

New degree courses to raise SIT intake by 300

Five are in fields related to health while a sixth is in smart transport

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The university for polytechnic graduates seeking higher qualifications – the Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT) – will launch six new degree courses and raise its intake by another 300 places next year, bringing its total intake to 2,400.

Five of the new degrees are in health-related fields: nursing, occupational therapy, radiation therapy, diagnostic radiography and physiotherapy, which SIT will run with Trinity College Dublin.

Previously, students who completed diploma courses in these fields and wanted to further their studies had to go abroad.

SIT officials said the move to offer degrees in these areas is consistent with international trends where the minimum practice qualification for allied health professionals is set at the bachelor's degree level.

At the degree level, students will have a longer duration of training within a university environment for deeper integration of knowledge and skills for practice.

The sixth new degree will be in intelligent transportation systems engineering. The course is a combination of electrical engineering, computer science and studying about intelligent transportation systems such as those used in driverless cars.

SIT president Tan Thiam Soon said the allied health courses of occupational therapy, radiation therapy, diagnostic radiography and physiotherapy, which will take in a total of 235 students, will be open to both A-level and polytechnic students with relevant diplomas in areas such as biomedical sciences.

Professor Tan said the new degrees are in areas where there is a huge demand for specialists, given the rapidly ageing population of Singapore.

He said: "These are areas of criti-



The Singapore Institute of Technology – the university for polytechnic students seeking degrees – will have a total intake of 2,400 next year, with 300 more students expected for its six new degree courses. ST PHOTO: ONG WEE JIN

cal need and graduates will have stellar job prospects."

Health Minister Gan Kim Yong, who spoke last year about the need for physiotherapists and occupational therapists, said they will be needed increasingly to provide rehabilitation and preventive care outside of hospitals, both in the community and in patients' homes.

Even hospital-based therapists will need to work outside, he said, especially to help the frail and less mobile who face difficulties in travelling to hospitals.

Diagnostic radiographers and radiation therapists are also needed to boost early diagnosis of ailments such as cancer so patients can get early treatment and suffer less.

Asked to explain the difference between SIT's nursing course and the one offered by the National University of Singapore, SIT's cluster director for health and social sciences Alan Wong said the degree was for nursing diploma holders, who are registered staff nurses.

He said: "The course will address the nursing care needs of patients in the acute hospitals, as well as those in the community and long-term care."

"Students will also be taught research skills and prepared for leadership positions."

He said students will need more than good grades to land a place in the allied health degree courses.

Similar to the selection of medical students, shortlisted applicants will be put through multiple mini interviews at which they will be given scenarios and asked how they would respond to such situations.

"We will be looking for qualities such as compassion, empathy and ability to communicate with people," he said.

He added that students in the course – like students enrolled in other courses – will spend eight to 10 months on attachment in various healthcare settings to hone their skills through practice.

The practice-oriented approach will be further enhanced by the fact that many of the course lectur-

ers are practitioners drawn from the hospitals. They will hold joint appointments at the hospital as well as the university.

This year, a record 9,600 polytechnic graduates applied for the 2,080 places offered by SIT.

The university now offers more than 30 degrees, including some with renowned foreign partners such as Germany's Technical University of Munich and the DigiPen Institute of Technology from Redmond, Washington.

A-level holder Caroline D'Cruz, 20, who is interested in studying physiotherapy at SIT, said she was waiting for admissions to open.

"I have always been interested in physiotherapy after breaking one of my legs in an accident a few years ago.

"But my parents, who run a small shop, cannot afford to send me abroad.

"So when I heard about SIT offering it, I decided that it was the course for me."

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