He's a man on a mission

HOW about a techno Master of Business Administration (MBA) that incorporates elements of information technology — or a graduate business programme with a focus on the mathematical sciences.

With MBA courses proliferating on the local scene, these are some of the ideas the Singapore Management University (SMU) is mulling over to give their offerings a unique twist, as it looks into expanding its postgraduate programme.

And the man behind these ideas is Professor Rajendra K Srivastava, who will take up the post of SMU’s new Provost and vice-president for academic affairs from July 1.

Currently based in the United States as a senior faculty member at Emory University’s Goizueta School of Business, Prof Srivastava’s main areas of specialisation include issues related to strategic brand management, customer management and market-driving strategies.

One of his notable accomplishments is the Austin Technology Incubator, which he helped manage in the late 1980s and mid-1990s.

It helped early-stage technology companies with business advice, and the 50 or so start-ups that graduated in 1994 experienced a total annual turnover of US$600 million in revenue.

At SMU, Prof Srivastava said, he would help to launch and accelerate new postgraduate research programmes, with the possibilities including a research laboratory, as well as collaboration with businesses and the Singapore Government.

“The research carried out by graduate students generate a new kind of knowledge and it is the research that sets the universities apart,” said the 57-year-old academic who is married with two sons and one daughter.

Incumbent Provost Tan Chin Tiong, who will continue in his role as SMU’s deputy president, said Prof Srivastava was one of the few academics in the field to delve into cross-disciplinary research.

Some of the potential programmes the varsity’s senior dons are discussing include an MBA that would tap on the expertise of its School of Information Systems to interface IT with business knowledge.

And because Asians tend to be strong in maths, another preliminary idea being looked at is postgraduate modules that are infused with mathematical science theory.

Prof Srivastava said he saw great potential in Singapore’s education scene as “it is only one of the two countries apart from Finland to consider education as a state religion”.

The Indian-born professor hopes to use this stint with SMU to understand the Asian economy better.

“I hope to be able to look back and say I was part of this great legacy of creating a successful graduate programme,” he said.