

Choosing the right computing degrees

In the first of a five-week AskST series on university education, The Straits Times addresses questions on university places – in particular, the sought-after spots for computer degree studies



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Q How many university places will be offered this year? With information technology (IT) and computing degrees being so popular now, will MOE consider offering more university places in these fields?

A The Ministry of Education has not said exactly how many university places it has planned to offer in the six local universities this year. But rest assured that it will offer enough places to ensure at least a 40 per cent cohort participation rate – which means that four in 10 of the age group going into university will be given places in the university.

Also, as The Straits Times reported last week, MOE said it will consider opening up more places in the six local universities for students whose plans to study overseas are hit by the pandemic. It will consider doing this even if the cohort participation rate for Singaporeans again goes beyond 40 per cent.

Education Minister Chan Chun Sing said in an interview with ST that the cohort participation rate had gone past 40 per cent in the last two years to accommodate students who could not go overseas. In 2020, the six universities here took in 17,500 students in total and, last year, they increased this further to 17,800 places. The cohort participation rate reached 42 per cent in both years.

Q Will MOE open up more places in computer science degrees?

A In recent years the universities have increased the number of courses in this field which are officially referred to as information and digital technology (IDT) degrees. As a result, the number of places has also gone up significantly.

In reply to your question, MOE said that with falling student cohort sizes, IDT places cannot increase indefinitely without eventually affecting the manpower pipeline for other important economic sectors.



According to the 2020 Graduate Employment Survey, the Singapore Management University's Information Systems graduates earned the highest salary among their peers in its School of Computing and Information Systems, with a gross monthly salary of \$4,683. PHOTO: SMU

It said it will need to take a calibrated approach when considering any further increase to IDT places, to distribute talent across the whole of Singapore's economy.

Q What does my son need to consider when deciding between the various computing degree programmes offered across the different universities? Can I find out more specifically about computing degrees in the Singapore Management University (SMU), which my son is keen on?

A Your son has chosen a popular field of study that offers good job prospects. Computing and computer technology are part of just about everything that touches our lives – from the cars we drive, to how we work, to how we entertain ourselves.

A computing degree can open the door to an array of high-paying fields, such as software engineering, Web development, information technology and network systems administration.

In reply to your questions, the dean of SMU School of Computing and Information Systems (SCIS) Professor Pang Hwee Hwa said the school offers four undergraduate

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computing programmes that target different job roles demanded by employers.

SMU's computer science degree emphasises strong technical skills in translating scientific principles to usable computing technologies and solutions, as well as the management skills needed to navigate complex software development and system deployment concerns.

Its information systems degree teaches students to identify emerging technologies and market trends, and exploit opportunities to digitally transform an organisation.

Under information systems, SMU also offers a Smart-City Management and Technology major, which is a unique interdisciplinary programme that trains professionals in blending technology, social, economic, business and environmental concerns to develop smart city solutions.

The school also offers a Bachelor of Science degree in computing and law in partnership with the

SMU Yong Pung How School of Law. The degree equips students with the skillsets to protect technology innovation, comply with legal and regulatory requirements, as well as manage technology and business risks posed by innovation.

SMU is working towards offering a new computing degree from August this year – in software engineering. This is a work-study degree that combines classroom learning and structured on-the-job training, and is geared towards training students for full-stack developer careers.

In response to the high demand for computing graduates, SCIS has been increasing its enrolment over the last few years. It admitted more than 535 students into its computing degree programmes last year and will increase enrolment this year.

Prof Pang had good advice on choosing from the various computing degree programmes. He said students should first decide which area they would like to specialise in, then consider the unique value propositions of SMU and the computing degrees it offers.

The computing profession encompasses a wide range of job roles, he said.

"The choice should be driven by considerations of target job roles, subject areas of interest and any prerequisites of each degree programmes," he said.

Students interested in degrees offered by SCIS should go to scis.smu.edu.sg/undergraduate.

Alternatively, they are welcome to talk to the faculty during next month's Open House.

According to the 2020 Graduate Employment Survey, which is jointly conducted by the six local universities, SMU's Information Systems graduates earned the highest salary among their peers in SCIS, with a gross monthly salary of \$4,683.

Six in 10 SCIS graduates received job offers before they graduated and they had a 93.1 per cent overall employment rate as of February last year.

They went on to undertake various professional roles, including as data analysts, data scientists, blockchain developers, IT security specialists, software engineers, project managers, user interface and user experience designers, enterprise/systems architects, as well as business process analyst and consultant roles.

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