Tatas, SMU tie up for cross-cultural benefits
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MUMBAI: The Singapore Management University (SMU) is a relatively new management institute in Singapore compared to the old incumbents, the National University of Singapore and the Nanyang University.

It is barely six-years-old and was set up courtesy of a grant of S$50m by the Lee Family Foundation. But it has taken the lead over older institutions in forging relationships with corporates, and has just signed an MoU with the Tata Group. It's in fact the first time an Indian company has signed an MoU with any institute.

Speaking to ET, Howard Hunter, president, SMU, elaborated on the need for an official relationship and its benefits for the institute as well as the companies.

Institutes often have an informal relationship with corporates. Why has SMU signed the MoU with the Tatas? Is the SMU looking to tie up with other Indian corporates?

Well, it did start out as a very informal relationship a couple of years ago, when the Tata Group hired five interns from SMU. This number has tripled since then. The MoU seeks to formalise this. We see the possibility of a number of different collaborations across the various group companies.

We will have collaborations in training and research for faculty as well. The focus area will continue to be internships for our undergraduates and hope some of them will turn into permanent employment. Also, we want to associate with the group because of its high level of involvement in the social sector.

What advantage do SMU students bring to companies?

We believe our students are cross-cultural in their educational experience. The bulk of them are Asians but we’re seeing Europeans and Africans join our undergraduate courses. Also, for any company that’s doing business in the region, it’s hard to ignore Singapore. It’s a neutral country with a lot of MNC activity and is at the cross-roads for the Western and Asian cultures.

More importantly, the Tata group wants to become an international company from inside out and not just externally. Hiring people who have their roots in a foreign country like China but have global experience will be a lot better than sending an Indian to China and making him learn Mandarin.

What opportunities do you foresee for SMU through such tie-ups?

The big opportunity is for the faculty to interact with companies in various disciplines as well as with Tata Management Training Centre. It’s an opportunity to see real-time economic decisions taking place, with lots of data.

The faculty can also work on case studies, in areas like product development and launches and monitor the developments internally. We can tailor executive programs for companies and these needn’t be on campus.

What other tie-ups are you looking at in the future?

We have been speaking with a few companies here. Infosys has had a few interns and in fact Narayana Murthy is on the board of directors of SMU.

In Singapore, we have very specific tie-ups with Standard Chartered for a research lab within the school, and another of the local banks sponsored research in small and medium enterprises.

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