

Singaporean academic to take the helm at SMU

Geographer Lily Kong, who is the university's provost, will assume her new role next year

Sandra Davie
Senior Education Correspondent

Geographer Lily Kong, 53, who made history three years ago as the first woman provost of a publicly funded university here, is scoring another first.

She will soon be the first Singaporean academic and social scientist to helm the 18-year-old Singapore Management University (SMU). The first three presidents of SMU were from American universities, while current president Arnoud De Meyer is a Belgian.

SMU, which in recent years has stepped up its research and course offerings in the social sciences, announced Professor Kong's appointment as its next president yesterday. She will assume her new role at the start of next year.

Well known internationally as a social, cultural and urban geographer, Prof Kong is also widely regarded as a thought leader in the study of social and cultural change in Asian cities.

SMU board chairman Ho Kwon Ping said the university launched a global search for its new president after Professor De Meyer asked to step down by the end of this year.

Mr Ho said: "We are very pleased that our seven-month search process culminated in the university appointing, for the first time in its history, an internal candidate



MAKING HISTORY

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SMU BOARD CHAIRMAN HO KWON PING



The appointment of Professor Lily Kong - who is well known as a social, cultural and urban geographer - as SMU's next president comes as the university steps up its social science research and course offerings.
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helped raise the quality of the student intake.

On the academic programme front, Prof Kong set up and led a panel that recommended revisions to the undergraduate curriculum structure and core curriculum. She also helped introduce new interdisciplinary majors and tracks, including the popular politics, law and economics degree programme.

This August, SMU will introduce residential living and learning at the revamped Prinsep Street Residences, a key project that Prof Kong has led.

Last year, she also led the successful establishment of the SMU Academy, which has since received more than \$20 million in funding from SkillsFuture Singapore, to enable SMU to offer skills upgrading courses for working adults.

Mr Ho had words of praise for Prof De Meyer, who has helmed SMU for the past eight years, led its internationalisation efforts and helped launch new postgraduate programmes.

He also mentioned another brainchild of Prof De Meyer's - SMU-X, an experiential learning programme where students tackle real-world problems by taking on projects from companies and community organisations. Even after he steps down, Prof De Meyer has agreed to help shape SMU-X on a part-time basis.

Prof Kong said she was "deeply honoured" to be appointed president of SMU. "But at the same time, it is an exciting time for growth and expansion into new directions, some of which has already started," she said. This included expanding into other disciplines and catering to groups such as working adults.

sandra@sph.com.sg

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He said SMU "didn't need a hero CEO from outside, lending the university his name".

On a personal note, Mr Ho said that for nearly 20 years, while heading the board, he had been waiting for an internal candidate who was

as good as or better than external contenders.

"The fact that Prof Kong is both a woman and a Singaporean is a nice plus, but was clearly not the deciding factor," he said.

Prof Kong was an academic leader at the National University of

Singapore for more than two decades before she joined SMU.

In her short stint as provost, she has implemented major revamps to the university's undergraduate admission process, including the introduction of Discovery Day sessions for strong applicants. This