SMU aim: Global exposure for students

By Zakir Hussain

DURING his four years at Singapore Management University (SMU), Mr Nadir Ali Zafar spent a total of 12 months overseas. He took up an internship in Thailand, studied for a semester in Denmark and went on a study mission to Southern India.

His experience, however, was not unusual at SMU. Almost 40 per cent of its students go overseas as part of their education. And SMU said every student who applies for overseas exchange is given approval.

They could also seek to intern in companies, do community service abroad or go on business study missions to explore opportunities and learn about cultural sensitivities, from Silicon Valley to Spain.

Yesterday, Mr Zafar’s experiences were cited by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, who said: “I am sure this exposure offered a tremendous learning experience which will stay with him for a long time.”

Mr Zafar, a former Anglo-Chinese Junior College student, graduated from SMU in 2004 with a business management degree.

He is now a management trainee at shipping group Neptune Orient Lines (NOL), working in Mumbai for transport and logistics company APL, an NOL subsidiary.

Speaking on the phone from India, the 26-year-old said he took up the overseas opportunities while in school as he “wanted to take the leap into the unknown”.

One month after he returned from a three-month internship at Bangkok’s KPN-ST Logistics company in July 2002, he left for a five-month-long semester at the Aarhus School of Business in Denmark.

Mr Zafar says his overseas experiences, which included a two-week study visit to Chennai, Hyderabad and Bangalore in his final semester, have helped him in his current job. “I was able to break out of my comfort zone.”

SMU hopes to have all its undergraduates receive some form of global exposure in the next five years, said a spokesman.

Students of Singapore’s two other national universities also have stints abroad. The National University of Singapore and Nanyang Technological University currently send 20 per cent of their students overseas.

They hope that by 2008, half of all their undergraduates will head overseas on exchange programmes, or research and work attachments.

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