An all-round education in the social sciences

The social sciences programme available at the Singapore Management University is fast gaining popularity. Find out what exactly it has to offer.

By CINDY TONG

IN 2004, the Singapore Management University (SMU) first added a social science programme to its list of available undergraduate courses. Two years on, the programme seems to be enjoying increasing popularity.

The four-year Bachelor of Social Science course, which allows students to take up subjects from other degree programmes, is headed by Professor Roberto Mariano from the University of Pennsylvania, who is dean of SMU’s School of Economics and Social Sciences.

It allows students to experience a wide range of disciplines, including subjects such as sociology and creative thinking, in their first year.

From the second year, students can choose to major in psychology, political science, or sociology. They can also opt to do a double degree, with a second specialisation in business management, economics, accounting, or information systems management.

Perhaps due to its flexibility, SMU’s Bachelor of Social Science programme has seen applications from some of the very best students. Thirty-eight per cent of those who applied scored slightly better than a B average for their A-level examinations, and to date, 334 places have already been taken up.

Engaging course instruction

Current undergraduates enrolled in the programme were more than enthusiastic about the benefits of the course. Mr Siddharth Poddar, 21, a fourth-year economics and social sciences undergraduate, said it was mostly due to the method of instruction.

He said: “We are given the freedom to think and make choices of our own. For example, if we are given a project assignment and feel that the topics we are told to cover fail to interest us, we can always approach the lecturers with our own ideas.”

Ms Leong Ai Lin, 22, a fourth-year social sciences and business undergraduate added: “It helps that the lecturers know us all by name. It’s a small community and we’ve developed quite a close bond. All of us, including lecturers, even meet up sometimes for coffee-cum-debate sessions.”

The course also requires undergraduates to undergo internships in various industries. Mr Poddar, for example, is now attached to The Straits Times Foreign Desk, and has even worked with the Singapore Institute of International Affairs.

Career prospects

While a degree in the social sciences has long been the second choice of aspiring lawyers and doctors, such programmes have been more popular in the West. However, Singapore will find greater relevance for such degrees as its economy progresses.

“The dean for SMU, Professor Roberto Mariano, pointed out: “An education in the liberal arts of social sciences is a route to careers in government policy making, management consultancy, journalism, academia, diplomacy and non-profit work.”

“In Singapore’s thrust to becoming a knowledge-based economy, social sciences are a key in generating cutting-edge research with global impact, and producing broad-based creative and entrepreneurial leaders.”

To send article contributions, comments, views and story ideas, e-mail recruit@sp.com.sg

When you contribute to The Straits Times Recruit, we take it that you agree, at no charge, to allow us to use, archive, resell or reproduce the letters and contributions in any way and in any medium.

“We are given the freedom to think and make choices of our own. For example, if we are given a project assignment and feel that the topics we are told to cover fail to interest us, we can always approach the lecturers with our own ideas.”

— MR SIDDHARTH PODOOAR, 21, A FOURTH-YEAR ECONOMICS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES UNDERGRADUATE