

Varsity business courses should include sustainability studies: Experts

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Business leaders need a heart for the planet and a head that can achieve growth while balancing the needs of the environment.

To achieve this, experts say universities should push for business courses to include modules on sustainability, which is about meeting present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.

These programmes will help students learn how the business world impacts areas such as the environment, economy and society.

Mr Paul Heng, managing director of NeXT Career Consulting Group, said: "We need to take care of Mother Earth so future generations can continue to enjoy it."

"I think most of us, businesses included, know we have to do our part, but conveniently excuse ourselves because of other priorities, such as meeting shareholder expectations to deliver dividends."

A number of modules have been introduced here to meet this need.

On Feb 12, the Singapore Management University (SMU) announced that business undergraduates will soon be able to take a second major in sustainability.

Students will learn about broad issues within the sustainability sphere and what businesses can do to reduce their negative impacts on communities and the environment, said SMU.

SMU's Lee Kong Chian School of Business students will also address the issue in the business sub-disciplines, including finance, operations, marketing and entrepreneurship, and graduate as "specialists in sustainability".

Nanyang Technological University currently offers a minor programme in environmental sustainability, under its Asian School of the Environment, and the National Uni-

versity of Singapore offers a broader environmental studies degree programme.

While it may appear that growth and sustainability are at opposite ends, said Mr Daniel Soh, managing partner of executive headhunting firm Leadership Advisory Inc, companies will benefit by striking a balance - for example, by being environmentally friendly.

"It leads to lower costs because companies end up reducing wastage from operations," he added.

"The process also generates additional revenue from better and more innovative products that en-

able companies to create new businesses or markets.

"In this context, business sustainability can drive organisational and technological innovations that yield both bottom-line and top-line returns," he said.

SMU said students enrolling in the sustainability major will develop a deep understanding of the challenges the world is facing as well as learn how to integrate sustainability initiatives in the management of a business.

Mr Heng said SMU's programme is timely, adding that there is a growing need for students who are equipped to champion sustainabil-

ity efforts.

However, few companies are actively hiring such graduates, he said, adding: "Some have employees who wear double hats - corporate social responsibility cum sustainability; some conveniently park this (sustainability effort) under human resource, when it should be a function standing on its own."

Agreeing, Mr Soh said it needs to be a whole-of-company endeavour.

If not championed by the company as a whole, including the chief executive and board of directors, sustainability initiatives "will fail".

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