

UniSIM picked to host S'pore's 3rd law school

Part-time degree course to focus on criminal and matrimonial law

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SINGAPORE'S only private university, SIM University (UniSIM), has been picked to host the third law school.

The part-time undergraduate degree course, which will open in the next few years, is expected to take in about 75 students.

While it will be a general law degree, there will be a strong focus on the specialist practice areas of criminal and matrimonial law to address the shortage of lawyers in these fields.

Setting itself apart from the two existing law schools, the course will be geared towards attracting mid-career professionals who want to make law their new career. They may include paralegals, social workers and law enforcement officers.

The law schools at the National University of Singapore (NUS) and Singapore Management University (SMU) target mainly students who have just completed their A-level examination.

Education Minister Heng Swee Keat made the announcement yesterday at UniSIM's convocation ceremony. Mr Heng said that in selecting UniSIM, the Government considered its strong track record in providing degree programmes for working adults, and its complementary offerings in the social sciences and humanities.

"It is envisaged that this third law school will have a strong applied curriculum," he said.

The Ministry of Law will work with UniSIM to develop the school's programmes in consultation with the legal industry.

Referring to the upcoming

school, Law Minister K. Shanmugam wrote in a Facebook post: "It will provide Singaporeans interested in a career in the law more opportunities and a new pathway to fulfil their career aspirations."

Plans to set up a third law school were announced by Mr Shanmugam in May. It was one of the recommendations made by a committee formed to review the supply of lawyers here.

Lawyers welcomed news that Singapore's third law school will be hosted at UniSIM. However,

they pointed out some issues that need to be addressed, such as ensuring that the school can secure the resources to distinguish itself from the two existing ones.

Criminal lawyer Josephus Tan suggested that there be "some sort of mechanism" to ensure that graduates from the school actually practise criminal and family law.

Lawyer Raphael Louis, who worked as a counsellor for 13 years before practising community law, is concerned that the new school could eventually lead to an oversupply of lawyers.

"Graduates from this school will have to fight for limited places at smaller firms, since the top

or bigger law firms do not focus mainly on community law. How will they all be able to start to practise?"

NUS and SMU were supportive of the new school. NUS law dean Simon Chesterman said: "I would see the school as complementing what we do - rather than competing with us."

SMU law dean Yeo Tiong Min said he saw that all three law schools would look to differentiate themselves in terms of research and teaching focus.

NUS takes in about 250 students a year, while SMU takes in about 120 students.

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Varsities offering more pathways

MORE diverse degree pathways will open up for Singaporeans over the next few years with SIM University (UniSIM) and the Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT) launching practice-oriented, industry-focused courses.

UniSIM in Clementi will add three full-time degrees to its part-time offerings for working adults. The courses in marketing, finance and accountancy will offer 200 places.

The SIT, which currently offers niche degrees from overseas universities, will run its own programmes from next year in infrastructure engineering, software development and accountancy.

These courses will add another 200 places to its yearly intake, which amounted to 1,500 this year.

Education Minister Heng Swee Keat, who announced the new courses at the annual convocation ceremony of UniSIM graduates yesterday, said: "Many new university sector learning opportunities are in the making, to better ca-

ter to the diverse aspirations of our young."

He said the new offerings by UniSIM and SIT will differ from those at the other four universities in taking an applied learning approach - classroom learning is integrated with real-life, on-the-job application.

One feature will be work attachment programmes that will be longer and offer a deeper immersion. Students will also take on an applied project around a work-related issue gleaned directly from the work attachments.

The two universities will release more details next week.

In outlining his vision for a more diverse higher education landscape, Mr Heng said he sees UniSIM and SIT go on to establish their own niches and specialisations.

"Our young people with an interest in largely science and technology disciplines can look to SIT, which aims to develop best-in-class specialists with deep technical expertise.

"UniSIM will be the place for young people keen to take up programmes in business, human and social services."

Later, when asked if the two universities would find it difficult to compete with the more established players, Mr Heng noted that there were similar concerns when the Government set up the Singapore Management University and the Singapore University of Technology and Design.

He said he was confident that the two universities will be able to draw in students as long as they are able to provide something distinctive.

UniSIM president Cheong Hee Kiat said the university will use the unique teaching it has developed and strong industry links to make its programmes distinctive.

SIT president Tan Thiam Soon noted that the university's aim will be to produce specialists with deep skill-sets - "best-in-class specialists", as the minister put it in his speech.

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