SIT extends study period after complaints

Some students struggling to cope with accelerated degree courses

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SINGAPORE Institute of Technology (SIT) students who find it tough to cope with courses offered by American college DigiPen Institute of Technology and the Technical University of Munich (TUM) can now extend their study period.

The move comes after several students complained they were struggling with the 2½-year accelerated courses, leading to high attrition rates.

As much as a quarter of students dropped out of the DigiPen game development and animation courses, while the corresponding rate for TUM courses was around 20 per cent.

SIT, however, said that it is providing the longer study period, which will continue to be subsidised by the Education Ministry, to allow polytechnic graduates who do not have directly relevant diplomas and A-level students to sign on.

“With the extension of tuition fee subsidies, we hope to attract more students into the programmes as they have proven to be popular in spite of their rigour,” said a spokesman.

The 160 students who enrol in the four DigiPen courses annually can now choose between studying at a more measured pace of two semesters annually for four years, or continue with the current option of three semesters a year. DigiPen is considered the Harvard University for game developers and animators.

The 80 students who take up the two engineering courses offered by TUM can complete the course in three years.

SIT, which was set up in 2009 and is being remade into Singapore’s fifth university, specialises in two-year niche degree courses in partnership with top-ranked overseas institutions.

It fast-tracks students because of course credit exemptions given to polytechnic graduates. Students also do not take a three-month mid-year break.

The courses were welcomed by polytechnic students, who previously had to spend about $100,000 studying Australian and British universities to top up their diploma with a degree in a period of two years.

SIT matched what overseas universities offered, at a fraction of the cost, given that tuition fees for its two-year courses cost about $20,000, after subsidy.

But DigiPen students who struggled and eventually dropped out said the programmes required them to study high-level mathematics and physics.

There were similar complaints about courses run by TUM, the German science and engineering institution which has notably produced 15 Nobel Prize winners.

The attrition rate was about 20 per cent in the electrical engineering course and 35 per cent in chemical engineering.

Most dropped out in the first few months or at the end of their first year. About 40 students enrol each year in each of TUM’s courses.

On whether SIT, which recently launched a three-year criminology and security studies degree course, is likely to launch more three-year degree courses, a spokesman said it will look at industry demand.

National serviceman Michael Ong is keen on the DigiPen game development degree and welcomed the longer study period.

“I heard about the high attrition rate and hesitated to apply as I would need more time for the advanced maths modules. But now that I can take up to four years, I will go ahead and apply,” he said.