

SMU holds biggest graduation in 11 years

Over 2,100 students gather for event; honorary doctorate for S R Nathan

By AMELIA TENG

MORE than 2,100 students completed "level SMU" yesterday.

Minister for Social and Family Development Chan Chun Sing was the guest of honour as the Singapore Management University held the biggest graduation ceremony in 11 years – and likened the experience to finishing the first part of a computer game.

"I'd like to congratulate you for completing level SMU," he told the 2,149 students who graduated yesterday – the university's 11th and largest batch of graduates since it formed in 2000.

"But let me also welcome you to the next level... the university of life, where you will begin a new and long journey," he said.

The giant intake is because of

growth in the number of postgraduate degree programmes that SMU has offered in recent years.

Among the graduates yesterday were two students who jumped at opportunities to help the community.

Mr Lee Guo Jun befriended construction workers from Bangladesh and Pakistan and Mr Gerard Wong helped to produce a guide on hiring domestic helpers here.

Mr Lee, 25, graduated in economics with the summa cum laude distinction – the highest honour achievable.

He was part of a group of SMU students who took 21 foreign workers in 2012 to sites in the civic district such as the Esplanade, Singapore River and Merlion Park and told them stories about Singapore's history and culture.



Mr Gerard Wong (left) and Mr Lee Guo Jun were among students who jumped at opportunities to help the community. Mr Lee befriended foreign workers and Mr Wong helped to produce a guide on hiring maids. ST PHOTO: ONG WEE JIN

He said: "We see foreign workers as construction workers, but never as friends. Many had never seen Singapore from a tourist's point of view and they were very happy taking photos."

Mr Lee has also visited foreign workers at the migrant worker group Humanitarian Organisation for Migration Economics, and a soup kitchen run by another such group, Transient Workers Count Too (TWC2).

"It's just to see how they are doing and what kind of help they need," he said.

Meanwhile, Mr Wong, 29, who graduated with a bachelor's degree in social sciences, worked with the British High Commission and TWC2 last year to publish a guide on hiring foreign domestic workers here.

It took a year to complete the 52-page booklet on legal and ethical practices – the product of months spent researching and talking to various embassies and non-governmental organisations.

It has been available since May through the British Chamber of Commerce website.

"It originated as a project to target the expatriate community here, but it really is for everyone who hires foreign domestic help," said the political science major.

Yesterday was the first time all graduands, including more than 500 master's students, had gathered in one location – Suntec Singapore Convention Centre – for the main commencement ceremony.

SMU chairman Ho Kwon Ping said the university's interactive pedagogy and seminar-style teaching had helped its graduates become more "world-ready and career-ready" than their peers.

The institution is now moving beyond that model to "set the bar higher", he said, adding that it will evolve into a more comprehensive university rooted in the social sciences, with an "integrated curriculum that includes components linking academic and personal development, and community engagement".

All SMU students will get to stay for a few weeks or months in a facility called SMU-X, a flexible 24/7 space for incubating ideas and bringing them to fruition. It will be ready in five years.

SMU president Arnoud De Meyer added that it will increase its "presence" in Singapore by tapping its central location and undertaking research and projects that will have an impact on the city.

The university yesterday also conferred an honorary doctorate of letters on former president S R Nathan in recognition of his support to SMU as its first patron, and his lifetime of public service.

Professor Katherine Schipper also received an honorary doctor of accountancy degree, for her contribution to the field of accounting thought and practice, particularly in financial reporting.

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