

New green building to help SMU students with hands-on learning and connect better

Singapore

STUDENTS at the Singapore Management University (SMU) will soon have more opportunities to network with start-up founders and mentors, and to work on real-world projects from organisations and companies.

Construction of an environmentally-friendly building along Stamford Road to facilitate such meetings and hands-on learning began on Monday morning, with works expected to be completed by the end of 2019.

Called the Tahir Foundation Connexion and fully solar-powered, the S\$70 million development will support the university's SMU-X programme started in 2015.

SMU-X is designed to mimic the workplace and enables students from different faculties to tackle real-world challenges by taking on projects from corporate, non-profit and government-sector organisations.

The five-storey building will feature a "makerspace" equipped with 3D printers and handyman tools that

students can use to create and build prototypes for SMU-X projects. Student-run programmes and activities will impart the necessary skills and knowledge to use the space and equipment.

Aside from classrooms, the Connexion building will also have student lounges, sleeping pods and shower amenities.

About 500 sq m of the 8,600 sq m development will be set aside as incubation spaces – permanent, physical event and networking areas – for start-ups, to provide an environment that fosters innovation and entrepreneurship. It will accommodate at least 80 start-ups a year, up from 40 now.

The new spaces will facilitate students' meetings with industry practitioners and faculty, as well as promote socialising. Some parts of the building will be open round the clock.

The Connexion building is located between SMU's School of Accountancy and School of Law. SMU-X courses are currently being run in the

conserved red-and-white building in Stamford Road, which was home to the flagship MPH bookstore until 2003.

Connexion is envisaged to be the connecting point for SMU students to build friendships and learn from one another, as well as engage with the industry, said SMU president Arnoud De Meyer at the building's ground-breaking ceremony on Monday.

Last year, SMU ramped up its offering of SMU-X courses to give every student an opportunity to take at least one SMU-X module during their time in the university. This means that students across SMU's different schools will have the chance to work together.

Professor De Meyer said: "The new building, with its myriad of new-generation learning spaces, is envisaged to be a lively and conducive environment for meaningful, multi-disciplinary experiential learning and to nurture innovation."

The interior of the building will incorporate balconies, terraces and

open staircases. Existing structures surrounding the new building will also be taken into consideration. For example, the North Plaza in the new building will be designed to blend in with Fort Canning Park.

The building is to be funded by a donation from the Tahir Foundation, a philanthropic organisation, and a grant from the Building and Construction Authority (BCA) under the Public Sector Construction Productivity Fund.

Designed to meet the BCA's Green Mark Platinum certification, it is the first on-site net-zero energy building in the city centre, which means it is self-sustainable as it has its own power generated from a photovoltaic system in the development.

Desmond Lee, Minister for Social and Family Development and Second Minister for National Development, said the completion of the building "will take us another step forward in our aspiration of achieving super low-energy or even zero-energy buildings in Singapore".