A mentor who wears many hats

ASK Professor Low Aik Meng about his role at the Singapore Management University, and his response is simple: To oversee everything concerning students — outside the classroom.

From giving advice about jobs, internships or activities to join, to helping someone with financial woes, Prof Low has done it all during his nine years thus far as Dean of Students.

Indeed, the 60-year-old says he is more than happy to wear many hats, be it as a lunch companion, a guest of honour at student-led events — or as a friend.

One message he drums into his students is to build up their “Co-curricular Activity (CCA)” portion of their resume.

“I tell every batch of freshmen: ‘Don’t hide in the library all the time, because employers aren’t looking for that type of person.’ Doing well is not merely scoring straight As. Your CCA is important, too,” he said.

So long as students play their part, SMU will do its best to ensure they land a job upon — or even before — graduation. Each year, the career services office produces a thick book with the resumes of its graduating class. Employers in SMU’s vast network, which includes banks, accounting firms, multinational companies and the civil service, each get a copy.

Prof Low, who has spent 12 years each at the National University of Singapore and Nanyang Technological University, joined SMU in 1998 as a core member of its founding team.

“As you go beyond boundaries, learning can no longer be just within the classroom. So, we emphasised small classes, lots of interaction and personality development.”

Asked to describe the ideal SMU student, Prof Low did not hesitate: “Someone who can communicate well and interact with others, who isn’t afraid to express himself. We’ve had very shy students who were transformed into the exact opposite upon graduation.”

Thanks to what happens outside the classroom, no doubt.

If you have a question for Prof Low on how to build up your resume, email succeed@newsstoday.com.sg and he will answer your question in QuizTime next week.