SMU tuition fees up 15%

Hike applies only to new students, more scholarships to be provided

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JUST a year after raising tuition fees by 15 per cent, the Singapore Management University (SMU) is increasing fees by 15 per cent for new students enrolling this academic year.

While this means incoming students will have to fork out $7,500 a year instead of $6,500 — which current undergraduates are paying — they will not have to worry about further fee increases as fees are locked in for the duration of each cohort’s four-year course.

Yesterday’s announcement came on the heels of news of a 3 per cent tuition fee increase at both the National University of Singapore (NUS) and Nanyang Technological University (NTU). Unlike SMU, both institutions are applying the hike across the board.

Rising costs as well as the need to build up its endowment fund were reasons SMU cited for the fee increase.

Last year, its 15 per cent hike saw tuition fees go up from $5,650 to $6,500. But enrolment did not suffer — indeed it went up by 25 per cent.

Still, SMU’s system of increasing fees for incoming cohorts rather than across the campus had drawn mixed reactions. And it still did, when TODAY spoke to some junior college students yesterday.

Said Ms Sampoorna Dasgupta, 17, of Anglo-Chinese Junior College: “I think increases on a year-to-year basis — like NUS’ or NTU’s system — are better, because it gives us more time to adjust to the higher costs as it happens each year.”

But Audrey Lim Hui Min, 17, thought the SMU system was fairer to students.

“I would want to start my degree with the knowledge that it’s a fixed increase and I won’t see any more hikes after that. I also think it’s a little unfair to students already enrolled to face a fee increase they might not have expected,” said the Catholic Junior College student.

Professor Tan Chin Tiong, Provost of SMU, said: “If you were to map out four years of fee increases, it probably is equivalent to, at best, 5 per cent on an annual basis. We find from the students and parents that locking in with one rate for the next four years is the most preferred model. They’d rather have some degree of certainty.”

In tandem with the higher tuition fees, Professor Howard Hunter, SMU president, said the budget set aside for bursaries and scholarships would increase 60 per cent.

Currently, one in nine incoming students receive scholarships each year with a total of 120 available. The university hopes to increase this proportion to one in five students.

This and other aspects of SMU’s academic environment — which offers students community outreach and internship programmes, among other things — should keep them coming to the university, said Prof Hunter.

There are about 300 undergraduates working as paid research and teaching assistant, and another 300 to 400 who work on campus under work-study grants.

At a separate event yesterday, Education Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam responded to the fee hikes by NUS and NTU by pointing out that the Government will continue to subsidise the universities heavily.

He said the fairer system would be to provide financial assistance for needy students, while allowing tertiary institutions to increase fees to reflect rising costs.