

# SUSS lauded for marriage and baby bonus offer

Scheme for students to claim free modules creative, a wonderful gesture, say academics

**Janice Tai and Jasia Shamdasani**

A university's offer of free classes to students who marry or have kids during their course of study has been welcomed by most students and academics interviewed, with some calling it a creative move.

Last Friday, the Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUSS) announced the Marriage and Baby Bonus scheme for its part-time adult students, saying this was "in support of Singapore's continued focus on encouraging marriage and parenthood".

From July 23, those who qualify can redeem two free modules, with a maximum of five credit units per module, or one 10-credit unit module. This move may save students up to a few thousand dollars.

Sociologist Paulin Straughan from Singapore Management University said the SUSS move is an innovative way to encourage young adults to integrate lifelong learning with family responsibilities.

"We tend to look at our life aspirations in linear segments – first we complete our formal education, then we get a job and build our careers, and then we get married and grow our families," she said.

This mindset results in a delay in people getting married and having their first child, she added, as investment in formal education and careers now take longer.

Associate Professor Tan Ern Ser from the Department of Sociology at the National University of Singapore (NUS) also thinks the SUSS scheme is creative, even though it will not enhance marriage and fertility rates significantly.

"It's a well-known idea in sociology that universities serve a latent function, that of providing opportunities for people to meet potential partners and to spend time as couples," said Prof Tan.

Associate Professor Daniel Goh, a sociologist from NUS, called the offer "a wonderful gesture".

"The point is that the university is

recognising the struggles of its part-time students and trying to alleviate their financial burdens just that little bit because it can," he said.

But Prof Goh said he does not see the scheme as encouraging marriage and childbirth, adding that this is something that universities should not be involved in.

"I don't see it as an incentive for students to get married or have children, because marriage and raising a child are immense responsibilities that most people take seriously and a free module is hardly part of the calculations," he said.

Part-time students interviewed were mostly in favour of the SUSS scheme, though some voiced concerns about fairness.

Mr Nicholas Goh, 27, who is studying digital marketing at PSB Academy Singapore, said one issue facing couples looking to get married and start a family is financial security. "Since Singaporeans often prioritise education, this move will certainly help some young adults marry earlier than when they initially planned to so as to save some money," he said.

While noting the scheme's benefits, Ms Nadzirah Eunon, 24, a part-time communications with psychology student at the Singapore Institute of Management, said it may not be fair to students who are single.

Ms Jermaine Loh Wai Lin, 21, who is studying human resource part-time at SUSS, said: "I think such a scheme is only workable for students of a certain age group. Maybe those 30 and above."

Her SUSS coursemate Muhammad Farhan Afiq Ja'afar, 25, said the cash savings will be significant to the students who qualify for it.

"Most of the students studying part-time in SUSS, like me, are working full-time in order to pay the bills and survive. So this scheme will help some students to be less afraid about taking more modules and racking up school fees."

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