Varsities up tuition fees by 4% to 20%

NUS, NTU, SMU to cushion effect with more financial aid and 'lock-in' system

By Jane Ng

TUITION fees at the three local universities will go up by between 4 per cent and 20 per cent for the new batch of undergraduates entering in August.

But to cushion their effect, all the varsities will introduce more financial help schemes, as well as a "lock-in" fee structure first pioneered by the Singapore Management University (SMU), where students pay a set fee and will not be affected by future increases.

The fee hikes, announced yesterday, will see students who are taking most of the courses paying $250 more.

However, those reading law and business at the National University of Singapore (NUS) and SMU will see increases of up to $1,200.

The hikes – the first since 2006 – are necessary because of a rise in manpower and operating costs, and will not affect current students, the universities said yesterday. They had planned to raise charges last year, but held back because of the increase in the goods and services tax (GST) from 5 per cent to 7 per cent.

The new fee structure will see SMU leading the pack, with students at its law school paying $10,050 a year, a 12 per cent rise from last year.

Fees for other courses at SMU – which charges more than the other two universities, mainly because it is smaller and does not enjoy economies of scale – will go up by 10 per cent, from $8,300 to $9,130.

Nanyang Technological University (NTU) students will have to pay a flat 4 per cent more, regardless of what course they take. This works out to an annual fee of $6,360, up $250.

At NUS, most students will also pay $6,360, up $250 (4 per cent) from $6,110.

But business course fees will go up by 7 per cent, to $6,540, and fees for the law course will rise by 20 per cent to $7,340.

In announcing the fee rises, the universities also drew a sharper distinction between what Singaporeans will pay and what their foreign counterparts will have to fork out.

From August, permanent residents will pay 10 per cent more than Singaporeans – there was no difference previously.

Foreigners, meanwhile, will pay 50 per cent more, a big change from the past, where their fee premium was just 10 per cent.

The Government had announced in 2006 that there would be greater differentiation in tuition fees between the three groups because its first responsibility is to Singaporeans.

Yesterday, NUS deputy president (academic affairs) and provost professor Tan Eng Chye explained the need for higher increases in the law and business courses.

He said the university needed to stay ahead of the competition by retaining talent in the face of increasing wages in the industry, and added that teaching staff at the two faculties are highly mobile.

Also in the works are plans for smaller class sizes at NUS, which will translate into the need for more manpower.

In tandem with the fee rises, the universities are working with the Education Ministry to enhance their financial assistance schemes.

They gave the assurance that no deserving student will be deprived of a university education because of financial constraints.

NUS also announced yesterday an increase in hostel fees, from an average of $60 a week for a single room to $75 in August. Further increases will be phased in over three years until it reaches $100 in 2010. The rise is to cover operating and repair costs, said an NUS spokesman.

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