

# An enriching experience

The Singapore Management University's Master of Business Administration is gaining popularity among Singapore's working professionals

## Hazel Tan

AFTER seven years in the military, Mr Chua Jiawen was ready for a new career. So he signed up for a Master of Business Administration (MBA) programme part-time at the Singapore Management University (SMU) to acquire the hard business management skills and the soft networking opportunities needed to make the switch.

He based his choice of the MBA programme on four key criteria: the reputation of the school, its linkages to the industry, the quality of interaction in class and the cost.

He chose SMU because the university has a great brand name. He also liked that SMU holds events with companies across industries, which offers students exposure and opportunities to network.

"The SMU MBA has certainly lived up to my expectations with impactful professors who have generously shared experiences and imparted much of their knowledge. It is also through opportunities gained from the MBA that I successfully switched my career," adds Mr Chua, 32, who became a consultant with Mercer in 2012.

## Popular demand

SMU started offering its MBA programme part-time in 2008. The full-time programme was offered a year later. The MBA programme is one of SMU's most popular courses and interest continues to grow. SMU has expanded this year's cohort for the programme by 10 per cent and will be running two parallel classes to cater to the growing demand.

Associate professor and associate dean of the Lee Kong Chian School of Business Gregor Halff says: "Nearly all of our students mention SMU's superior teaching and the fact that we're embedded in the business and corporate community. Additionally, we're establishing Asian relevance, which means teaching Asian business with Asian research about Asian challenges."

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professional and personal development. Plus, I made many great friendships which I treasure. Even after the MBA programme, we are still bouncing ideas off one another!

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With the opportunities made possible with the MBA, Mr Chua (standing, with Prof Halff) successfully switched careers. PHOTO: NURIA LING

To date, 281 students have graduated from the programme. In addition to developing students' analytical skills typically found in an MBA curriculum, SMU's MBA programme nurtures other career-enhancing skills such as communication, leadership and innovation through specific coursework and its unique small-sized, seminar-style lessons, which promise lots of interaction between the lecturers and students.

Another unique feature is the strong emphasis on case studies, in particular, with focus on Asian companies, which supplement those written on western companies.

"What I really like about my learning experience is that many of the professors are also practitioners and consultants," says Mr Chua. "They enrich class discussions with an excellent combination of theoretical rigour and practical implementation."

It was only after he took up the MBA programme that Mr Chua learnt the value of human resources.

"Previously, I had thought that the people aspect of business pales in comparison to business strategies like global expansion and mergers and acquisitions. After the modules, I realised the importance of human capital, and how it can make or break a business," he says.

"The ability to align everyone in the company towards the same direction is paramount to business success."

Mr Chua calls the SMU MBA an excellent "fail-safe" environment to build up critical professional and leadership skills.

"You can put forth your thinking and rationale and bounce the ideas off a diverse class of students from different backgrounds and cultures. While the academic rigour of SMU is certainly one to be proud of, I am happy to have built up soft skills such as communication across cultures, persuasion, leadership and networking," he explains.

"These skills, which may take many years to improve on outside the MBA, are priceless in my