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Headline: SMU's financial aid scheme to benefit over 3,000 students yearly

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The Singapore Management University (SMU), which launched a financial aid scheme in 2017 to cover the full tuition fees of its needy undergraduate students, will extend it from August 2025 to include allowances to cover students' living expenses and overseas experiences.

The university, which is celebrating its 25th anniversary in 2025, said that under the new SMU Access Plus scheme, it is also eliminating requirements such as housing type and focusing solely on per capita income and citizenship.

As a result, it expects to benefit more than 3,000 students annually. Previously, only about 200 qualified for the scheme.

Since 2018, the university has made it a requirement for all its students to have some form of global exposure, be it through an overseas exchange programme, international internship or overseas community service programme.

SMU president Lily Kong said: "At SMU, we take pride in being the first university to make global exposure a graduation requirement. Experiencing the world through the lens of a university education is a transformative opportunity – one that fosters international networks, broadens horizons and opens doors to new possibilities.

"Such opportunities for global exposure should be accessible to every student, regardless of financial circumstance.

"That is why we continue to enhance the SMU Access scheme to support and enable their global experience, ensuring that no one is left behind."

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In the interview with The Straits Times, she noted that SMU is also the first local university to introduce both internship and community service as graduation requirements from 2000, when the university was launched.

All SMU undergraduates must complete at least 10 weeks of internship and a minimum of 80 hours of community service.

It is also the first university to innovate in other areas, including introducing a holistic admissions approach to having Friday afternoons free of classes to enable out-of-classroom activities and learning.

In recent years, another first in the higher education landscape in Singapore has been the set-up of SMU's College of Integrative Studies that allows its students to customise and design their majors from the university's entire suite of courses.

Professor Kong said these innovations have, over the years, enabled SMU to deliver an education that has truly transformed its students and played a role in shaping higher education practices in Singapore.

Going forward, she said, SMU will continue to innovate in both undergraduate and continuing education.

In undergraduate education, all its students will be given more leeway and flexibility to direct their own learning.

For one thing, those who are aspiring to be entrepreneurs will be given the opportunity to develop their own elective to acquire the skills and knowledge to develop and scale their start-ups.

In continuing education, SMU will unveil a new series of industry graduate diplomas that will provide flexible pathways for learners to pursue professional growth.

She also said that in keeping with SMU's refreshed vision and mission to be "Asia's premier global city university", the university will unveil courses and programmes to nurture "globally agile, Asia-ready graduates".

All undergraduate students will take up at least one course to gain an understanding of Asia's cultural, social and economic landscapes. They can then advance to programmes that will include short-term experiences in different parts of the region.

"As our young undergraduates explore the world and cultivate a well-rounded global perspective, it is equally vital that they develop a deep appreciation of Asia's rich social, cultural and economic landscape," Prof Kong said.

"Being Asia-ready and globally agile are indispensable qualities – valued not only by global companies seeking talent with nuanced insights into Asia but also by Singapore enterprises expanding in the region. These dual competencies empower our students to navigate and contribute meaningfully to an interconnected and dynamic world."

She also noted the fact that SMU has set up overseas centres in Jakarta, Bangkok and Ho Chi Minh City as part of the institution's efforts to extend its regional reach and contribute to Asia's growth.

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Referring to SMU's refreshed vision and mission, she said: "While we honour the achievements of the past 25 years, we also look ahead with these renewed statements.

"They embody our purpose as a global city university rooted in Asia, driving innovation, fostering partnerships and transforming lives as we navigate the next phase of our journey."