

Master your destiny

The master's programmes at Singapore Management University boast cutting-edge curricula and a distinctive brand name

ESTHER TEO

AS TECHNOLOGY change and disruptions affect every facet of business and society, more are heading back to school to gain an edge.

Singapore Management University (SMU) is on track to double its intake of postgraduate students this year from about 600 in 2013.

"We need to be aware of the transformation that is taking place, and pick up new knowledge to navigate the changing landscape," says Associate Professor Themin Suwardy, dean, Postgraduate Professional Programmes, SMU.

He points out that postgraduate programmes can help to accelerate career moves, increase career options and aid progression to lateral or more specialised roles. For example, those with a technology background may want to upgrade their skills and expand their knowledge in emerging areas such as fintech (data analytics).

Others who may not want to switch industry or go deeper into their discipline can look at ways to become better managers and leaders, as well as empower themselves to advance into more senior roles and enhance their career prospects.

Degrees not created equal

Despite its rise in popularity, misconceptions about postgraduate studies still abound.

"Some people think that all master's degrees are the same, and that any one will do. This cannot be further from the truth," Prof Suwardy says.

He points to the multitude of postgraduate degrees, with varying focus and emphasis; diverse programme-specific features and

competitive advantages such as partnerships, accreditations, overseas and practical stints, and career services.

He adds that it is also important to pick a reputable and progressive education institution, as a strong brand name lends credibility and support in enhancing students' career progression and giving them an edge in competitive job markets.

Prof Suwardy observes that while some students are certain of the industry that they want to be in, they tend to have limited ideas about work roles and career prospects, and the programme best suited for that specific area.

Students also need to understand that mastery of knowledge alone is inadequate these days. To navigate change and disruptions, they need to develop "skills beyond knowledge", such as functioning well in teams, being effective communicators, and being able to lead when necessary.

Postgraduate programmes help to sharpen students' analytical skills and prepare them to deal with complex problems of the future.

Says Prof Suwardy: "You are going to invest significant time, effort and resources on your postgraduate studies, so my advice is to determine clearer goals from the onset, define your rationale and objectives for pursuing a postgraduate education.

"Research and prioritise, and know how it will fit in with your overall personal or career development."

The SMU advantage

SMU's 20 master's programmes can be broadly classified into general management programmes and specialised master's, which cover specific disciplines such as accounting, finance, law, and

information systems.

Programmes include SMU's Executive Master of Business Administration (EMBA), which is ranked ninth among Asian business schools and 32nd globally in the Financial Times (FT) Executive MBA Ranking 2016.

The Master of Science in Wealth Management (MWM) programme is third globally in the FT Masters in Finance (MiF) Post-experience Ranking 2016, while its Master of Science in Applied Finance (MAF) programme is fourth among Asian business schools and 42nd globally in the FT MiF Pre-experience Ranking 2016.

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There are several first-of-its-kind, leading-edge programmes such as the Master of Tri-Sector Collaboration, Master of Human Capital Leadership and Master of IT in Business.

Prof Suwardy highlights SMU's strengths, including its innovative and transformative education approach, rigorous and highly interactive pedagogy, small class sizes, large pool of diverse and international faculty for teaching and research, as well as world-class city campus and facilities.

Its master's programmes are



Pick a reputable and progressive education institution, as a strong brand name gives students an edge in the job market, says Prof Suwardy. PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG

designed through extensive consultations with industry experts and leaders, many of whom deliver parts of the programmes as advisory board members, guest lecturers or speakers, or take on the role of employers and mentors to students.

The university also enjoys the unique pedagogical advantage of having its own award-winning case studies on Asian businesses for faculty to teach.

Professional Development Series (PDS) workshops, a graduation requirement for most SMU master's programmes, hold the key to cultivating broad-based, creative and entrepreneurial leaders for the knowledge-based economy, says Prof Suwardy.

PDS topics range from Influence and Advocacy, Negotiation, The Art of Giving Feedback, Creative Thinking, Design Thinking, Sustainability, Leadership and Innovation.

Through the workshops, students gain insights on cross-cutting interdisciplinary issues, which helps them develop interpersonal and organisation skills beyond their specific disciplines.

Last October, about 1,200 students were involved in more than 30 workshops over two days.

Says Prof Suwardy: "PDS workshops are an important differentiator for our master's programmes. Very few schools have a structured process to bring together that many postgraduate students

through developmental workshops.

It also means giving students networking opportunities to get to know more like-minded individuals from different disciplines.

He adds: "We are not just putting together programmes that earn you a postgraduate degree. Our goal is to transform our students in terms of their world views, competencies, strategic vision, spirit of collaboration and appetite for problem-solving."

Visit www.smu.edu.sg/masters to find out more about SMU's postgraduate programmes.