UNDERGRADUATES bitten by the investment bug amid a booming stock market are making their five-figure sums fatter by moonlighting as stock-picking professionals.

More than 2,000 students from faculties such as the Arts and Media Design School, the Business School and the National University of Singapore (NUS), are joining the investing scene, competing with Wall Street moguls who have served national service.

One is Mr Chen Jianwen, a 23-year-old honours year business administration student at the National University of Singapore (NUS). He has built up an investment stash from past Chinese New Year hong bao, his pay as an agent during national service and part-time jobs.

The 22-year-old recorded a 35 per cent rise in the past three years, his portfolio has grown to around $10,000, buoyed by Singapore Exchange shares soaring from his purchase price of $1.50 each to around $7.

A sign of the times, Singapore Management University (SMU) undergraduate Chan Ying Fan says: "Comprehensive copies of The Business Times and Financial Times are almost always crammed in their bags when they arrive on campus.

Students dream in sections of the syllabus that deal with stocks, says Mr Chan. He is president of the E.Y.E Investment Interactive Club, whose member rolls have swelled from 30 members two years ago to 500 now.

"Students logged on to trading portals even during lessons. In the canteen, but stocks are hot topics." At Nanyang Technological University (NTU), there are far more students who want to invest in the stock market than there are vacancies, says Mr Jacky Xu, president of the Investment Interactive Club.

The nervousness at investing are funneled for knowledge on what to buy.

Last December, more than 600 students signed up for a talk by broker OCBC Securities, prompting the NUS Investment Group to hold two sessions back to back instead of turning half the crowd away.

Mr Chen says that another event — a "How To Be A Successful Investor" seminar by DBS Victoriam Securities — was well attended, with students sitting along the aisles and some standing at the back.

A few students have an early start in investing.

During national service, Mr Hou Wei Fa, 22, an NUS business management and accountancy undergraduate, devoured articles on American billionnaire Warren Buffett and his investing approach.

Thanks to that inspiration, he has doubled his profits in the past year, transforming his five-figure capital into five-figure gains.

Mr Chen of NUS says: "I always tell friends: 'It's never too early to start investing. Neither must you be rich.'"

He points out that many students would be interested in an investment seminar when an investment in United Food Holdings, a China food company, turned sour.

He quickened his learning of investing fundamentals, and was likewise inspired by the strategies of stock market maestros like Mr Buffett.

Another SMU undergraduate student-investor hailing from a finance-related course of studies.

But with the Straits Times Index soaring to as high as 3,300 points recently from around 2,000 points just a year ago, students from faculties such as the Arts and Media Design School, are joining the investing party too, notes Mr Xu of NTU.

Honing investment skills

STUDENT investors are mostly males who have served national service and are over 21 — the age when they become eligible to open stock trading accounts. First-year women undergraduates are mostly 18.

For any student, the allure of making a quick buck tempts him to lock in quick profits quickly, instead of investing for the long haul.

At investment clubs, they learn more advanced investment skills which tend to lead to long-term investing, says, SMU undergraduate Liu Wei, 21, adds: "We discuss ideas about what makes a company great, or what valuation models are appropriate to value different types of companies."

As his club president, Mr Chan: "A year or two back, students were asking about basics such as how to open a trading account. "Today, they ask more sophisticated stuff. Which technical analysis software do you use?" and "What are some good books to learn how to do my own discounted cash flow models?"

Given such good grounding, some students will go on to become successful investors but, for now, they are content with the allure of the stock market.

Undergraduates like Mr Hou — who says he has made a profit from trading stocks, commodities futures, warrants and the like — think they know better.

"The main difference between today and the past is that stocks now give a faster, driven profit. Therefore, you can have more success more quickly."

He says: "Even 3 per cent of the returns are more worthwhile.

You improve your odds by 'arming yourself' with an abundance of investing knowledge. "And train yourself to respond in the heat of a battle," he adds.