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The move follows encouraging results from SMU's other overseas centres in Jakarta and Bangkok



Singapore Management University (SMU) launched its third overseas centre on Thursday (Apr 25), in Vietnam's bustling commercial hub Ho Chi Minh City, as part of the institution's efforts to extend its regional reach and contribute to Asia's growth.

This is the first official presence of a Singaporean university in Vietnam.

It is expected to increase SMU's opportunities to collaborate with local partners in education and industry, enhance human capital development, and facilitate the exchange of knowledge and expertise between the two Asean countries.

The university, which was founded in 2000, also aims to launch three more representative offices across Asia by 2030, with the locations to be decided after gaining the necessary experience in the first three centres across South-east Asia, Professor Lily Kong, president of SMU, told The Business Times at a media briefing.

SMU's two other overseas centres, located in Jakarta and Bangkok, have achieved "encouraging" outcomes, she noted. This laid a solid foundation for the university to move forward with its plans for a third chapter in Vietnam.

"The activities are common across all the centres, but each country might have a slightly different emphasis," Prof Kong said.

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In Indonesia, SMU concentrates on student recruitment as the market is well-established with a keen interest and awareness of studying in Singapore, she said.

On the other hand, in Thailand, most undergraduate students do not consider studying abroad, leading the university to focus more on dimensions such as innovation and entrepreneurship.

Nearly 900 students from other South-east Asian countries are enrolled at SMU, with roughly 60 of them being Vietnamese. The university is home to a total of more than 13,000 students across undergraduate, postgraduate professional and postgraduate research programmes.

According to statistics by Unesco, Vietnam topped South-east Asia in the number of students studying abroad during the 2021 to 2022 period.

Out of the 350,000 students from the region studying overseas, 132,000 are Vietnamese. Indonesia and Malaysia each have 56,000, while Thailand has 32,000. Their top destinations are Japan, South Korea, the UK, the US and Australia.

“There’s quite a lot of interest in South-east Asia now (from universities in other parts of the world),” said Prof Kong. “We have been close to the industry and built a base of strong relationships that we can build on. It gives us, in a sense, a sort of first-mover advantage.”

In Vietnam, SMU has formed partnerships with prominent organisations such as investment management firm VinaCapital, the largest private company Vingroup, and technology unicorn VNG, through its International Advisory Council.

Through collaborations with local partners, SMU’s educational offerings have extended to areas such as professional and continuing education training and upskilling programmes, collaborative research projects, international internships, and business incubation programmes.

“In response to the growing need for skilled workers in technology and sustainability, (the overseas centre in Vietnam) is dedicated to building a talent pipeline that meets these demands,” Prof Kong added.

“I think that Vietnam will find (the IT sector) an area of growth and that is, in fact, our greatest strength.”

In 2022, the university ranked fourth globally in software engineering by CSRankings. The three cross-disciplinary focal points at SMU are digital transformation, sustainable living and growth in Asia.

“We think the region as a whole will find these areas sources of growth,” said Prof Kong. “By focusing on South-east Asia and contributing to South-east Asia, we want to be positioned as a part of the growth story of Asia”.