SINGAPORE: The Temasek Foundation on Friday gave S$430,000 to the Singapore Management University (SMU), to fund the new Temasek Foundation-SMU Leadership Enrichment and Regional Networking Programme (LEaRN) for a year.

Currently, about a third of SMU students get some form of overseas exposure. The university hopes to raise this to half.

This is where the S$430,000 Temasek Foundation-SMU LEaRN Programme will help.

It will fund 40 SMU students - who excel not only in their studies but also in community work - on an overseas exchange scholarship worth up to S$4,250 each.

They will spend a semester in an Asian partner university - in countries like China, Hong Kong, Japan, the Philippines, South Korea, Taiwan and Thailand - and will be required to take part in meaningful community projects in the host country.

Michelle Khoo, Third-Year Accountancy Student, Singapore Management University, said: "I'm very happy that this scholarship has a community service element, because when we organise overseas community service projects, we only have 3 or 4 days to get to know the community. So we may not be providing what they truly need.

"With this scholarship, our students will have 3 or 4 months to understand their chosen country and work with the communities in need there, and hopefully they will be able to come back and we can organise more meaningful overseas community service projects in the future."

Thor Chun Ping, Third-Year Economics Student, Singapore Management University, said: "This scholarship provides a lot of networking opportunities for students, especially right now Asia is experiencing a boom and the European and American markets are very soft.

"So I thought by going on an exchange programme to Asia, I can learn more about the culture of the region and tap into the opportunities."

For a start, 40 students from 31 universities across Asia will come to the SMU on an exchange programme. These foreign students will get to perform community service, and they will be hosted by local families for a taste of the Singapore culture.

Benedict Cheong, CEO, Temasek Foundation, said: "Because of the leadership potential in these students, both on the Singapore side and also from the Asian universities, we hope that in future when they get into business or when they get into government or non-profit leadership, they get a chance to work together, remember their stay here, and just make phone calls to each other, email each other and get things done.

"We've taken the decision to fund programmes for one year in the first instance. But we see a lot of potential in this programme to bring young people together to start to build the networks. And I'm very confident the programme will do well and if that's so, there's no doubt we'll continue to fund this for a long period of time."

The S$430,000 contribution by Temasek Foundation will be matched dollar for dollar by the Singapore government. - CNA/ms