Model graduate
Elsie Lin fronted SMU’s ad campaign three years ago—now, the all-rounder is graduating summa cum laude.
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Yesterday’s poster girl is today’s model SMU graduate

She bags eight of the 11 medals in accountancy

BY SANDRA DAVIE
Education Correspondent

THREE years ago, Ms Elsie Lin was a “model” student, serving as a poster girl for the Singapore Management University (SMU).

Yesterday, the student best remembered for her back-arch ing pose in an SMU advertisement that boldly claimed its students were “different” turned out to be a model graduate as well.

Ms Lin, 23, is one of the top students in SMU’s class of 2005, graduating with the highest distinction—summa cum laude—and bagging eight of the 11 medals in accountancy.

SMU’s dean of accountancy Pang Yang Hoong said that although this year’s 88 accountancy graduates are SMU’s first, she does not expect Ms Lin’s feat to be repeated.

“Elsie maintained a perfect grade point average of four for every term. Most students slip in one or two terms, but not Elsie,” she said.

“And she didn’t just ace her accountancy subjects; she is an all-rounder—she also did well in the other courses she took up in business and law.”

Ms Lin, whose father is a technician and her mum a housewife, attributed her sterling results to SMU’s American-style teaching methods.

“I had the choice of going to the National University of Singapore, Nanyang Technological University and SMU, but SMU it was for me,” she said. “And all because it took a different approach in its teaching, especially its seminar-style lectures and use of project work.”

Smaller classes “forced” students to participate in their own learning.

And the project work helped her internalise what she had studied.

“There’s nothing like applying what you have studied. You retain the knowledge better,” said the former Raffles Junior College student, who is also a ballet dancer and fluent in Japanese.

She said that three years ago, when the university administration asked her to appear in the SMU advertisements, she did not hesitate. “I was happy to lend my name to it. After all, I really believed in the product I was selling.”

Ms Lin, who serves as a grassroots leader in the Bishan Community Club, believes so much in her alma mater that she has already pledged to donate $500 a year towards a scholarship fund.

“It’s a very small way of giving back to a university that gave me so much,” said Ms Lin, who has landed a job as a management trainee at Neptune Orient Lines (NOL).

Education Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam, who spoke at the convocation ceremony for 520 students, commended the graduates for their move to form an alumni association and raise funds for scholarships.

He said SMU had made the most of its initial advantages and done remarkably well in its first five years.

But he cautioned that “these initial advantages fade as you grow in years.”

“And the self-selection of risk-taking students which you saw among your initial classes—when the SMU brand was not established—will be less obvious as the years go past and new students get attracted to SMU for its established brand.”

He urged the university to retain its culture of being different.

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UNBEATABLE ALL-ROUNDER: Best remembered for her pose in an SMU ad (below), Ms Lin maintained a perfect grade point average of four for every term. She has landed a job as a management trainee at NOL.

PERFECT SCORE

“Elsie maintained a perfect grade point average of four for every term. Most students slip in one or two terms, but not Elsie.”

MS PANG YANG HOONG, SMU’S dean of accountancy, on Ms Lin’s

PHOTO: CHEW SENG KIM