SMU don donates $80k to start scholarship

He is among 60 faculty members who have donated $700,000 in recent years to fund university schemes

BY THERESA TAN
Community Correspondent

FOR Miss Phelicia Goh, 25, it was a financial struggle putting herself through university.

Then last year, a lifeline came in the form of a scholarship from her school - the School of Information Systems (SIS) at the Singapore Management University (SMU).

She was also thrilled later to discover that the scholarship money came from her dean, Dr Steven Miller.

He is not alone in his generosity. About 60 SMU faculty members have donated close to $700,000 in recent years towards university schemes.

Dr Miller, 51, pumped in $80,000 of his own money to start the SIS scholarship in 2004.

The professor said he has come across many good students who needed financial help. He did not wish to see them drop out of school due to financial woes at home.

Dr Miller, whose wife volunteers to help tsunami orphans in Aceh, Indonesia, said: "To be an educator is not just to teach a class, but to make a difference. And to do so, we have to get involved in our students' lives."

Other SMU academic staff share his conviction.

Just last month, one professor, who declined to be identified, donated about $20,000 to buy a keel-boat for SMU's sailing club.

He has given the university about $85,000 so far, including $32,000 to buy a grand piano and $10,000 to fund scholarships. He said: "We must put our money where our mouth is."

The professor said he believed "very strongly" in the value of activities like sailing, which teaches students about leadership and teamwork.

He learnt that the sailing club needed a second boat so two boats could race each other, so he sponsored the boat.

The students had no idea that the boat was bought by him, he said with a chuckle.

Miss Goh was also unaware that Dr Miller had donated the initial sum for the SIS scholarship. She learnt about it only when she was interviewed for this story.

The second daughter in a family of three children, Miss Goh said her dad was jobless.

Now a final-year student, she used to give tuition to about 20 students to get by. "It was very taxing mentally and physically juggling both studies and work," she said.

Now, her scholarship covers her tuition fees.

The value of a scholarship depends on each individual case, but it is generally about $5,000 a year. So far, 18 students have received the SIS scholarship.

Miss Goh said: "It's very sweet and generous of Dr Miller to give the money. His act is inspirational."

ST PHOTO: CHEW SENS KIM

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GENEROUS GIVING: Miss Phelicia Goh and Mr Raymond Leong, both 25, are two of the beneficiaries of the scholarship fund that their professor, Dr Steven Miller, started with $80,000 of his own money in 2004.