

What will it take for alumni to give back?

Student from SMU speak up

Intimate culture at small campus

BIG universities like NUS and Nanyang Technological University (NTU) have the muscle and heft of champion athletes, with their huge cohorts of 23,000 and 21,000 respectively.

But numbers can be deceiving. A Straits Times article last August revealed that less than 5 per cent of alumni from NUS and NTU give back to their alma mater. To me, this means they do not really care about the universities that gave them their degrees.

Some of my friends who went to these universities say they found their years there "not fulfilling or memorable". Specifically, they felt lost in a sea of faceless strangers and did not see how they could "make a difference".

By contrast, Singapore Management University's (SMU) smaller campus – for now – seems to offer more ways for its cohort of 6,100 to participate and feel valued.

Over time, intra-school activities such as planning for Patron's Day or the Arts Festival help forge bonds, and these relationships translate into a school spirit that keeps students engaged with the school after they graduate.

The smaller school size and the hard-working student leaders seem to do the trick. SMU somehow attracts its alumni back, if not to contribute in terms of dollars and cents, then in minutes and hours. Despite their busy lifestyles with demanding careers in the financial and energy sectors, they have been enthusiastic in giving back to their alma mater.

In my three years at SMU, I have benefit-

ed from invaluable alumni expertise and networks in planning for my overseas community service expedition, improving my performance in competitive sailing, and even planning for a career after graduation.

Such energy and drive have helped shaped my ideals and nudged me in the right direction in my university endeavours. School life has been all the more fulfilling with their support and advice.

Meanwhile, my friends at NTU and NUS say the contact they have with alumni is, at most, limited to their co-curricular activities. Who knows how much they could have benefited if their alumni were as active?

I am hoping that as SMU grows, it continues to maintain its intimate culture because while it is natural to want to expand, nice things do come in small packages too.

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