Holiday at school – overseas

NTU students get a taste of HK, German or US campus life

LEE U-WEN
u-wen@newstoday.com.sg

WHILE most undergraduates go on holiday, work part-time or simply put their feet up during their three-month vacation, the Nanyang Technological University (NTU) has an entirely different plan for its students.

It wants to send them straight back to school – but at prestigious universities around the world instead.

Last year, more than 1,000 of the NTU’s 6,000-strong cohort each year got to enjoy an overseas stint. By 2008, the aim is to have at least half the cohort travel abroad.

The new Global Summer Studies (GSS) programme, officially unveiled yesterday, is the fifth and latest initiative put out by the NTU to help do just that.

While its other four existing global education programmes are conducted during the academic year, the GSS, mooted by acting provost Professor Er Meng Hwa, is held during the May to July vacation period each year.

This will provide a much wider range of choices for students to experience life in a different country, said the NTU’s international relations director Sonny Hwa.

"Unlike, say, America, where going to summer school abroad is quite widespread, this concept is missing in our educational landscape, and we would like to see our students do likewise and receive that valuable exposure," he said.

For a start, nine of the NTU’s partner institutions will be part of the GSS, including the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) in the United States, the Chinese University of Hong Kong and the University of Stuttgart in Germany.

With each summer session lasting four to six weeks, students can earn up to eight credits, equivalent to about two to three modules’ worth of academic units at the NTU. They can choose to have them graded or as a pass/fail option, with all overseas credits fully transferable towards their degree.

Depending on the university picked, the cost of the summer programme could cost anywhere from under $1,000 to $7,000.

With about $2.5 million set aside for financial assistance schemes this year, Prof Er said needy students who want to go overseas will be given help to realise their ambitions.

Already, 230 students have completed their overseas stint under GSS since the soft launch last year, and plans are underway to expand the range of universities available.

Meanwhile, the university is in talks with three University of California campuses to allow second-year junior college and fresh polytechnic graduates to enrol under the GSS, with all credits earned counting for advance standing when they apply to the NTU.

Next year, the NTU will also set up its own summer school, which will allow foreign students from overseas universities to come to Singapore for short-term studies.

Over at the National University of Singapore, 36 per cent of its students get to go on overseas stints.

The Singapore Management University has about 40 per cent of its cohort going abroad as part of their education.

The latter also has a summer study programme where some 60 students each year get to spend their vacation at universities in countries such as Canada, Switzerland and the United States.