

To prepare students for a future of rapid change, university offers...

# Transformative strategy for capacity to cope

QA



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— Ms Bevlyn Tan, 23, SMU accountancy undergraduate

**Q** What can universities do to prepare students like my daughter for a fast-changing world and manage the threat from generative artificial intelligence (AI)?

Worries about the impact of AI are common. In its latest Future of Jobs report, the World Economic Forum estimates that nearly three-quarters of global companies intend to adopt AI over the next five years.

This will bring about an average shift of 44 per cent in workers' core skills over the same period of time, says the study, released last April.

In a rapidly evolving world, "cultivating an innovative mindset and practical skills is crucial," says Ms Linette Lim, director of Admissions and Financial Assistance at SMU.

The university is constantly updating its curriculum and initiatives to meet the evolving needs of tomorrow's workforce.

To help students better understand real-world applications of technologies like AI, the school hosted a workshop together with professional services firm Accenture last year.

Another emerging space is the green economy, which could produce 30 million jobs in South-east Asia alone by 2030, according to US-based non-profit organisation Bridgespan last year.

SMU is training its students for potential jobs in this sector. Starting this year, all incoming SMU undergraduates will have to complete at least one sustainability-related course before they graduate.

SMU also aims to prepare students through work-study and internship programmes that offer real-world exposure. All students must complete at least one internship programme.

"We're dedicated to preparing students for the dynamic global landscape," says Prof Kong, "through our flexible interdisciplinary curriculum, interactive learning, and experiential opportunities such as guaranteed global exposure and real-world projects."

Says SMU accountancy undergraduate Bevlyn Tan, 23: "These programmes offered real-world contexts for me to apply academic knowledge, significantly enhancing my critical thinking, collaboration, and leadership skills." She took part in a three-month internship programme and a five-month exchange programme with Paris Dauphine University, both of which were arranged by SMU.



PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

**Q** How can a university education help my son develop soft skills like critical thinking, leadership and resilience?

As technology reshapes industries, soft skills like critical thinking are increasingly sought-after by employers. SkillsFuture Singapore, the statutory board in charge of skills upgrading, calls them "critical core skills". These skills, it says, are transferable and essential.

One of SMU's key strategies in this area: Fostering an interactive learning environment where students actively engage with professors and peers.

"The deliberate choice of small class sizes facilitates discussions, allowing each student ample opportunity to speak up and actively participate," says Ms Lim.

Mr Duncan Lim, 24, who is currently pursuing a Bachelor of Laws at SMU, says this approach helps him develop confidence and critical thinking: "There is always the opportunity for you to chime in and engage in a conversation with the instructor."

He used to be afraid of speaking up in class. "Now, it has become second nature," says Mr Lim, who also takes part in

the university's mooted programme.

Another strategy is SMU-X, an interdisciplinary programme where students can work with industry partners to tackle real-world challenges. It is open to students from all schools and disciplines in SMU, and includes projects from smart technologies to design thinking.

"Our transformative education nurtures core attributes of future-ready and socially conscious graduates who excel as global citizens," says Prof Kong, "empowering them to make a meaningful impact in the workplace and beyond."

**Q** My children want to study abroad, but it's too expensive. Can local universities offer similar opportunities?

Overseas exposure is crucial in preparing students to effectively navigate today's highly globalised world. Recognising its importance, SMU says it has made acquiring overseas experience a graduation requirement for all of its students.

The university provides a wide range of overseas programmes, from overseas internships and exchanges, to short-term study programmes and community ser-

vice projects.

The goal: To provide students with insights into different cultures and opportunities to build connections.

SMU also has a range of university-funded and donor-supported financial assistance schemes for students who need help with study and overseas programme costs. So far, its students have travelled to more than 150 cities in over 45 countries since the university opened in 2000.

SMU business management undergraduate Leong Hui Ling, 23, says her overseas experiences have helped her enhance her critical thinking and cross-cultural communication skills.

Ms Leong took part in a 10-week internship stint at chemical company Indorama Ventures in Bangkok in 2022. Last year, she took part in a week-long business study trip to Malaysia to learn more about palm oil sustainability, and a six-day social enterprise expedition to Vietnam.

"Engaging in sustainability projects in SMU-X modules and (doing so) in different countries has broadened my perspective," says Ms Leong, "allowing me to understand how solutions in one part of the world can be adapted and applied globally."

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