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## **Fewer head Down Under to study**

Key reason: More varsity choices here now - at lower cost  
By Cassandra Chew, THE STRAITS TIMES



**FOREIGN VARSITIES GO LOCAL:** Many foreign schools have set up campuses here - offering the same brand but at a much lower overall cost. One newcomer, the Singapore branch of the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, has seen 35 of its 50 pioneer-batch places this year filled so far. -- LIANHE ZAOBAO

A GROWING number of young Singaporeans are choosing to study here rather than head to Australia.

They say there are more choices here now.

Also, many foreign schools have set up campuses here - offering the same brand but at a much lower overall cost.

In the past five years, intakes for at least four foreign university campuses here have doubled.

Among them, Hartford Institute and PSB Academy.

At the Singapore branch of the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 35 of the 50 pioneer-batch places this year have already been filled.

And a total of 13,000 students will join Singapore Management University (SMU), Nanyang Technological University (NTU) and the National University of Singapore (NUS) this year.

That's an increase of 1,200 from last year's 11,800.

Conversely, Australian universities are not receiving as many Singaporean students these days.

Although Singapore consistently ranks 10th among international students Down Under, in the past five years, that number has seen a steady decline - from 3,299 to 2,631, according to IDP Education Australia.

NTU's head of the economics department, Associate Professor Euston Quah, believes that this has to do with the improvement in standards here.

'There is not much difference between Australian universities and those in Singapore - the standards are comparable or even better here,' he said.

'Our universities are doing well globally, offering a world class education at a fraction of the cost.'

Jobs Factory - which runs online education, scholarship and career information portal BrightSparks - estimates that studying in Australia would set a student back by about \$35,000 to \$44,000 a year.

University of New South Wales Asia (the Singapore campus) charges between \$23,000 and \$29,000 for its engineering and science courses.

This is four times more than the fees charged by NUS, NTU and SMU - but it is still far cheaper than setting up base in Australia.

Miss Charlene Lim, 22, a second-year law and communications student at the University of New South Wales in Australia, said she chose to study there because it allowed her to register for a double-degree course.

She regrets that NUS and SMU had not offered their dual-degree programmes two years ago, or she would have happily stayed in Singapore.

In a registration poll of 4,200 junior college students in Singapore done by Jobs Factory, it was found that Singapore is still the top choice as the place to pursue a university education.

Jobs Factory's director, Mr Lim Der Shing, speculates that this is in large part due to the three local universities' efforts to beef up their recruitment drives in the past few years.

'They are becoming more image-conscious, promoting themselves more aggressively in junior colleges and providing more scholarships to keep the bright students,' he said

More novel courses, including NTU's aerospace engineering and SMU's new law school, are also getting students' votes.

Miss Jenny Chan, 23, who opted for SMU over University of Melbourne two years ago, is already starting to see a pay-off.

'I have better job opportunities here,' she pointed out. 'The connections I would have made overseas would have been useless when I returned.'

Now a third-year marketing and corporate communications major, she recently completed a 14-week internship as an account executive with an international advertising firm based in Singapore.

She still works there part-time, and the firm is looking at offering her a permanent position when she graduates in December next year.

Dr Quah added: 'With opportunities to study abroad through exchange programmes, the old reasons of an overseas experience in Australia are no longer compelling.'

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**ADDITIONAL REPORTING BY DEBBIE YONG**