More giving back to varsities

NTU, NUS, SMU record increase in donations from alumni; active fundraising also helps their cause

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(From left) NTU graduate Priscilla Ng, SMU's Tim Mou Hui and NUS' Chen Wai Kean are among a growing group of young alumni who are making a contribution.

Donations from alumni of Singapore's two oldest universities have risen dramatically over the last decade, nearly 200 times in the case of Nanyang Technological University (NTU). The increase has been fuelled not just by the growing number of graduates but also through intensifying ways to reach out to them – including fundraising campaigns by telephone.

NTU received over $3.9 million from more than 14,000 alumni in 2013, up significantly from the $20,275 donated by 143 people in 2004.

The National University of Singapore (NUS) saw a 10-fold increase from 745 alumni donors in 2004 to more than 7,700 in 2013. From available figures, the sum raised jumped from $3.3 million in the 2008 financial year to $13.5 million in financial year 2012.

The Singapore Management University (SMU) has also seen an increase in donations. It had 147 alumni donors who gave $19,752 in 2005. This grew to 858 donors who contributed $112,639 in 2013.

Its first batch of about 300 students graduated in 2004, and it now has 14,000 alumni members. In contrast, NUS has more than 240,000 alumni and NTU, more than 190,000 alumni.

Professor Kam Chan Hin, NTU's senior associate provost (undergraduate education), said the increasing donations are a result of efforts over the years to engage alumni. They include the NTU Phonathon, in which current students call graduates to tell them about fundraising programmes.

NUS provost Tan Eng Chye said the university has also been ramping up its fundraising, and even set up an alumni student advancement committee in 2013 to encourage graduates to give back.

He added: "The halls are particularly aggressive... They will go back to their connections and (encourage) alumni to donate generously."

But money is not the only way alumni give back.

NTU graduate Priscilla Ng, 26, helps to sponsor activities such as sports events organised by the hall of residence she stayed in as a student. "I was blessed because I had a scholarship and my fees for three years were covered," said the financial adviser, who has given more than $1,000 to her alma mater since graduating in 2011.

SMU graduate Tim Mou Hui helped to set up a fund for needy students in 2013, a year after he graduated. Said the 27-year-old, who had received a bursary and a bond-free scholarship: "The only clause in the scholarship was to 'give back' when I'm able and that spurred me on."

Mr Chen Wai Kean, who graduated from NUS with an engineering degree in 2012 and is pursuing a master's degree there, continues to meet students to think of ways to improve donation drives. Said the 27-year-old: "We look up to established universities like those in the Ivy League. Their growth is supported by alumni, who donate, share their expertise and work opportunities, or even set up research centres.

"I don't see why NUS can't do that too."

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