



S'poreans flocking overseas to study

Weak currencies and high-ranking universities draw them to UK, US

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DESPITE the expansion of university places here, Singaporeans are flocking to the United States and Britain, drawn by the weaker currencies and high-ranking universities.

This year, more than 4,500 of them are enrolled in American institutions, the highest figure in 11 years, according to Open Doors, a publication that tracks international student movements.

About half are undergraduates, while nearly 35 per cent are on postgraduate programmes. The remainder are on exchange schemes or professional courses.

For Britain, the enrolment figure also reached a record high of 4,840 last year, according to the British Council Singapore, with the majority enrolled in undergraduate degree courses.

The universities with the most Singaporean students are among the most prestigious. They include Stanford, Harvard, Cornell and the University of California, Berkeley in the US, and Cambridge, Oxford and Imperial College in Britain. Education counselors report, however, that an increasing number of Singaporeans are also taking the road less travelled to the liberal arts colleges and art and design schools.

Singaporean students and their



Top-tier US universities that attract Singaporean students include Harvard (above, left), Stanford and Cornell. The Government is adding more places and courses at SIT (above, right), which offers degree programmes for polytechnic graduates. PHOTOS: REUTERS, SINGAPORE INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY



parents say the lower cost of education is the main reason they are heading overseas.

Businessman Milton Tan, 49, whose son and daughter are at British universities, said: "My daughter can get a law degree in three years and my poly grad son, an engineering degree from Imperial in three years. My son could have easily got a place at the Singapore Institute of Technology, but it is not quite an Imperial College degree. And all this at a discount, because of the cheaper pound."

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PRESTIGE AND VALUE FOR MONEY

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Technology (SIT) and the Singapore University of Technology and Design are two of the universi-

ties that have been set up to offer places for up to 30 per cent of university-age Singaporeans by 2015.

Recently, the Government announced it was adding more places and courses at SIT and offering full-time degree programmes at SIM University to raise the university participation rate to 40 per cent by 2020.

Mr Kelly Koh, the British Council's director of education, said that because of currency fluctuations, since 2008, the cost of studying in Britain has dropped by 35 per cent for Singapore students.

Currently, undergraduates have to fork out about \$40,000 a year for fees and living expenses. Three years ago, it would have

cost them \$60,000 a year.

Mr Koh admits that British universities are also popular partly because of the shorter duration of studies. Students can complete an undergraduate degree with honours in three years and a master's degree in one year. In the US, undergraduates need four years to complete their degrees while those studying for master's degrees generally take two years.

"At the end of the day, Singaporeans want a high quality education from a prestigious university," said Mr Koh. "Yet they also recognise good value for money. British universities tick all of these boxes for them."

Ms Karen Kaylor, director of the US Education Information Centre in Singapore, said record numbers of Singaporeans are choosing to study in the US as the tuition fees offer value for money. "The US dollar is low and Singapore students want brand-name degrees and the US has many top-tier institutions," she said.

Attending a US university generally costs between US\$30,000 (S\$37,000) and US\$65,000 a year in tuition and living costs. Ms Kaylor said that although most Singaporeans make a beeline for top-tier institutions, some are choosing specialist liberal arts colleges such as Middlebury in Vermont.

Others say that with more Singaporeans going to university, a brand-name degree will give them the edge. National serviceman Adrian Toh, 20, who wants to study at one of the Ivy League colleges, said: "A garden-variety degree won't do any more. You have to have something more. So having a degree from a top-notch institution will be an advantage."

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