Nine fast-track degree options at local universities

Those joining these programmes – some jointly run with US varsities – can save a year; it is cheaper too

BY LIAN WY-CIN

ADD one more “integrated” to the list: programmes which allow students studying for a bachelor’s degree to seamlessly go on to a master’s.

The three local universities now offer a total of nine integrated packages where students study for a basic bachelor’s degree and an advanced master’s degree concurrently.

Under these through-train programmes, bachelor’s and master’s degree studies are integrated, with students starting to take master’s level courses near the end of their undergraduate years.

And while it normally takes about five to six years to earn a bachelor’s and a master’s separately, students in an integrated programme can save a year. It is cheaper too.

An integrated programme will thus appeal to those focused on getting a master’s from the start. It costs about $30,000 in total. Pursuing the two degrees separately can cost about $32,000 to $36,000 or more.

The National University of Singapore (NUS) has six such programmes, the Nanyang Technological University launched two last month and the Singapore Management University (SMU) introduced its programme one year earlier this year. The trend started last year when NUS offered two programmes.

Students can graduate with a bachelor’s degree in fields like business, engineering, computer science and law, and a master’s degree in management, engineering, IT and public policy. Some of these programmes are run by different faculties and schools within the university, but some are offered together with US universities.

NUS’ integrated computing and IT bachelor’s/master’s programme and SMU’s IT programme are run with the Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh and NTU’s two engineering programmes are offered with the Georgia Institute of Technology in Atlanta.

SMU student Huang Liang, 23, likes his fast-track option. He will be going to the US next month for the master’s leg of his course and will graduate with bachelor’s and master’s degrees in 2008, 4½ years after starting university.

But the take-up rate is still modest, with three NUS programmes and one SMU programme running so far, for a total of 14 students. All the other programmes will start next year.

Such integrated programmes do not seem to be popular with the top universities overseas, noted Associate Professor Quek Swee Aik, NUS Business School’s vice-dean (undergraduate studies).

“The integrated degrees we offer are very specialised and sometimes, the top universities prefer to train students more broadly so they can perform a wider range of tasks,” he said.

As for what is likely the most popular postgraduate degree – the Master of Business Administration – there is no short cut. A high premium is still placed on working experience by top universities offering the MBA.

Still, NUS is hoping to tap into a new market. With four of its six integrated programmes offered by the NUS Business School, it is hoping to break into a new European market for master’s studies for students without work experience, said Prof Quek.

SMU STUDENT HUANG LIANG, who will be going to the US next month for the master’s leg of his IT course

AT ONE GO

“It’s good to get all the studying out of the way. Sometimes, after working for some time, it takes a while to get the momentum back to start on a master’s degree.”

SMU STUDENT HUANG LIANG, who will be going to the US next month for the master’s leg of his IT course