

SMU boosting China varsity links

S'pore varsity inking 13 pacts with 5 counterparts, doubling its tie-ups

By HO AI LI
CHINA CORRESPONDENT
IN BEIJING

SINGAPORE Management University (SMU) is doubling its tie-ups with universities in China, beefing up its presence here to make up for an overemphasis on links with European and American schools.

A delegation led by its president Arnoud De Meyer is in China this week to ink 13 agreements with five universities, including Fudan and Tsinghua, in areas like student exchanges and joint research. The others are Shanghai Jiao Tong University, Shanghai University of Finance and Economics and Sichuan University.

These pacts include the setting up of a joint research centre

on development studies by SMU and Fudan in Shanghai.

"For SMU, this is a big step forward," said Professor De Meyer, noting that this is the first time the university is setting up a research centre with a Chinese counterpart.

Until now, it has only about 10 agreements with Chinese universities, SMU officials said at a press conference in Beijing. Instead, most of its 200 or so university partners are from the United States or Europe.

Prof De Meyer said he hoped to partially "re-orient" SMU's internationalisation strategy to China to give students more opportunities to learn about it.

"I think it's an absolute priority that our students learn about what's happening here in

China," he said.

SMU students tend to be more keen to go on exchange to universities in the United States and Europe, noted SMU vice-provost Pang Yang Hoong.

"Many of them have come to China as tourists. They think they have seen China, but they haven't studied in China before," she said, adding that studying here would give them a different perspective.

Some 84 per cent of the cohort graduating this July would have spent time abroad, noted Prof De Meyer. The aim is to get this up to 100 per cent eventually, he added.

The greater cooperation with Chinese universities would also allow SMU faculty to do more research on China and get more Chinese students to go to SMU, said Prof De Meyer.

Chinese nationals form the biggest group among SMU's foreign students, who in turn make up 15

per cent of its about 7,100 undergraduates.

The Singapore university is also linking up with the Sichuan Administration Institute, a Communist Party school in Chengdu, south-west China.

The two sides are in talks to bring SMU faculty to the school to teach short-term courses on topics like private-public partnerships to mid-level officials, said SMU vice-president Annie Koh, who looks after business development and external relations.

Such overseas partnerships can help SMU overcome the problem of a lack of space in its campus in Singapore, she noted.

Prof De Meyer said as the university expands its postgraduate programmes, it would need more space, but on whether there will be an extension of the campus, he would say only that announcements "will come at an appropriate time".

✉ haili@sph.com.sg