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SMU enhances Undergraduate Core Curriculum to prepare students for an AI-driven, Asia-centric economy

From AY2027/28, undergraduates will follow a University-wide curriculum with new course baskets in Asia Insights, Dialogue & Discovery, Digital Technologies and Environment & Society — within the existing Core Curriculum credit requirement

Singapore, 24 November 2026 – Singapore Management University (SMU) is enhancing its Core Curriculum for all undergraduates admitted from Academic Year (AY) 2027/2028. The curriculum is broad-based by design, spanning critical thinking, ethics, numeracy, digital literacy, economics, sustainability, and intercultural understanding. The enhancements deepen the focus on AI, Asia and interdisciplinary dialogue.

Four new course baskets* – Digital Technologies, Environment & Society, Asia Insights, and Dialogue & Discovery – will enrich students' learning and are designed to help students evaluate emerging technologies, examine issues from different perspectives, and apply insights across disciplines to real-world challenges.

"A degree must do more than prepare students for their first job. As AI reshapes work and Asia grows in economic importance, graduates need to understand and apply technology responsibly, think critically and connect ideas across disciplines. While the current Core Curriculum serves students well, our Enhanced Core Curriculum offers increased opportunities to strengthen these capabilities alongside students' disciplinary expertise, further enriching their learning experiences and ability to adapt as jobs and industries evolve," said **Prof Alan Chan, SMU Provost.**

A refreshed Core Curriculum

The changes follow a comprehensive year-long review of SMU's Core Curriculum in 2025, with the curriculum benchmarked against 14 universities and reviewed alongside employer expectations. Reorganised around three pillars – **Foundations, Capabilities, and Horizons** – the Enhanced Core Curriculum combines intellectual rigour, professional skills, and broader perspectives on cultures, societies and global challenges.

It preserves SMU's existing emphasis on modes of thinking, communication through effective writing and reasoning, and ethics. These enduring capabilities will complement students' digital and disciplinary knowledge, helping them exercise sound judgement, communicate effectively, and navigate the human and ethical dimensions of an AI-transformed workplace.

Under the Horizons pillar, students will continue to take the compulsory *Big Questions* course and select two courses from four baskets: Peoples & Cultures, Environment & Society, Asia Insights, and Dialogue & Discovery.

**Course basket refers to a group of courses.*

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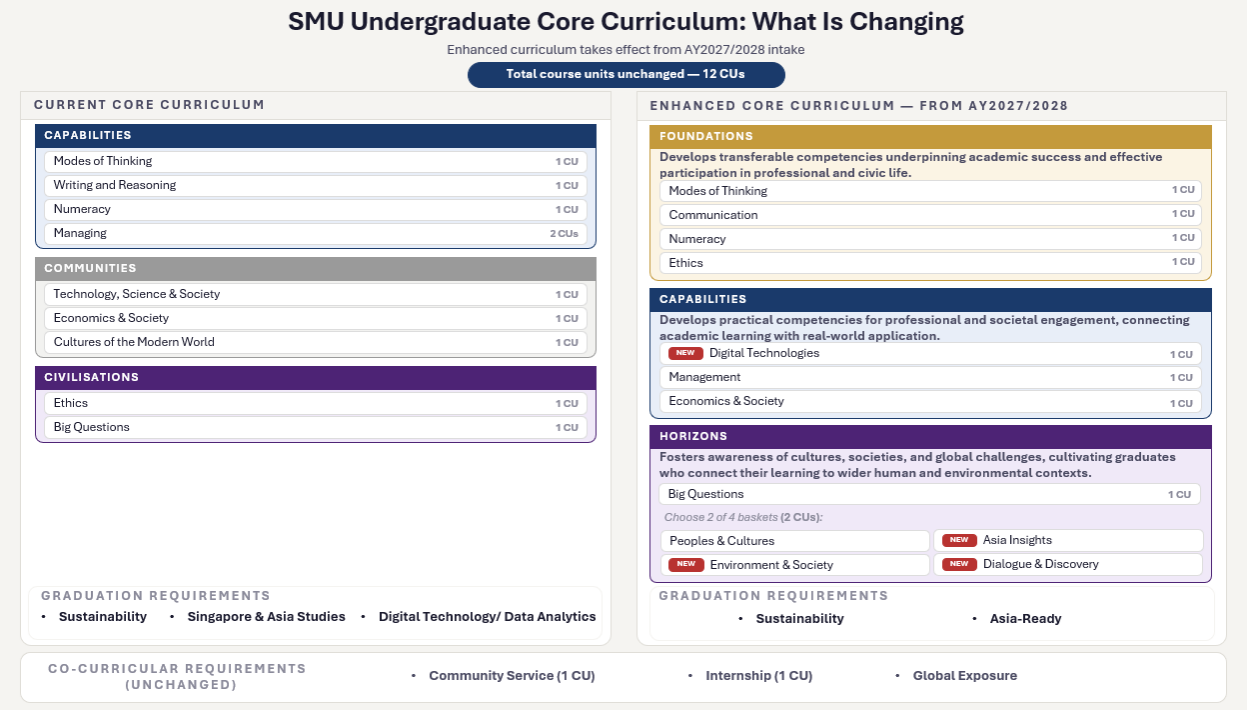

