

'Beyond the ordinary'

SMU's new Master of Tri-sector Collaboration programme aims to promote greater understanding and cooperation among leaders in business, civil society and government

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THE solutions to big global issues are increasingly found through collaboration among government, business and civil society.

It is with this view that the Singapore Management University (SMU) is launching the Master of Tri-sector Collaboration programme to train leaders in these sectors.

First programme of its kind

Admission to the programme — the first of its kind in the world — opens in August and classes start in January next year.

"This new course empowers emerging leaders from businesses, governments and civil society to work together to find sustainable solutions to the world's big problems," says programme director Professor Ann Florini, sharing the thinking behind the new programme.

"It gives students a common mindset and set of skills to deal with a future of increasing complexity and scarce resources."

Prof Florini says that while it is widely agreed that governments alone cannot solve the "big problems", they need to work closely with businesses and civil society to address issues such as environment, financial instability, equality and economic inclusion and, in most countries, social services like health care and education.

But who trains people for these vital collaborations?

"We will," she says. "We will create pioneers to be Asia's (and the world's) leading lights, with the first coherent and rigorous degree programme from a major university in Asia."

The Master of Tri-Sector Collaboration programme aims to provide rigorous interdisciplinary training where students will apply knowledge and skills gained from the Leadership and Management, and Skills components in Issues courses that address specific problem areas of concern to all three sectors.

The programme is designed like an Ex-



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ecutive Master of Business Administration (EMBA) programme and it similarly aims to take in working adults with a few years of experience in government, business or civil society organisations.

Rigorous skills training

Its target market is professionals who are open to new ways of thinking and working, are willing to be stretched and want to contribute to both their organisations and the greater good of society.

Prof Florini explains that the programme uses a modular approach, bringing students together for a total of 12 intensive weeks over 18 months. Students

are expected to continue in their jobs while doing the programme.

"The programme will provide rigorous skills training and content — for instance, what the big problems are and how to solve them," she says.

Students gain a tool set of skills they can take back to their organisations to help them become effective at working with the other sectors and at adapting to 21st-century challenges.

Many of the skills include competencies in which the Singapore Government excels, such as futures and scenarios methodologies. The other key pillar focuses on leadership and organisational manage-

ment in this growing space.

"This is the programme to take if you want your organisation to make a meaningful contribution beyond the ordinary," says Prof Florini.

Asked how demand for the programme was assessed, Prof Florini says there is a real need for progress.

Survey results and roundtables held across Asia with government officials, businesses and civil society organisations had shown there are students and organisations that want this new programme.

This is because it offers an intense focus on pragmatic problem-solving and execution of strategies.

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— Professor Ann Florini (left), programme director, SMU

In addition, there are dual benefits of establishing crucial regional and cross-sectoral networks for the three sectors to work closely together to solve the big problems of today.

Businesses are moving to risk management and business opportunities that come from the tri-sector approach. This is now a part of strategic thinking.

"Governments want to send their best and brightest both to have regional exposure beyond purely national training and to learn how to work effectively with business and with civil society," says Prof Florini.

"For example, Singapore government officials increasingly say they need to work with other sectors, to have business, governments and society working effectively together. Terms such as 'tri-sector' and 'tri-partite' are now commonly used."

At the same time, civil society groups, particularly non-governmental organisations (NGOs), increasingly see business and government as problem-solving partners rather than targets against which they should campaign.

The Master of Tri-sector Collaboration programme, which costs \$38,000 (before GST), aims to take in 30 students for its first batch in January next year. This number is projected to go up to 40 in the long run.