

PROF LILY KONG WILL START HER NEW JOB IN SEPTEMBER

SMU snags NUS don, making her first woman provost here

She hopes to be link between school's business management niche and social sciences



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Professor Lily Kong (picture)

INCOMING PROVOST OF SINGAPORE MANAGEMENT UNIVERSITY

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SINGAPORE – Singapore Management University (SMU) has pulled off a coup by drawing a prominent Singaporean academic from the National University of Singapore (NUS) to its ranks, and in the process made history by appointing her as the first woman provost of a publicly funded university here.

From September, Professor Lily Kong, who spent 24 years at NUS, will join 15-year-old SMU as its second-in-command, behind university president Arnoud De Meyer. She will concurrently hold the appointment of the Lee Kong Chian Chair Professorship of Social Sciences.

Prof Kong, 50, who is currently NUS' vice-provost of academic personnel, previously headed NUS' Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and led the University Scholars Programmes. She also played a key role in the setting up of the Yale-NUS liberal arts college.

Announcing the move yesterday, Prof De Meyer said Prof Kong will help enrich SMU's social sciences and humanities offerings, which are currently "underrepresented in what (the university) is doing". He added that the search for a new provost started last July after



PHOTO: JASON QUAH

its previous provost, Professor Rajendra Srivastava, indicated his intention to step down after seven years.

With the help of an international search firm, SMU shortlisted about 20 international candidates. Apart from attributes such as university management experience and international standing, other criteria included familiarity with Singapore and the disciplines at SMU, Prof De Meyer said.

At the briefing, Prof Kong, who will oversee all academic aspects ranging from research, teaching and continuing education, spoke about being a bridge between SMU's business management niche and the social sciences. She mooted the possibility of introducing humanities into the undergraduates' foundation core modules. This will allow students to develop a "rich and complex understanding of the past so that they might be able to operate well in the future", said Prof Kong. She also intends to look into introducing new majors and strengthening the students' ability to handle big data.

Also on her agenda is the fostering of more international collaborations between SMU and overseas universities, in particular rising Asian universities such as those in China and India. "A university today, particularly in Singapore, is worth its salt only if it also has a strong international reputation," said Prof Kong, who plans to have all SMU undergraduates getting international exposure.

On her decision to leave NUS, Prof Kong said she had several discussions with Prof De Meyer before making up her mind. "We are all humans ... and we have ties to our friends, our colleagues, the institutions we have been at for a very long time. But when I saw the possibilities and thought about what I could do to make a positive difference, it became a very attractive proposition," she said.