

Going beyond just getting a degree

Singapore Management University's Professional Development Series helps mature students develop skills beyond their specific disciplines

MARY LIM

POSTGRADUATE education has become increasingly popular. At the Singapore Management University (SMU), enrolment has jumped by 250 per cent since 2011, from under 400 to 1,000 every year. Between 2014 and 2015 alone, the number of students grew by over 20 per cent.

This has led SMU, which also offers doctoral and executive education and research courses, to expand its postgraduate offerings.

The university now offers 21 postgraduate programmes, and the most popular are the Master of Science in Applied Finance and Master of IT in Business, with an annual intake of 150 and 140 students respectively for 2015.

An extra cohort was also added to its Master of Science in Management and Master of Professional Accounting programmes last year.

Many are drawn to a postgraduate education for various reasons. "It is usually a combination of personal growth and professional opportunities," says Associate Professor Themin Swardy, SMU's deputy dean of postgraduate professional programmes.

"Some want to join a new field that requires specialised skills such as accounting, while others want to progress in their current workplace or industry by taking on leadership roles. There are also those who want to expand their knowledge in areas relevant to their career or pursuit, or to satisfy their intellectual curiosity."

A postgraduate degree is an important investment you will ever make, so it pays to choose wisely. Consider the match between prospects, programme and institution. Prof Themin says: "For example, if you travel often for work and cannot attend classes regularly, look for a programme with a more flexible

curriculum or taught in intensive 'blocks'. If you plan to join a new industry, make sure the programme has appropriate accreditations and recognition."

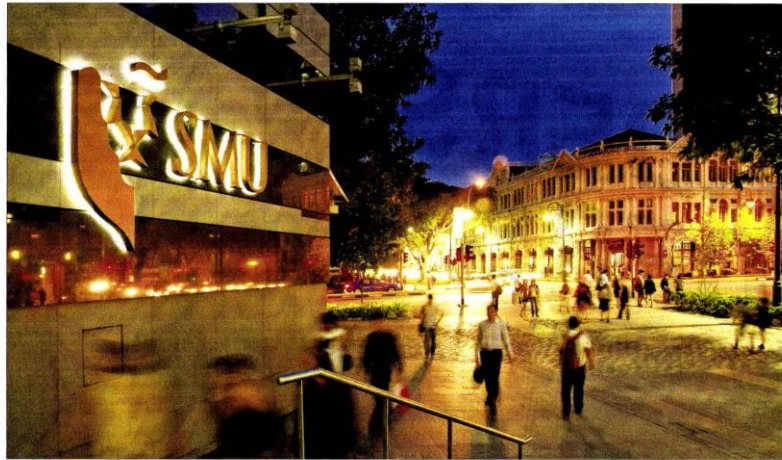
Where you study matters

Last year alone, SMU chalked up a string of accolades. Its Executive Master of Business Administration was rated 10th in Asia and 36th in the world to become the highest ranked entrant in the Financial Times EMBA Ranking in 2015. Its Master of Science in Applied Finance was named second in Asia by the Financial Times Global Masters in Finance Pre-experience Ranking, while its Master of Science in Wealth Management came in third globally in the Financial Times Global Masters in Finance Post-experience Ranking.

But where you study is just as crucial, says Prof Themin. "Like 'corporate culture', universities have their own characteristics. Find one you can identify with, and one that clearly understands and actually invests in their postgraduate programmes and students," he points out.

SMU's postgraduate programmes are boosted by a Professional Development Series (PDS). PDS is a graduation requirement for postgraduate students, who select three workshops based on what they feel are most relevant to their academic or professional development. These workshops are to be completed during a student's candidature.

To encourage students to participate in PDS workshops, programme calendars at SMU have been synchronised as closely as possible, as most postgraduate programmes are shorter than an undergraduate degree — one year for full-time and two for part-time — and can be very time-intensive.



Prof Themin describes PDS as an opportunity for SMU students to develop interpersonal and organisational skills beyond their specific disciplines. For one, there is a wide range of topics to choose from, in-

cluding influence and advocacy, negotiation, the art of giving feedback, creative thinking, sustainability, leadership and innovation.

And by incorporating the latest research from SMU's various institutes, centres, labs and initiatives, these workshops also enable students from any discipline to learn more about issues like data analytics and service excellence.

Transforming students

"We want to go beyond putting together programmes that earn you a postgraduate degree," says Prof Themin. "To achieve our goal of developing leaders for the knowledge-based economy, we want to help transform our students in terms of their world views, com-

petencies, strategic vision, spirit of collaboration and appetite for problem-solving.

"The workshops will open our students' perspectives to the interdisciplinary nature of the major problems the world faces. For example, you cannot solve sustainability issues purely from the legal or financial perspective; you need organisational leadership, as well as an understanding of how businesses, governments and the society can work together, too."

And since these workshops comprise students from across different programmes, the interaction is expected to be more meaningful and fruitful, he adds.

Students are also provided with excellent networking opportunities

as they get to know like-minded individuals from other disciplines.

Meanwhile, as part of SMU's efforts to constantly enhance educational offerings and explore new opportunities, the university recently rolled out a Master of Human Capital Leadership programme.

Designed in collaboration with the Human Capital Leadership Institute, Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, and Wharton's Center for Human Resources, it addresses the challenges of human resources among business leaders in Asia.

Visit www.smu.edu.sg/programmes/postgraduate to find out more about the various programmes.