

TERTIARY EDUCATION

NUS to send more undergrads abroad

University aims for at least 2,000 of its students to have overseas exposure by 2015

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SINGAPORE – To broaden perspectives and instil cross-cultural skills in a greater number of its students, the National University of Singapore (NUS) plans to send more undergraduates on overseas learning stints.

It hopes that, by 2015, at least 2,000 of its undergraduates will have some form of overseas exposure by graduation, with about three in 10 doing student exchange programmes (SEP).

Exposure may take the form of overseas summer programmes, international internships or other programmes the university offers, such as study trips abroad.

This was revealed by NUS Provost and Deputy President of Academic Affairs Tan Eng Chye in a blog post yesterday about the formal signing of an agreement between the NUS and King's College London earlier this month.

Currently, the NUS sends about 1,700 students on SEPs that can last for six months or longer.

When contacted, the other two major universities here — the Nanyang Technological University (NTU) and Singapore Management University (SMU) — gave their own targets for overseas opportunities for their students.

An NTU spokesperson said that currently “one in two students” have overseas exposure and it hopes to raise this figure to seven in 10 through work-study and research programmes, international competitions and conferences, and other options, such as the university's Short Overseas Journalism programme.

At SMU, about four out of five students would have had “some form of global exposure” by graduation, said a spokesperson, and the university is “working to make that 100 per cent in three to five years' time”.

This would be done through international student exchanges, business-cultural study visits, overseas community service, overseas internships and co-curricular activities, as well as business side missions.

These usually last from one week to several months. Destinations that are increasingly popular with students include “large, fast-track emerging economies” like Mexico, Indonesia, South Korea and Turkey.

NUS' Professor Tan noted that,

“There is much value in an overseas stint, to broaden one's perspectives and to hone one's global awareness and cross-cultural skills.”

Professor Tan Eng Chye
NUS PROVOST AND DEPUTY PRESIDENT (ACADEMIC AFFAIRS)

in sending a projected 2,000 undergraduates overseas, it also expects to receive a similar number of incoming students every year.

Presently, handling the 3,400 incoming and outgoing students for the school is “no trivial task”, but the NUS would “press on” as it felt there is “much value” in an overseas stint, he said.

In his blog post, Prof Tan also detailed the two concurrent degree courses the university has rolled out in conjunction with King's College — a Bachelor of Science in Life Sciences

and Master in Molecular Biophysics, launched in 2010, and a Bachelor of Science in Life Sciences or Chemistry and Master in Forensic Science or Analytical Toxicology, launched last year.

Six students will be accepted into the degree programme each year. They will spend three years in NUS to obtain their honours degree and their final year in King's College London for their master's.

The students can also spend up to two semesters at King's College under NUS' regular SEP during their undergraduate studies.