

SUSS to equip graduates for alternative job pathways

Training programmes in entrepreneurship and gig economy among initiatives uni has started

Amelia Teng
Education Correspondent

Students from the Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUSS) are getting a leg-up in their work prospects amid a tough economic outlook this year.

The university has been working on ways to help fresh graduates who wish to explore alternative job pathways beyond salaried positions.

To this end, it started two programmes in entrepreneurship and the gig economy for those who are interested in such areas of work.

SUSS president Cheong Hee Kiat

told The Straits Times in an interview last month that it is the institution's way of providing some training and stability as graduates pursue their interests in this uncertain Covid-19 situation.

He said: "We need to encourage more of these young people with energy, drive and ideas... to make a living on their own, and some of this will be in terms of entrepreneurship."

The university's efforts are on top of 100 traineeship positions it is offering as part of the Government's SGUnited Traineeships Programme for recent graduates.

It has received nearly 6,000 applications for the positions, which

come with a monthly allowance and some training for up to 12 months.

SUSS, Singapore's sixth autonomous university, is currently in the process of interviewing applicants.

Since July 1, some of the positions have already been filled, and eight trainees have started work across departments such as business intelligence and analytics, human resources as well as communications and marketing.

Professor Cheong said the university, which marks its 15th anniversary this year, will train aspiring entrepreneurs through a Venture Builder programme which starts this month.

Full-time and part-time SUSS graduating students who are eligible for SGUnited Traineeships can join the programme, which comes with a monthly allowance. It plans to start with 15 students, and eight

GOING BEYOND SALARIED JOBS

We need to encourage more of these young people with energy, drive and ideas... to make a living on their own, and some of this will be in terms of entrepreneurship.



PROFESSOR CHEONG HEE KIAT,
president of the Singapore University of Social Sciences.

have already been recruited.

It hopes to increase the intake to 30 students next year if the scheme proves to be effective.

The institution had previously introduced an Alibaba Cloud-SUSS Entrepreneurship Programme, an incubation programme open to all institutes of higher learning students, including those from outside SUSS.

Since 2017, it has helped to create about 35 student start-ups, 14 of which have secured funding amounting to more than \$8 million in total.

Another initiative is a series of workshops on the gig economy that took place in June to equip graduates with skills related to starting up businesses. About 130 SUSS graduates attended the workshops, which covered topics such as freelancing, e-commerce and digital marketing.

Prof Cheong said it is not a given that young people know how to freelance. "We want to train up a group of people whose mental model of what employment is about has enlarged," he said.

The university, he added, hopes to impart to interested students tips and tricks in the freelance world, from how to find work opportunities and how to create content to marketing one's abilities.

It may also bring such aspects

into its formal curriculum to prepare graduates for new work regimes, said Prof Cheong.

In a bid to broaden students' expertise, SUSS has also grown its pool of minor subjects, from fewer than five in 2005 to 38 now. The fields range from analytics and digital media to psychology and sociology.

Full-time undergraduates at SUSS, except those in accountancy, need to take a minor as part of their curriculum. Part-time students have the option of taking a minor if they wish to do so.

Prof Cheong said it is essential for students to have multiple perspectives, be open-minded and interact with peers from other disciplines who may not think like them.

"What we are thinking of is... to introduce more complex problems in students' second and third-year curricula, and combine students from different disciplines for broad-based projects," he added.

Real-world issues are often connected, he said. An issue in housing, for example, could be linked to not just logistics, but transport of goods and supply disruptions, environment, pollution and jobs.

ateng@sph.com.sg

SEE EDITORIAL A15