SMU's Enhanced Core Curriculum, which applies to all undergraduates admitted from AY2027/2028. While preserving the interdisciplinary spirit and diversity of the current curriculum, the reorganisation of the Enhanced Core Curriculum provides greater clarity for students and employers about the skills and knowledge of graduates.

The Enhanced Core Curriculum retains the existing requirement of **12 Course Units (CUs)**, and accounts for one-third of the undergraduate degree programme.

Existing co-curricular requirements, including community service, internships and global exposure, remain unchanged.

The Enhanced Core Curriculum will apply to students admitted from AY2027/2028 onwards. Existing students will continue to take the Core Curriculum requirements applicable to their year of admission.

Equipping every undergraduate with AI fluency

Under the new compulsory **Digital Technologies** basket, every undergraduate will complete a course that combines an online component on AI with instructor-led sessions tailored to specific disciplines.

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The online component, titled *AI for Work and Life*, will be delivered through a structured Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) comprising eight micromodules. It will account for one-third of the Digital Technologies course. The remaining two-thirds of the course will comprise in-person instruction that explores AI use in specific disciplines.

Designed to help students develop both broad AI literacy and the ability to apply AI within their respective fields, the new basket examines how digital systems shape decisions, workflows and society, preparing students to use these tools responsibly and effectively in professional contexts.

Encouraging more discourse in an age of AI

SMU is introducing a new **Dialogue & Discovery** course basket that builds on SMU's compulsory Big Questions course which tackles broad societal challenges.

Under the Enhanced Core Curriculum, Big Questions will adopt a Socratic small-class format, so that every student learns to question, reason, and write in a setting built around sustained discussion. Dialogue & Discovery (D&D) takes this further, with each course centred on a compelling question explored in depth through multiple disciplinary perspectives. Students engage closely with readings, examine different viewpoints, and test their ideas through substantive dialogue and questioning.

Spanning a range of topics, D&D courses will employ interactive formats such as debates, peer writing workshops, fishbowl seminars, and student-led discussions. By learning to question assumptions, weigh competing perspectives and make reasoned judgements, students develop the discernment to navigate questions that AI cannot resolve for them.

Deepening students' understanding of Asia and Environment

As Asia’s influence on the global economy and world affairs grows, graduates need a deep understanding of the region and strong intercultural competence. SMU is therefore strengthening its **Asia-Ready graduation requirement**, in line with the University’s strategic focus on preparing graduates to engage confidently with the region. Under the enhanced requirement, students must complete at least one course that offers an in-depth understanding of one or more Asian countries beyond Singapore.

