SINGAPORE: The best and brightest young minds are being encouraged to pursue a high-flying career in the infocomm industry.

Singapore Management University and America's Carnegie Mellon University are jointly offering a new fast-track programme, which will culminate in a Master's degree in four years instead of the usual five.

The unique partnership is believed to be the first for any institution outside the US.

Reflecting the closeness between SMU and Carnegie Mellon, the programme was finalised after just some two months of discussions.

SMU and Carnegie Mellon will also be collaborating in other areas like student exchange programmes and pedagogy development.

Outstanding polytechnic and junior college students will be eligible to apply for the four-year programme, which will see them spending equal amounts of time in each university.

Their course of study will be an unusual mix of IT, business and liberal arts to give them both a Bachelor of Science from SMU and a Master's degree from Carnegie Mellon.

The seven areas of specialisation for the Master's degree include information systems management, information networking and information security.

Said Professor Steven Miller, dean of SMU's School of Information Systems, "They can choose from any one of seven Master's that really cover a range of IT and in addition SMU and Carnegie Mellon coordinate on getting them internships. This is very special and unusual."

For American educational heavyweight Carnegie Mellon, Singapore was the natural focal point for its work to expand its Asian presence.

Said Dr Jared Cohon, president, Carnegie Mellon University, "We'll be getting some of the best students in Singapore coming to Carnegie Mellon to get their Master's degree. That's a very high value for Carnegie Mellon University and we benefit directly from it."

Singapore's Infocomm Development Authority has set aside S$12 million worth of scholarship funding over the next five years to attract students.

It will provide for 40 scholarships paying for the full expenses of the programme.

Said Chan Yeng Kit, CEO, Infocomm Development Authority, "IDA believes that investment in talent, investment in manpower development is critical; talent will drive the industry. So if the demand is high, and the quality of students is good, we will be very happy to increase the funding for this programme and expand this programme."

The first batch of students under this special programme will be graduating in 2010.

They can look forward to employment with one of the 14 companies which are sponsoring their scholarships.

These include big international names like Microsoft, Intel and Oracle, and major local companies like DBS and SingTel. - CNA /ct