SMU offers MBA that can be completed in one year

Shortest programme available at local varsities will focus on softer skills

By Fiona Chan

IT TOOK eight years to put together, but Singapore’s third university has finally launched its Master of Business Administration (MBA) programme.

Singapore Management University (SMU) yesterday unveiled its accelerated one-year programme— the shortest to be offered by a local varsity—and said it would emphasise softer skills such as negotiation and ethics.

These subjects are usually optional in traditional MBA curricula, but have come into focus lately as companies seek executives with better management and leadership abilities, said Ms Doris Sohmen-Pao, the director of the university’s MBA programme.

“We are the only school I know of in the world offering ethics as a core subject,” she said. The 11 core courses in SMU’s curriculum will also include negotiation and corporate governance.

Most other MBA curricula tend to be very functional, with core classes typically in technical skills such as finance and marketing, added Professor Tan Chin Hong, SMU’s provost and deputy president.

“But today’s problems cut across various functions,” he said, adding that more multidisciplinary and integrative abilities— such as communication and people skills— are required to tackle them.

SMU is also hoping its shorter programme, modelled after European institutions such as INSEAD, will be a draw.

Full-time students will take only one year to get their MBA degree, compared to 16 or 17 months for the full-time programmes at Singapore’s two other universities.

But SMU’s course is significantly more expensive. At $49,800, it costs 25 per cent more than the National University of Singapore’s full-time MBA programme and 78 per cent more than that at Nanyang Technological University.

SMU also offers a 16-month part-time programme at $51,900— also much costlier than comparable courses at the other two local varsities.

The deliberate higher pricing is due to the belief that SMU “deserves a premium”, said Prof Tan.

Its MBA course will draw on more than 200 of SMU’s teaching staff at SMU’s six schools.

“The university is aiming for all its MBA students to land jobs right after graduation, the same standard it has achieved for its undergraduate schemes,” he said.

In time, SMU also hopes its MBA programme will be the top ranked in Singapore, added Ms Sohmen-Pao, who joined the university in July.

The former director of INSEAD’s MBA programme in Singapore and France, Ms Sohmen-Pao, is one of the main reasons the university has finally managed to get its MBA act together.

Interested candidates can ask for applications online via SMU’s website. They have until April 14 to apply for the part-time course and until Aug 1 for the full-time course.

The part-time course will start in September, while the full-time course will start in January next year.

Each class will have 30 to 50 students. Applicants are expected to have a minimum of two years’ working experience, although six to 15 years is recommended.