

# 500 degree chances snapped up

## New institute helps slake poly grads' thirst for varsity education

By AMELIA TAN

PLACES at the new Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT) have been snapped up by polytechnic students. About 1,500 students applied for the 500 places on offer for SIT's first intake in August, and all the spots have been filled.

The new institute was set up last September to fill growing demand by polytechnic graduates for a university education, and the rush for places is the latest reflection of this.

About 15 per cent of the annual polytechnic cohort, or about 2,500 students, now secure a place at one of the three local universities. Many others with above-average grades are turned away, and the clamour for more places to be set aside for them has been growing.

SIT, which offers two-year degree programmes in partnership with top-notch overseas institutions, will ease the situation. It will eventually raise the number of university places available to polytechnic students to about 3,700 a year, according to the Ministry of Education.

The school's director of admis-

sions Desmond Soon said the demand for places in its pioneer batch was encouraging. The quality of the applicants was also impressive, he said. About 70 per cent had a grade point average (GPA) of 3.0 or higher. Most applicants were in their early 20s, and about 60 per cent had at least one year of working experience.

Applications opened in March and ended in April, and short-listed candidates were interviewed, either individually or in groups, by a panel comprising representatives from SIT, its partner universities and the polytechnics. Applicants were assessed on relevant skills, academic performance in polytechnic, aptitude and related work experience, and the quality of their portfolios. The assessments were also tailored according to which courses they had applied for.

For example, those who were interested in the University of Nevada, Las Vegas' (UNLV) Bachelor of Science in hotel administration programme were gauged on their ability to express themselves and engage in conversations, which it has identified as key traits for success.

Mr Soon said the panel of interviewers also asked prospective students if they could handle the rigour of the courses, and if they had a clear idea of what they wanted as a career. "This is necessary as the degree programmes, which last two years, are intensive and demanding and would

suit students who are focused and know what they want out of the programmes," he explained.

Successful applicants who spoke to The Straits Times said the SIT degree programmes gave them a chance to fulfil their dreams. Cost was a key factor, they said.

Fees will be \$18,000 over the two years, after a 75 per cent subsidy. By comparison, most degree programmes at the National University of Singapore cost Singaporeans about \$6,890 a year for three to four years.

Ngee Ann Polytechnic alumnus Siti Khairunnisa Jamaluddin, who has landed a place in an engineering programme offered by Newcastle University (NU), said: "I want to work as a project superintendent on shipyards. But I did not get a place in the Nanyang Technological University (NTU) and it would be difficult for me to afford fees at private institutions.

"I thought I would have to put my plans on hold and start work first," said the 20-year-old, who has a GPA of 3.31 and a diploma in marine and offshore technology.

Cost was an issue for Temasek Polytechnic alumnus Kelvin Ong, who has a place in the UNLV programme. He said: "I've always wanted to study in Switzerland or UNLV because they are very well known in the hospitality circle. But the courses cost a lot." The 20-year-old, who has a diploma in hospitality and tourism management with a GPA of 3.35, failed to secure a place to study business at any of the three local universities.

Besides UNLV and NU, SIT's other partner institutions are the Technical University of Munich, which has produced 15 Nobel Prize winners, and the United States' DigiPen Institute of Technology. SIT has said that it will have a fifth partner, the Culinary Institute of America, which has been consistently ranked as the best school in the US, but details have not been firmed up yet.

Of the courses on offer, UNLV's was the most popular: It was the first choice for 500 applicants.

ameltan@sph.com.sg



Mr Kelvin Ong and Ms Siti Khairunnisa Jamaluddin (right), both 20, in one of the DigiPen art studios in Buona Vista with Ms Teo Wan Ting (left), 21, who will be pursuing a DigiPen degree in production animation. ST PHOTO: LIM SIN THAI

## Degree programmes offered

### Technical University of Munich:

- Bachelor of Science (B.Sc) in electrical engineering and IT

### Newcastle University:

- Bachelor of Engineering in marine technology with honours in naval architecture, marine engineering and offshore engineering

### DigiPen Institute of Technology:

- B.Sc with specialisation in real-time interactive simulation/game design
- Bachelor of Arts with specialisation in production animation/game design

### University of Nevada, Las Vegas:

- B.Sc in hotel administration