second-choice university or their second-choice course in their preferred university. The student has to think carefully."

He added that some students who applied to study law, dentistry and medicine are only now going for their interview, which is part of the rigorous selection process. But all offers will be sent out by May 20, which gives them another two weeks until decision time.

Four out of 10 students interviewed said that they are deciding between courses and universities. Ms Grace Chan, 19, who is choosing between arts or business in two universities, said: "This is my future, so I want to take my time over it."

The other six were not faced with difficult decisions, and admitted to having picked one offer over the others.

Meanwhile, it is a torturous wait for students like Mr Darren Ng, 21, a polytechnic graduate who is still waiting to hear from the universities.

The full-time national serviceman, who described his results as borderline, said: "I am probably on the waiting list so I am on tenterhooks. I wish the other students would decide quickly so that I will know my fate and move on to Option B if need be."