

SMU welcomes new president

By **LEE U-WEN**

THE Singapore Management University (SMU) may have officially welcomed over 1,700 new students into its family yesterday, but much of the attention was focused instead on a 56-year-old Belgian academic who is just a fortnight away from assuming his role as the varsity's new president.

Making his first public appearance since his appointment was announced in January, Arnoud De Meyer was all smiles as he received a large, gold medallion from outgoing chief Howard Hunter during a ceremonial handover as part of the university's annual freshman convocation.

"As an institution, we still have a lot to learn but now we are in a situation where we should

have the ambition to develop leadership – our model of what a university should be," the gregarious professor told his audience at the Resorts World Sentosa convention centre.

"We should become an example to others. From being a good apprentice, we should become a leader in the academic world."

Prof De Meyer is no stranger to Singapore. He was the founding dean of French graduate business school Insead's Asia campus here from 1999 to 2002.

He then moved to Insead's campus in France before taking up his current post as head of Cambridge University's Judge Business School, where he has been for the last four years.

He chuckled when asked what was the best piece of advice he

has received so far as he gears up to begin his five-year term at SMU.

"Someone told me to forget that I come from a business school background. I've spent the last 27 years in business schools, but I have to learn about other disciplines that I'm not so familiar with," he said in a short meeting with reporters before the ceremony began.

"I know what law is, but not very well. Sociology, psychology, political science, economics – I know about them but they are not really my speciality."

SMU, despite being just 10 years old, is in a good position to become one of the "top quality universities" in East Asia, he said. "Hopefully, 20 years from now, SMU can be a model that



Prof De Meyer: *'From being a good apprentice, we should become a leader in the academic world.'*

Prof Hunter by teaching a class or two – preferably in innovation management – whenever his schedule allows it.

"I'm a professor, I can't leave teaching completely. If I have to teach, I have to read widely, and I see that as my way of keeping myself updated," he said.

As for Prof Hunter, he won't be leaving SMU for good after he steps down. The 64-year-old American will return to the classroom in January on a half-yearly basis to teach at the Law School, in what he describes as a "return to my first love – teaching".

"I expect to do more writing and consulting and the occasional arbitration, as well as keeping up with my research and helping President De Meyer any time," he said.

"There are so many other things to do as well, such as revising and updating my book. And very importantly, I want to spend a lot of time with my new grandson."

can influence what other universities will do."

While getting to know the staff and students will be foremost on his mind, Prof De Meyer plans to follow in the footsteps of