Standing Out

IN the arts, it is important to have your own unique perspective in order to stand out from the crowd. That is why the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA) actively seeks to attract international students.

“We want to embrace multiculturalism into our teaching and culture, so that our students will come up with a distinctive perspective,” said corporate relations manager Tan Sook at a media briefing recently.

Founded in 1938, NAFA is the oldest fine arts institution in Singapore, and is the alma mater of some of the country’s most eminent artists.

Succeeding generations of the same family have come and gone through its doors, as proven by Johor Baru student Evelyn Lim Boon Hwee, 18.

“My aunt graduated from here, and is now teaching at the School of Young Talents (part of the academy). She encouraged me to apply here,” said the first-year visual communications diploma student.

Aside from the academy’s reputation, an added bonus is that Evelyn is a recipient of the Talents Grant Scheme funded by Singapore’s Education Ministry.

Said Lim: “We set aside 120 places for international students who are eligible for tuition grants from the Singapore government. These are students who score well in their admission tests. They receive an average grant of about 50% of their fees, and are required to sign a three-year bond with the government.”

Evelyn added: “My school fees are about S$6,500 (RM14,988) per semester, and with the tuition grant, I only need to pay about S$2,000 (RM4,612).”

A corporate feel

Fees are no worry for Singapore Management University (SMU) student Suan Sim, 22. A former Asean scholar, the second-year economics student received a scholarship from the Keppel group for her undergraduate studies.

Although her initial choice was the National University of Singapore (NUS), she changed her mind after finding out more about SMU.

“I went for their open house and spoke to the lecturers, and decided that SMU was more my style as I’m an outgoing and talkative person. It was more real-life and application-based compared to NUS, which I felt was more theoretical,” Suan Sim said.

Having studied there for almost two years, she felt that SMU’s most distinguishing factor was the opportunities it offered.

“There are a lot of opportunities to go overseas, to do projects, to do our own learning. For example, in my class on Technology and World Change, 50% of the marks are allocated for a project in which we can do anything we like.”

On top of that, there are plenty of extracurricular activities to join, like salsa classes, golf lessons, and skydiving.

SMU students also have to complete at least 80 hours of community service before graduating.

“I had the chance to go to Thailand for an elephant conservation project for two weeks last December,” shared Suan Sim, who comes from Johor Baru. “It was very memorable and peaceful as it was really going back to nature.”

Going back to Mother Nature is certainly a contrast to the high-powered corporate feel of the university.

“We all feel very geared up for internships and corporate life: it’s not only about our studies.”

Suan Sim concluded: “Students here tend to be more adventurous and have done different things before. That’s why they come here, and not a more traditional university.”

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SMU classes are conducted seminar-style with little barrier between lecturer and students, and marks are given for class participation. — Courtesy of SMU

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SUAN SIM: We all feel very geared up for internships and corporate life.