

SIT's degree courses a hit with poly grads

Record numbers vie for places at Singapore Institute of Technology

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THE Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT), which may be Singapore's fifth public university, is a hit with polytechnic graduates.

A record 5,000 polytechnic diploma holders vied for the 1,300 places which the institute offered this year. Last year, 4,000 applied for the 1,000 places offered.

With the addition of seven new courses this year, the institute, which runs the courses on its decentralised campuses in the polytechnics, offers niche degrees in 24 courses from culinary arts to design to preschool education.

Most of the applicants, or 95 per cent, were diploma holders with some work experience. The rest were A-level holders.

Another indication of SIT's popularity – one in five of those admitted had a grade point average (GPA) of 3.5 and above, which

puts them among the top 15 per cent of the polytechnic cohort.

SIT president Tan Chin Tiong attributed the increase in applicants partly to the popularity of its new degrees, which include the food and human nutrition course from Newcastle University, and the aeronautical engineering and aerospace systems courses from the University of Glasgow.

Some students who had offers from other universities, including the National University of Singapore (NUS), Nanyang Technological University and the Singapore Management University, said that they picked SIT for the programmes offered by SIT's partner schools.

The 50 places in the food and nutrition course, for instance, were eight times oversubscribed, while the Glasgow University courses had more than six applicants for every place available.

"We have been very selective

in our choice of partner institutions so that our graduates will have an edge in the job market," Professor Tan said.

Among SIT's new partners are the University of Glasgow, and the Glasgow School of Art, which offers design courses at SIT. Both are leading schools in Britain and Europe.

Prof Tan added that SIT offers programmes which are in demand by industry, and plans the curriculum to align with polytechnic diploma courses.

This enables the universities to give SIT undergraduates advanced standing, which allows them to complete their degrees faster, generally two years.

With the Ministry of Education's tuition fee subsidy, students pay between \$20,000 and \$27,000 for two years of study.

SIT was set up in 2009 to meet the growing demand among polytechnic graduates for university places.

Back then, only 13 per cent of the polytechnic cohort secured places in the local universities, but this is projected to go up to 20

per cent by 2015. SIT's annual intake will be 2,000 by then.

Prof Tan declined to comment when asked about Minister of State Lawrence Wong's recent remark that SIT could be a "possible platform" for an applied university which a university review committee has proposed.

Ms Lisa Goh, 23, is among the students to win a place at SIT this year.

The Nanyang Polytechnic graduate scored a GPA of 3.89 in interior design and was offered a place in architecture at NUS.

But she decided not to take it up because her heart was in interior design, she said.

Instead, she worked for the next two years in her father's interior design firm, and decided to get a degree when she heard that the Glasgow School of Art was offering a course through SIT.

"It's amazing that I get to do a degree with such a reputed school in Singapore and it will cost me just \$20,000," she said.

"It would cost me three times more if I had to go to Britain."

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Madam Lim discovered her passion for nursing later in life and is glad for the opportunity to pursue her dream. PHOTO: DIOS VINCOY JR FOR THE STRAITS TIMES

Going for nursing degree... at age 45

MADAM Michelle Lim will begin her nursing degree course this year at the Singapore Institute of Technology at age 45, but for the mum whose three sons are in their 20s, it is better late than never.

The secondary school dropout decided to go back to school more than 10 years ago to become a nurse, after her mother's prolonged bout with breast cancer 15 years ago. "My mother was in a lot of pain, but I saw how helpful and comforting the nurses were and I decided there and then to become a nurse," Madam Lim said.

But it was a long road to achieve her dream. First she had to pass her O levels to make it to the nursing course in the Institute of Technical Education.

She did well enough to enter the nursing diploma course at Ngee Ann Polytechnic three years ago. She graduated with a GPA of 3.9 early this year.

When she applied to SIT for a place in the University of Man-

chester nursing course, she was worried that her age would be a barrier – but it wasn't.

Dr Ting Seng Kiong, SIT deputy president (academic), said the institute welcomes mature students and had admitted 54 students above 30 years old in the last three years.

He said their breadth and depth of work experience are taken into account for admission, adding: "Mature students show deep love for the subject they wish to study. They feel that it is time for them to synthesise the knowledge they have acquired at work by going back to school."

Madam Lim said that although she discovered her passion later in life, she was glad for the opportunity to pursue her dream. "By the time I graduate, I will be 47... But I still feel that I will have a lot to offer because I really want to be in a profession where I can help people."

SANDRA DAVIE

Universities in Singapore

■ The National University of Singapore (NUS) and Nanyang Technological University (NTU) are billed as teaching and research-intensive universities.

They offer a range of degrees from the arts and social sciences to engineering and the sciences.

NUS has about 27,000 undergraduates, while NTU has close to 24,000.

In recent years, both universities have been rising up several worldwide rankings.

■ The Singapore Management University started in 2000 and was modelled on the Wharton Business School in the United

States. It offers six bachelor's degree programmes including business, accountancy, social sciences and law. Currently, its undergraduate enrolment is close to 7,000.

■ The Singapore University of Technology and Design (SUTD), which opened its doors in May, offers degrees in four areas: architecture and sustainable design; engineering product development; engineering systems and design; and information systems technology and design.

SUTD, which aims to nurture technically grounded leaders and innovators, has a multi-disciplinary curriculum, and is

partners with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and China's Zhejiang University.

SUTD took in 340 students this year. The school will move to a campus in Changi in 2014. There will eventually be 4,000 undergraduates and 2,000 postgraduates studying there.

■ UniSIM, Singapore's first privately funded university, was set up in 2006. It offers a range of part-time degrees to working adults, and enrolment has reached 12,000 this year. The Government gives a 55 per cent tuition fee subsidy to UniSIM students.