

US varsity asked to 'double fees' at SIT

Las Vegas school wants to maintain presence here despite ending tie-up

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THE top American school that is ending a tie-up with its Singapore partner after a financial disagreement has revealed it asked for its fees to be nearly doubled.

The University of Nevada, Las Vegas had its request rejected by the Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT) – and is now considering pulling out of Singapore.

Mr Richard Linstrom, managing director of the school's Singapore arm, said it receives \$40,000 for each Singaporean on its popular two-year hospitality management degree course.

He said he had asked for these fees to be "more or less" doubled. This would have brought them closer to the US\$80,000 (S\$98,000) that international students pay for its three-year equivalent course in Las Vegas.

But the request was turned down by SIT, which decided to end the tie-up once the five-year contract finishes in 2015.

Despite parting ways with its Singapore partner, the university wants to keep a presence here because of the gaming industry.

But Mr Linstrom added: "We

can be in Singapore only on a basis that is financially reasonable and sustainable, as well as on a basis that advances our institutional objectives and standards."

He also said the university had proposed making the SIT course longer. This was because some faculty members here and in Las Vegas had concerns about compressing the length of the course.

Students have two years to complete their 120 credits; some get exemptions if they have done related diplomas. By contrast, those on the United States programme take three years to complete the same amount of work.

Mr Linstrom said the school had made adjustments, such as spreading difficult modules throughout the programme and looking to admit youngsters with more transferable credits. But he added that it "remains challenging for students to complete an American undergraduate degree in such a short period of time".

The issue of the accelerated programme has also been raised by another American university partner of SIT, DigiPen Institute of Technology. Last year, The Sunday Times reported that its attrition rate was about 25 per cent.

DigiPen, a top design and animation school, began its partnership with SIT in 2010.

Students were quoted as saying it did not help that the demanding programme – which requires them to study high-level mathematics and physics – was compressed into two years. Nor was it possible to extend the timeframe as they would have had to pay higher, non-subsidised fees.

DigiPen officials said they were in discussions with SIT about reviewing the course structure and government subsidies. Officials from the institute declined to comment on the Las Vegas university's request for more fees.

SIT, which takes in more than 90 per cent of its students from polytechnics and has been designated as one of the Republic's two new universities, has said it will continue to offer a hospitality management degree.

Mr Linstrom said the university will keep offering a high-quality degree programme. He added that its Singapore arm is on track to repay a \$3.65 million Economic Development Board loan by January 2016. He said the school had also sought government approval to run a new undergraduate degree in engineering but had not yet heard from the Ministry of Education.

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