

SMU to help students design their purpose-driven education

Sandra Davie
Senior Education
Correspondent

University students are usually asked to declare their majors at the end of the first year. But Singapore Management University (SMU) is looking at getting its students to declare their life missions.

SMU president Lily Kong, who announced the move yesterday, said it is exploring the idea of getting a small number of committed students to define their mission at the end of the first year of studies.

The renowned social, cultural and urban geographer, who took over the helm from Professor Arnoud De Meyer last month, said a student might want to pursue sustainable business and economic practices, or be passionate about addressing the issue of social equality.

The students will be guided by faculty mentors to build a resume with the right mix of courses, research and internships that will enable them to fulfil their mission.

She said SMU already has several inter-disciplinary and multi-disciplinary programmes to cater to students' career interests. The programmes include law and economics, and smart city management and technology.



SMU president Lily Kong says students can expect more global exposure opportunities.

Professor Kong also touched on another SMU initiative – to ensure all its students head abroad. They can expect more global exposure opportunities with the setting up of global centres, starting with Asean cities such as Bangkok, Manila, Ho Chi Minh City and Jakarta.

Of the 1,775 SMU students who graduated in 2017, 87 per cent had at least one form of global exposure activity during their time at the university, and 55 per cent had two.

The centres will be SMU's "footprint in these cities", helping to seek out opportunities and coordinate activities, including student internships, innovation immersion and community service projects.

They will also be the base for SMU to offer executive education programmes and skills training to corporate firms in the region. The centres will facilitate research link-ups for SMU professors and help SMU connect with its regional alumni.

"Together, the global centres have the potential to contribute to

our international presence and form a network... which SMU can leverage to raise our profile, engage, cooperate with and build relations with global communities," said Prof Kong.

Not forgetting SMU's role in Singapore, she said the university will strengthen and deepen its partnerships with various industries. The partnership models can be "varied and bespoke", she said, with the possibility of even housing some companies on SMU's city campus.

As "Singapore's only university in the city", SMU wants to contribute to thought leadership, and be a place in the city where compelling and relevant ideas are being discussed and debated, she added.

With this in mind SMU will launch city dialogues to engage the broader community in discourse on topics that matter to the "city", such as reducing inequality and re-making the economy.

Prof Kong also announced the appointment of its new provost and dean for the SMU School of Social Sciences (SOSS). Provost-designate Professor Timothy Clark will take office on April 1, while SMU SOSS dean-designate Professor Chandran Kukathas will join the university on July 1.

sandra@sph.com.sg