SMU picks 50 for new scholarship

By Jane Ng

AT FIRST, Wee Tze Yi had his heart set on studying at an American university. So after Secondary 3, the St Joseph’s Institution student went to Australia to do an International Baccalaureate diploma to prepare himself for it.

Just as he had hoped, after he got the qualification, American universities offered him places.

But the 21-year-old changed his mind and applied to the Singapore Management University, as “I want to work here eventually so I wanted to get to know people and the local context”.

But that diploma and his unusual interests — he teaches salsa and used to fence — has led to him being picked as one of 50 Lee Kong Chian scholars.

The recipients of the award will be announced during SMU’s convocation ceremony today to welcome its sixth batch of 1,241 freshmen.

The scholarship, named after the late philanthropist and rubber tycoon, aims to groom promising students into a new generation of “social entrepreneurs”, people who will not only run a successful company, but give back to the community as well.

Apart from a free university education and a chance to pursue double degrees, they will also be sent on overseas exchange programmes and community service projects, and get to learn from top managers as part of a special internship scheme.

The programme is funded by a $50 million donation from the Lee Foundation. From this, $50,000 will be spent on each scholar over his four years at the varsity.

The scheme’s director, Professor Pang Eng Fong, said almost 30 people — CEOs, lecturers, alumni and current students — were involved in choosing the 50 recipients.

“We were looking for something outstanding in their background that shows them to be different from the standard, academically high-achieving youth with four As,” he said.