

# More help for needy students



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**J**UST last year, financial applications in the Singapore Management University (SMU) shot up by almost 40 per cent.

Similarly, both the National University of Singapore (NUS) and the Nanyang Technological University (NTU) said applications for financial assistance schemes are on the upswing.

Given the current dismal economic climate, the expectation is that such schemes for needy students will further increase in demand in the coming year.

Associate Professor Low Aik Meng, Dean of Students for SMU said there was a 36 per cent increase in their top five loans for students between 2007 and 2008.

He said: "Total applications have increased over the years as more assistance schemes are introduced and application criteria like household income are relaxed."

Of the expected rise in applications due the economic downturn, Assoc Prof Low said: "SMU is prepared to support more applications for financial assistance."

"We have also bolstered the budgets for various schemes such as the financial grant and work-study grant schemes to ensure that the financial needs of students, particularly in these trying times are met."

Amongst the various schemes offered at SMU, there is the tuition fee loan which allows local undergraduates to borrow up to 90 per cent of their tuition fees, if they come from households with monthly per capita income of \$2,400 and below.

In addition to this, the university has a host of other financial aid schemes including the SMU financial grant of \$2,000 for needy students, various bursaries and a Work Study Grant which pays them for working in various positions at the university.

Likewise NTU has had a "gradual growth" in its various loan schemes over the years said Dean of Admission and Financial Aid Professor Lalit Kumar Goel.

Its bursaries – which can range between \$800 to \$6,000 – have also been on the rise.

Last year there were about 3,300 bursaries awarded to students coming from families with monthly per capita income not exceeding \$1,700.

This is 700 more than the previous academic year. Prof Goel said: "In view of the downturn, the university is exploring ways to enhance our schemes to assist students experiencing a sudden loss in family income due to job cuts."

Currently, one third of its students take up its tuition fee loan which has no income restriction and about five per cent of its students take up the university's study loan.

The study loan has a requirement of monthly household income per capita not exceeding \$2,400.

Over at the National University of Singapore, Professor Tan Eng Chye, Deputy President (Academic Affairs) and Provost said applications have "increased steadily" over the past three years.

The numbers have jumped from 2000 three years ago to the 2,800 in the last academic year (2008/2009), a 40 per cent increase.

Prof Tan said: "During this period the university has enhanced its financial assistance schemes and increased efforts by the university's Office of Financial Aid to raise awareness amongst students about the availability of financial aid."

"These efforts contributed to the rise in applications for financial assistance."

He added that these packages ensure that no deserving student is denied tertiary education because of financial difficulties.

One of the beneficiaries of the financial aid scheme at NUS is Mr

Donald Lim, 24, a fourth-year Communications and New Media student.

The student who comes from a household with a monthly family income of \$1,500, benefits from a tuition fee loan which pays for 80 per cent of his school fees and a NUS Study Loan which pays the remaining 20 per cent. On top of this, he also receives bursaries each year amounting to about \$2,000 each year.

The freelance web consultant said: "The financial schemes on offer are pretty sufficient and the amount of help is comprehensive."

Having various financial aid schemes also gives would-be undergraduate Miss Y C Hao, 20, some peace of mind.

Miss Hao who is waiting for her A-level results currently supplements pocket money with part-time jobs like being a waitress.

She said: "I'm concerned, even though my father has said he will pay for my university fees. Things are unstable now, so you never know what to expect."



TNP PICTURE: **SHREE ANN MATHAVAN**

**BENEFITED:** Fourth year NUS student Donald Lim took up financial aid schemes offered by his school.