The University is also introducing two new course baskets that strengthen students’ understanding of Asia and sustainability:

- **Asia Insights**, which combines classroom learning with immersive field experiences, including a study trip to an Asian destination, helping students understand the sociocultural, economic, political and business contexts that shape Asian societies.

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- **Environment & Society**, which enables students to examine sustainability through the interplay between environmental and social issues. By exploring human-environment relationships and the challenges facing communities, students will develop their critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

Reflections from members of the SMU Core Curriculum review taskforce:

“Our students will graduate into a world shaped by pressing challenges such as climate change and the rapid rise of AI. The Enhanced Core Curriculum gives particular focus to these defining issues of our day. In particular, what stands out most is the place we have given to dialogue within the Enhanced Core. We will be adopting a new pedagogical approach where every first-year student will learn to question, reason, and write in small-group settings. It is a deliberate investment in how our students think, not just in what they know.” ***Michelle Lee,*** *Associate Provost (Undergraduate Education); Associate Professor of Marketing (Education)*

"I’m optimistic that the Enhanced Core Curriculum will be the next step in SMU’s already renowned pedagogy. The Enhanced Core Curriculum keeps SMU education directly engaged with changes in the workplace. Our changes will enable students to be AI savvy while also preserving key aspects of independent critical thinking; knowledge creation and written skills that employers will increasingly view as valuable.” ***Fiona Clare Williamson****, Professor of Environmental History and Associate Dean (Undergraduate Education)*

“The Enhanced Core Curriculum is SMU's reading at harmonising the two critical dimensions necessary in contemporary higher education - the skills and knowledge we think students urgently need to respond to the polycrisis of our time, and the dispositions that reflect perennial needs in any human flourishing situated in Asia.

With the Asia Insight basket now a core pillar of SMU's Asia Ready framework, our students are given more opportunities to learn by immersing with Asia and its stakeholders. I’m excited to be bringing them to where the action is, and to be part of their learning journey on how to create solutions for many of Asia's wicked challenges.” ***George Wong****, Assistant Professor of Sociology (Education)*

“AI is a controversial topic at the moment. But there’s much more than just generative AI. It's a rich topic to study both as a technology and as a mirror to ourselves. I want our students to feel empowered to be successful in a world with new AI capabilities, both in their knowledge of what it is and how it works, and so that they will also be free to not use it.

People are feeling lots of uncertainty about the job market. Pushing our students to grapple with discipline-crossing questions around AI, sustainability, the Asian continent, and how they are all intertwined, is key to helping them develop into not just employable graduates, but more deeply thinking people. A university education is about so much more than the piece of paper you graduate with. It's about curiosity, discovery and challenging yourself to take on new and important

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ideas. That's what we're aiming to do with the Enhanced Core." ***Jonathan Chase**, Assistant Professor of Computer Science (Practice)*

Click here for details on the Enhanced Core Curriculum.

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About Singapore Management University (SMU)

Established in 2000, Singapore Management University (SMU) is recognised for its disciplinary and multi-disciplinary research that address issues of global relevance, impacting business, government, and society. Its distinctive education, incorporating innovative experiential learning, aims to nurture global citizens, entrepreneurs and change agents. With more than 12,000 students, SMU offers a wide range of bachelors, masters and PhD degree programmes in the disciplinary areas associated with six of its eight schools - Accountancy, Business, Computing, Economics, Law and Social Sciences. Its seventh school, the SMU College of Integrative Studies, offers degree programmes in deep, integrative interdisciplinary education. The College of Graduate Research Studies, SMU's eighth school, enhances integration and interdisciplinarity across the various SMU postgraduate research programmes that will enable our students to gain a holistic learning experience and well-grounded approach to their research. SMU also offers a growing number of executive development and continuing education programmes. Through its city campus, SMU focuses on making meaningful impact on Singapore and beyond through its partnerships with industry, policy makers and academic institutions. www.smu.edu.sg

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