

**Opening Remarks by SMU President Professor Lily Kong
Media Briefing
Launch of SMU's Representative Office in Vietnam
(SMU Overseas Centre Ho Chi Minh City, OCHCMC)**

Thursday, 25 April 2024

Friends from the media

Good morning. Your presence here marks the beginning of an exciting new chapter in the SMU story here in Vietnam, and we are truly delighted to have you with us.

We launched our first overseas centre in Jakarta in December 2022, and second overseas centre in Bangkok in October 2023. Today, we are delighted to announce the launch of Singapore Management University's (SMU) representative office in Vietnam, known as the SMU Overseas Centre Ho Chi Minh City.

Let me first share about the establishment of SMU's overseas centres with context of our strategic plan. In 2020, we identified three strategic priorities to further build our education, research and engagement work, focusing our entire institutional energies and expertise on these areas: Digital Transformation, Sustainable Living, and Growth in Asia.

In line with the "Growth in Asia" strategic priority, we have identified the establishment of a network of overseas centres as an important step towards strengthening collaborations, enabling deeper cross-cultural understanding, and collectively contributing to the growth of the region. The overseas centres will allow SMU to drive deeper engagement with our trusted partners to successfully make meaningful impact on communities in different parts of Asia.

We chose Vietnam for three reasons:

Fast growing economy

Vietnam stands out as one of the world's fastest-growing economies, supported by a record of successful economic and market growth, alongside a youthful and energetic workforce. Ho Chi Minh City, serving as Vietnam's central hub for economics and finance, offers an ideal setting for SMU to foster connections with both private and public sectors, presenting significant prospects for students. Within this vibrant business environment, there is abundant potential for SMU to contribute to executive training and education, nurturing the development of local students into future leaders.

Aligned with SMU's strategic priorities

Additionally, Vietnam's dedicated efforts towards digitalisation perfectly match our strategic emphasis on Digital Transformation. Its digital economy has expanded at an annual average rate of 20%, three times higher than its GDP growth rate. 80% of the Vietnamese population is now connected to the Internet. For two consecutive years, in 2022 and 2023, Vietnam ranked among the top 10 countries globally in terms of new mobile application downloads.

Furthermore, Vietnam's National Green Growth Strategy 2021-2030, complemented by the Prime Minister's Decision 167, encourages sustainable practices and the adoption of eco-technologies. SMU's strategic priority of Sustainable Living, where we aim to drive solutions and shape frameworks to enhance the quality of life, is very much in line with these goals.

By leveraging our academic and interdisciplinary research capabilities, we hope to achieve mutually beneficial interactions by partnering with local organizations and government agencies in these two areas.

Longstanding relationship & strong partnerships

There is also a strong diplomatic connection between SMU and Vietnam. Last year, SMU co-hosted a luncheon together with VinaCapital and FPT for Vietnam Prime Minister, His Excellency Pham Minh Chinh to celebrate the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations and the 10th anniversary of strategic partnership between our two countries.

SMU has maintained a longstanding partnership with Vietnam through its International Advisory Council (IAC), which was set up to guide and advise the university on the direction and approaches to strengthen and deepen SMU's collaboration and engagement with the government, academic and business communities of Vietnam.

The Vietnam chapter of SMU International Advisory Council includes senior representatives from leading Vietnamese organisations such as Unigroup, Vingroup, and Indo-Trans Corporation.

Over the years, SMU has also formed numerous strategic partnerships with Vietnamese universities and corporations.

SMU has close partnerships with three respected universities in Vietnam: Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City (VNU-HCMC), Vin University (VinUni), and the University of Economics Ho Chi Minh City (UEH).

Our close relationships with the local universities have made possible many student exchanges, faculty missions, professional and continuing education programmes, experiential learning (SMU-XO) courses, and case writing projects.

Through our partnerships with local companies, we have also been able to offer our students a wide range of global exposure programmes to develop in them a global mindset. They include Overseas Community Service Projects, internships, short-term study programmes, Global Summer camps, and SMU-X Overseas courses.

Over the last 5 years, more than 1200 students have participated in these global programmes involving our partners in Vietnam, either virtually or onsite. To date, we have partnered more than 500 companies in Vietnam for student internship opportunities.

What is the role of SMU's OCHCMC?

At a broad level, OCHCMC will seek to deepen existing partnerships and collaborations while forming new ones with local academic institutions, businesses, and government agencies. These collaborations will facilitate student mobility, upskill local capabilities, and facilitate knowledge exchange.

Student mobility is vital for extending the horizon of learning for both Vietnamese and Singaporean students. This enriches cross-cultural understanding and broadens the horizons of young individuals, offering fresh experiences that they will keep for life. OCHCMC will oversee these student mobility initiatives.

OCHCMC will contribute to efforts to upskill local capabilities in Vietnam, by seeking to better understand talent and skills development needs, thereby helping SMU to contribute to upskilling and reskilling efforts in Vietnam in targeted and relevant ways. In response to the growing need for skilled workers in technology and sustainability, OCHCMC is dedicated to building a talent pipeline that meets these demands.

The Centre will also organise discussions and various activities to encourage sharing of knowledge. These events may be open to the public or exclusive, and they will strive to introduce advanced research and expertise in fields like sustainability and digital transformation to aid the social and economic growth of local communities. Through these efforts, we aim to collaborate with local educational and industry allies to bolster Vietnam's pursuit of a sustainable and knowledge-based future.

SMU will continue to offer scholarships and grants for eligible Vietnamese citizens to pursue undergraduate and postgraduate studies at SMU.

Conclusion

Through the Overseas Centre in Vietnam, SMU hopes to be able to extend SMU's unique brand of holistic and transformative education to a broader base of Vietnamese students. We aim to create a hub of knowledge and innovation that not only benefits our students but also contributes to the growth and prosperity of Vietnam.

To conclude, we believe that SMU, through its Overseas Centre and together with our partners, can make a significant contribution to Vietnam's social and economic development, while deepening the understanding, collaboration and trust, between our two countries.

I shall now invite the Centre Director of SMU OCHCMC, Mr Viet Anh Vu, to share more details about the Centre.

Thank you.