Headline: Prof Tan Chin Tiong: Receiving a broad-based education helps one prepare for the new economy

New SMU graduates to gain ten-year professional experience

SMU alumna: 'trying to break new ground'

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Prof Tan Chin Tiong: Receiving a broadbased education helps one prepare for the new economy

In tracing back the history of Singapore's third university - Singapore Management University, it is not hard to see how it keeps close to the thinking of Singapore with regard to university education. SMU was set up to meet the requirements and demand of the labour market and to ensure the quality of education.

The success of SMU reflects the changing education model. SMU's broad-based American styled pedagogy is welcomed by students and industry and its holistic approach to education is influencing the change in the local education scene. The reporter interviews SMU deputy president and provost Prof Tan Chin Tiong. Prof Tan has helped to develop the curriculum for SMU and has witnessed the development of SMU. The development of SMU can be used as an example when setting up the fourth university.

10 years of business management

From conception to present, after some 10 years, SMU is now a business management university with some 6,000 students. Very different from what was originally planned - a comprehensive university with an intake of 15,000 students.

Prof Tan Chin Tiong said that at the time, Dr Tony Tan suggested that SIM could be the third university. A special committee was set up and Prof Tan happened to be a member. During the discussions, another suggestion was that NTU could issue the degree while SIM focus on teaching. Although the parliament had announced that SIM would be the third university, plans changed.

Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania was then added into the plans and the set up committee opted for a special business management model. The third university then became an independent university specialising in business management with no relations to NTU and SIM.

SMU has spent 10 years developing into a business management university. Many different plans and ideas were tabled during its development. The planning for the fourth university will likely go through the same stages of planning but what it will be eventually is still too early to finalise.

With more financial organisations setting up in Singapore, talents that are well versed in business management are in demand. As a business management university, SMU has a close relationship with business organisations and is able to customise programmes according to industry needs.

Prof Tan said that right from the beginning we have formed close ties with the business community. All over the world, business universities have close relationships with industry and SMU is no exception. Business organisations work with us as they believe that we can supply them with what they need and can customise our courses to meet their requirements.

The attractiveness of the SMU curriculum is that it is closely related to industry. The success of SMU is that it meets the needs of the industry.

Development of the three local universities

For the past 20 years, S'pore has set up three universities. NUS in 1981, NTU in 1991 and SMU in 2000. Although the developmental path of the three universities is different, it reflects the different eras, policies at the time and the changing needs of university education. NUS came about through the combination of University of Singapore and Nanyang University. NTU was originally the Nanyang Technological Institute. SMU, the university with the shortest history, cooperated with the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania and started from ground zero. Starting with the first batch of 300 students, SMU now has more than 5,000 students and next year we’ll be looking at some 6,200 students.

SMU graduates welcomed by the market

Applications to SMU have exceeded supply over the years. More importantly, SMU graduates are in great demand in the market. For the last two consecutive years, SMU graduates have had 100% employment and most of the students were employed before and soon after graduation. SMU can take in good quality students because it meets the needs of the students. SMU's American pedagogy requires students to submit compositions and go through interviews, thus increasing the bar of entry. Students find this to be challenging and it allows SMU to take in students who are willing to put more effort to get in. Every student is required to complete 80 hours of community service before graduation. Social service, leadership training and team building provides the students with an all rounded education and has allowed SMU to build its own unique culture.

As a new university, SMU needs to attract and compete with other universities for quality faculty. Salary for quality business management faculty has been on the rise over the years. Hiring good quality faculty is not easy but as the reputation of SMU grows, hiring good quality faculty has become much easier.