I REFER to last Saturday’s report, “Give to varsity? No, thanks”. We are happy to note the mention of SMU as the “lone bright spot” in alumni giving. We have indeed seen a positive trend of alumni who believe in giving back to their alma mater, in ways monetary or otherwise.

Like the practice in many American universities, each graduating cohort of SMU makes a senior class gift which is channelled towards scholarships to help needy students. This is a tradition started in 2004 by the pioneer batch of SMU graduates.

This year’s batch, comprising just over 1,000 fresh graduates, contributed a total of $13,000 towards the senior class gift with a participation rate of close to 50 per cent, up from 30 per cent in previous years.

This is well above the 11.7 per cent average alumni participation rate across universities in the United States. The report, however, compared the $13,000 contribution by SMU alumni with the $5 million and $1.32 million from alumni of NUS and NTU respectively.

This is a misleading comparison as the amount contributed by SMU alumni comes from only one single graduating batch of that year – the class of 2008 – whereas figures from the other universities comprise donations by graduates from among a much larger alumni base across many years numbering more than 100,000.

We have also been encouraged by examples of alumni who have given back to the university, beyond the senior class gift. In 2006, newly graduated alumnus Darren Lim pledged $4,000 annually to SMU to set up a scholarship to help students with financial hardship.

Last year, an alumna donated $9,000 towards the Chua It Wee Financial Scholarship. This year, another alumnus pledged $10,000 every year to set up the Krishna Exchange Scholarship.

SMU believes that monetary contribution is just one of many ways in which alumni can give back to the alma mater. More importantly, we want to build up a strong alumni which stays connected to the university through various means.

Over the years, many have volunteered to be mentors to junior students, help out during admissions interviews, share experiences at career talks, or be involved in the alumni association.

In engaging our students, it is pivotal to cultivate a special bond from the very first time freshmen enter the university. This, we believe, is key to instilling a sense of pride in SMU.

Wong Hur Ming
President
Alumni Association
Singapore Management University
Class of 2005