For SMU, small is beautiful — it won’t up intake despite demand

Dons say varsity will stay small to focus better on its students

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DESPITE surging demand, the Singapore Management University (SMU) has decided not to expand.

SMU dons — rejecting calls to increase the intake — confirmed that it will remain a small business university so as to focus better on its students.

Calls for expansion grew loud as a whopping 9,400 applications were received for the 1,100 places offered in August last year.

But SMU provost Tan Chin Tiong said: “We are known for our American-style approach, where students are taught in small groups of about 40 to 60 students. Also, we encourage our students to speak up, and in some courses, as much as 30 per cent of the marks go to participation. Remaining small enables us to keep this approach.”

SMU president Howard Hunter agreed, saying that a 6,000-undergraduate size is the same as that of the best private universities in the United States.

The six-year-old SMU, which aims to offer 1,500 seats every year, is targeting a total undergraduate enrolment of 6,000 by the year 2010. It now has 4,000 students in its business, accounting, economics and social sciences and information systems programmes, but the number will be gradually increased as the faculty is beefed up.

The National University of Singapore (NUS) and Nanyang Technological University (NTU) offer between 4,000 and 6,000 places every year, and each has an undergraduate population of more than 20,000.

The demand for SMU places comes in spite of the university raising its tuition fees by 15 per cent and charging $570 a year more than NUS and NTU.

Professor Hunter, quoting the university’s graduate employment survey results last year, said employers see the value of the SMU style of education.

Two-thirds of its pioneer class of 309 business management students were polled and all had landed jobs within six months of graduating, with more than half reporting they had found jobs even before leaving school. Their average annual starting pay was $32,500.

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