

STUDENTS DOWN UNDER

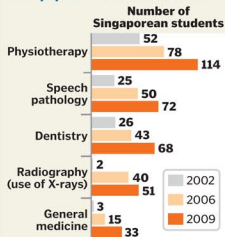
Fewer Singaporeans going to Australia for degrees

Year	2002	2009
Number of students	10,395	7,967

But health-related degrees increasing in popularity

Year	2002	2009
Number of students	408	1,008

Most popular health-care courses



# Fewer S'pore students going to Aussie varsities

Drop over last decade may be due to a wider range of degree options opening up here

By JENNANI DURAI

FEWER Singaporean students have been heading to Australian universities in the last decade, and the promise of two new tertiary institutions here may have something to do with it.

One is the Singapore University of Technology and Design (SUTD), which opens next year, with the other being the Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT), which has tie-ups with leading foreign universities on five polytechnic cam-

pus here.

These two institutions, which spell an opening up of study-at-home options for Singaporeans, may have, at least for now, slowed the exodus Down Under.

In 2002, nearly 10,400 Singaporeans were enrolled in Australian tertiary institutions; by 2007, the number had shrunk to 7,400. A slight uptick since then has raised the number, but it still stood at below 8,000 last year.

Meanwhile, foreign students from other countries are heading to Australia in healthy numbers: The number of international students in universities there grew from 272,000 students in 2002 to 630,000 students last year.

Students from China and India made up the bulk of the increase, with Korean, Thai and Nepalese students rounding off the top five foreign nationalities.

Australian High Commissioner Doug

Chester attributed the decline in Singaporean enrolment to the Singapore Government's efforts to widen the range of degree programmes here. He also noted that the number of places in the existing three universities had been raised.

On top of this, the impending debuts of SUTD and SIT, and the courting of foreign universities to set up a presence here, are all in line with the Government's efforts in building the "Global Schoolhouse", that is drawing world-class institutes to set up operations here.

The number of Singaporeans choosing to further their studies in the United States remained steady at about 4,000 between 2002 and 2009, noted a representative of the US Education Information Centre. A British Council spokesman said the number of Singaporeans studying in the United Kingdom rose slightly to 3,500 in the last couple of years.

Mr Chester said he is not worried. He is instead confident that, despite more options opening up here, Singaporeans will still choose Australia for its "unique and valuable experience".

In fact, he expects the number of Australia-bound students from here to pick up again, citing a UK 2020 report that predicts Asia will account for 70 per cent of the global demand for international higher education by 2025.

"Singaporeans continue to have a close affinity with Australia and Australia has always been a quality education destination for Singaporeans, stretching all the way back to the 1950s and 1960s," he said.

The first batches of Singaporean students went to Australia on Colombo Plan scholarships, awarded from 1951 to bright students from former British colonies and tenable at universities within the Commonwealth. Singapore stopped receiving these scholarships in 1988.

An SIT spokesman expressed doubt that its debut would mean a fall in Singaporeans enrolling in Australia when it begins operations this year as it has no current tie-ups with Australian universities.

Those keen on Australia will still go there as "Singaporeans are familiar with Australian universities, with many of them having established a presence here".

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