

# Developing well-rounded business grads

**T**HE Singapore Management University's plans to start a humanities programme may seem contrary to prevailing academic fashion elsewhere, where job scarcity after the 2008 financial crash turned opinion against courses considered "less useful". But the SMU's move, which will likely start off as modules within business programmes, is consistent with Singapore's drive towards producing adaptable graduates who can do much better than crunch numbers and make PowerPoint presentations.

It is a natural progression towards promoting thinking and solving skills, personal initiative and communication proficiency, after the country's early focus on science, technology, engineering

and mathematics for industrial take-off.

If the transition is done well, it will be a smooth transfer from the "technocratic" to the "empathetic" graduate, one who is not just a problem solver but who also understands the impact of decisions. The Yale-NUS College, which emphasises the liberal arts, is an example of changing pedagogies. At the Singapore University of Technology and Design, the aesthetic of design harmonising with the living and natural environments is emphasised. More Singaporeans are going for a liberal arts education abroad, combining "feeling" subjects with the sciences.

But as a business university, the SMU has another compelling reason to move

faster on its humanities programme, like having a separate faculty to complement its existing six schools. The teaching of ethics, moral reasoning and societal values will presumably be a part of the core canon of history, modern languages, philosophy, literature and civilisational studies. What blighted the business world during and after the most recent market failures has been the systematic illegal and immoral conduct by firms in the pursuit of profit. Organised bank frauds and individual criminality in Ponzi schemes are almost a habit for some in the developed world. The credo seems to be: just don't get caught. In Singapore, albeit to a much smaller degree, blatant law-breaking by some em-

ployers over unpaid wages and Central Provident Fund contributions, denial of medical benefits and injury compensation is of the same reprehensible order.

Will teaching aspiring entrepreneurs and corporate executives the ethical bounds of business competition and the morality of investment decisions do much to reduce criminality? It is hard to tell, but universities will not want to be caught out doing nothing. The SMU president and governing board chairman have both indicated that the expansion is intended to turn the SMU into a comprehensive university. It is ambitious for a university only in its 14th year, but its standing in the community says it is getting most things right.