

Universities get top marks for keeping students happy

By Sue-Ann Chia

UNIVERSITY students gave their schools top marks with local tertiary institutions passing the latest customer satisfaction survey with flying colours.

Public universities scored 75.6 on the Customer Satisfaction Index of Singapore (CSIG) for the three months ended June 30, the highest score for the sector since the survey commenced in 2007.

The index, compiled by the Institute of Service Excellence at Singapore Management University (ISES), showed that two out of three universities assessed saw a jump in satisfaction scores. Nanyang Technological University's score rose the highest by 3.8 per cent to 73.3 while the National University of Singapore also climbed, by 2.9 per cent to 76.5.

SMU's results dropped slightly, dipping 0.1 per cent, but it still managed to retain the top spot among the three local universities with a score of 79.1. Together, the scores for universities saw a 2.9 per cent improvement from the same period last year, when the sector received 73.5.

But not all public education institutions did as well. The polytechnic cluster of schools saw scores drop by 1.8 per cent to 69.8 while the Institute of Technical Education also saw satisfaction drop 0.4 per cent to 74.

Overall, public education institutions – universities, polytechnics and

the Institute of Technical Education – rose 1.6 per cent to 74.1 from the same period last year.

The survey was conducted between April and June and gathered 13,292 unique responses about customer experiences with the air transport, land transport, logistics, public education, and private education sectors.

Beyond the classroom

Part of the reason why universities have been doing well in their satisfaction scores is because universities are increasingly focused on the non-academic parts of student life.

These include career counselling, building world-class facilities for students as well as enhancing their experience on campus through activities. The enhancements to the universities come as the government prepares to ramp up places for locals to meet the rising aspirations of Singaporeans who are looking for ways to get degrees, either locally or overseas.

A record 15,000 students entered universities this year, even as the government places more emphasis on skills rather than on paper qualifications.

SMU vice-provost for undergraduate matters and student development Pang Yang Hoong said that he was "delighted" with the performance by SMU, which was top among the universities for the second year running.



SMU has launched a two-year plan to freshen and liven up the campus, with new spaces created for co-curricular activities; (left) artist's impression of the co-curricular centre and amphitheatre on Campus Green

The university, he added, has always strived to listen to feedback from students to make courses relevant for them.

"I believe that these, together with our distinctive interactive pedagogy, teaching excellence, stimulating learning environment, broad-based curriculum, vibrant student life, global exposure, career enrichment programmes and internships, and strategic campus location, have contributed to the positive perceptions of quality by our students," he said.

Among other moves, SMU has also introduced new courses and a curriculum this year as part of their efforts to keep up with the industry, said Professor Pang.

At the same time, new facilities

were launched this year, including the SMU labs that allow students to solve real world problems with experimentation. New buildings for the School of Law will also be complete by 2017.

Meanwhile, the university has launched a two-year plan to freshen and liven up the campus in May this year.

Other new spaces are a centralised co-curricular activities space facing Campus Green; an expanded three-storey fitness centre rising from the Concourse; a new amphitheatre for student and community engagement activities; and a jogging track on the campus.

NUS has also put in intensive efforts over the years to raise the quality of student life on campus, and the

latest rise in scores reflects the success of the approach, said Tan Eng Chye, deputy president (academic affairs) and provost at NUS.

One of the key moves it has made is to ensure its students are well prepared for the future.

"We have recently repositioned the NUS Career Centre as the Centre for Future-ready Graduates, committing an additional S\$5 million yearly to provide more personalised career advising for students, and enhancing our career preparation programmes and initiating new leadership development courses," said Professor Tan.

The oldest university here in Singapore is also sprucing up its campus, by adding brand new state-of-the-art facilities for students to enjoy.

Over the next few years, NUS will

be introducing two new facilities. One is a new seven-storey building at the NUS Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, which will house new teaching spaces, the Asian studies departments of the faculty, the Asia Research Institute, as well as covered spaces for students.

A new 9,000 square metre University Sports Centre is also in the works, said Prof Tan.

This will include a covered Olympic-sized swimming pool, sports halls, squash courts, fitness lab and eateries, as well as a new Academic Green at the NUS Faculty of Science.

Said Prof Tan: "These new spaces will enliven our campus, increase interaction, and provide wonderful settings for an even more vibrant and energising NUS community."