

SMU to collaborate with two top Indonesian varsities

Hariz Baharudin

The Singapore Management University (SMU) is linking up with two of Indonesia's top universities to offer exchange programmes for students and faculty, as well as promote greater sharing of the three institutions' educational resources.

Under the agreements signed yesterday, SMU will also be collaborating with Universitas Indonesia (UI) and Institut Teknologi Bandung (ITB) on research areas like digital transformation, sustainable living and growth in Asia. They are now in preliminary discussions and will be launching joint programmes within the next 12 months.

SMU president Lily Kong signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) each with the rectors of UI and ITB. The signing was witnessed by Indonesia's Minister for Education and Culture Nadiem Makarim.

Professor Kong said: "The new MOUs on academic cooperation with UI and ITB underscore the common interests and commitment of SMU and our two Indonesian partners to develop new generations of global-ready and responsible citizens for Singapore and Indonesia through educational collaborations."

Mr Nadiem, the founder of ride-hailing firm Gojek, noted that collaboration in higher education, be it between schools and industry players, other institutions or international partners, is key for students to achieve success in the current global economy.

"The overarching principle is that in order for students to leave the academic programme, and have relevancy in the workforce and relevancy in the world of entrepreneurship... We need to really focus on simulating as much as possible situations that they will encounter in the real world," said Mr Nadiem, who studied in Singapore and the United States.

"So the overarching strategy to increase relevancy is to actually accelerate the cross-pollination of the higher education experience."

The minister was speaking at a dialogue with Prof Kong, where they discussed his vision and plans for higher education in Indonesia.

Mr Nadiem said that educational institutions in his country have to take learning outside of campus. Some universities in Indonesia have their students go through a six-month period of off-campus learning, be it exchange programmes, internships or external projects, he added.

Doing so would allow them to gain experience which they would otherwise not have if they spent their whole academic life in their institutions.

More than 8,000 business, government and academic leaders, as well as students, tuned in to the dialogue yesterday, which was held on videoconferencing platform Zoom.

Responding to a question from one of the attendees on how the Covid-19 situation will affect the way people learn, Mr Nadiem said that there is a misperception that e-learning and artificial intelligence will replace physical schools and in-person teaching in a post-pandemic world.

Even as students undertake more project-based initiatives and pursue vocational-based projects, they will still need face-to-face interactions with peers, teachers and learning partners, said the minister, who added that hybrid models of learning where students attend a mix of face-to-face and online lessons would likely be the future in higher education.

He said: "But what will be permanent is the use of technology in enhancing the class experience. Make it more efficient, make it more dynamic, make it more fun and utilising multiple channels of information media in order to engage students – that will be permanent."

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TO INCREASE RELEVANCY

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MR NADIEM MAKARIM, Indonesia's Minister for Education and Culture.