DR SUZAINA KADIR, 37
A political science lecturer at NUS. The Singaporean is single and has been teaching at NUS since 1999.

"I've been told that I look very young so I dress older to help establish my status as a teacher. It's tough to find suits here for big women so I shop at Ann Taylor or Banana Republic in the United States when I go there for conferences. I favour dark colours and I am more comfortable in pants.

"With their shorts, flip-flops, T-shirts and jeans, students here dress casually. Nothing wrong with that as they should be comfortable in class."

DR MAHMOOD ISHTIAQ, in his 30s
Assistant professor in NUS school of business. The Bangladeshi started teaching at NUS in 1999. He is married.

"Coordination is important so I make sure my shirts, pants, belt and shoes match. I also prefer Japanese clothing to European labels because the sizes are smaller and fit better. Icy Mix is great for its range of linen jackets. Knowing how to dress is like knowing how to speak eloquently. But it doesn't define us, our character does. ""I like how students here dress formally with tie, shirt and pants for class presentations. However, at other times, the skirts are too short. Then again, maybe I am just too old-fashioned."

DR DAWN DEKLE, 38
Associate professor of psychology at SMU. The American has been with SMU since it started operations in 2000.

"Wearing something bright helps to retain my students' attention. People make their first impression of others in the first three seconds so image is important. Dressing properly is also a form of self-respect. SMU students dress up professionally when they have presentations and are casual when they don't. I don't have any issues with their dressing. ""They should focus on studying and making it to my 8.30am class on time instead of worrying about what to wear."

WELL-DRESSED

What makes great student fashion? It took a while but Urban sussed out six well-dressed students

REUBEN JOSEPH ONG, 22
Second-year student from SMU's school of accountancy

"I am a shoe whore like Carrie Bradshaw from Sex And The City. I have over 30 pairs of shoes like sneakers, sports shoe, leather shoes and slippers. I like minimalist designs and go for the relaxed look. Bermudas are a no no because of my skinny legs. My style must break up since my girlfriend doesn't mind introducing me to her friends."

CELINE TAN SIEW HUI, 20
Second-year student from SMU's school of economics and social sciences

"I like clothes that don't restrict my movements, like free-flowing dance pants and jeans. I accessorise with earrings and belts to add character to my dressing. It's important to dress up for school because first impressions count, for both teachers and my peers. I'll rate my dressing a 7.5 out of 10 and no higher because I am modest."

FREDDIE LIM, 22
Second-year student from NUS' faculty of law

"I go for the street style so you will always find me dressed in t-shirt, jeans and sneakers. I might seem to have a vanity problem but I just want to look nice, especially since the students in my faculty dress up all the time. Perhaps it's a rebound from my uniform days in school and the army - there was no chance to dress up then so I'm making up for lost time now."
DR STEFANO PERLUSZ, 34
Assistant professor of management at SMU’s Lee Kong Chian school of business. Also voted “sexiest male teacher” by SMU students in 2003. He will be getting married to his Singaporean-Chinese girlfriend by the end of the year. The Eritrean has a PhD in mechanical engineering from Denmark and arrived here in 2002 to teach at SMU.

“Make an effort to dress up as a sign of respect for my students. I keep three jackets, five pairs of pants and a drawer of T-shirts in my office so I can change into the appropriate attire for class since I cycle to school every day. My favorite brand is Ermengildo Zegna – it has the best range of silk and linen clothing.”

Singapore students are generally better dressed than those in Italy and Denmark.

“The female students here wear skirts and dresses while the men will wear pants and even jackets for class presentations. But there are a few occasions when I’ve seen the girls dressing too sedately for class – their minds and low-cut tops.”

DR XU RONG, 31
Assistant professor at NTU’s school of chemical and biomedical engineering since 2004. She is from China and has been living here for the past 12 years. She is married and has no children.

“I go for simple shirts with skirts or dark pants and low heels for an informal look. My style makes me approachable to my students.”

Having studied in NUS from 1994 to 2004, I think all engineering students from both schools dress casually. I feel that students can dress in anything they like so long as they feel comfortable and can concentrate in class.

DR ADRIAN CHEOK, 33
An associate professor at NTU’s school of computer engineering and school of art, design and media. He is also the director of the Interaction and Entertainment Research Center in NTU. The Australian was teaching in NUS for seven years before moving to NTU in July this year. He is married with no children.

“Dressing is a form of self-expression. The university should be a hot spot for creativity so there shouldn’t be a dress code except for important functions. I go for both dark and bright colours depending on my mood. I enjoy wearing clothes that can make people smile. I like my pink long-sleeved shirt and bright red tie with Chinese characters that I bought from Shanghai. Nothing is too colourful for me.”

While Singaporean women collect shoes, I have collected 300 T-shirts with bold prints over the decade and which I wear to work during the weekends. So long as you prove yourself at work, people don’t care how you look.”

WEE SUI LEE, 22
Final year student from NTU’s school of communication and information (SCi). Coincidentally, also Reuben Joseph Ong’s girlfriend.

“I have what my friends call an eclectic or edgy style of dressing. I don’t like plain clothes because they don’t portray my vibrant character. The competition here at SCi is stiff with its huge population of female students so I have to wear clothes with stripes and prints as well as chunky accessories to make me stand out from the crowd. Guess I’m well, vain.”

ZABU KYAW, 26
Myanmar first-year student from NTU’s school of electrical and electronic engineering.

“My ensemble of tight jeans, fitting black t-shirts and sneakers reflects my punk personality. Wearing a loose T-shirt makes a person look sloppy. I love straight-cut jeans and even eight pairs, mainly from Levi’s and Guess.”

KAREN HENG
(Left), 21
Third-year student from NUS faculty of arts and social sciences.

“I don’t like my pants to drag on the floor so I usually wear caps or fold my jeans up. I match them with tank tops, tubes or spaghetti tops to show off my shoulders. I have over 30 pairs of earrings to complement my dressing – the bigger the better. Since they frame my small face, I think dressing is important even for school. It’s a way of self-expression.”

Photographers: CAROLINE CHIA ALAN LIM ADRIAN SIM HAZEL YONG