

## **The Straits Times, pg B1 4 April 2009**

### **It pays to do econs at SMU**

**Business grads from NUS also among top earners, survey shows**

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ARE you pondering what field of study to take up at university?

If you qualify, picking economics at the Singapore Management University (SMU) or business at the National University of Singapore (NUS) would be worthy options.

Those armed with such qualifications emerged as the top earners in the latest Graduate Employment Survey, which was published by the Ministry of Education for the first time.

SMU economics graduates with cum laude and higher qualifications landed average monthly salaries of \$4,164, a shade above the \$3,971 earned by NUS business administration honours graduates.

At Nanyang Technological University (NTU), those with chemical and biomolecular engineering degrees made the most, an average of \$3,232 a month.

The results of the survey, which looked at those who graduated last year and landed a job within six months, were released yesterday. In the past, the three universities did their own surveys and released results separately, but the different benchmarks they used confused some students.

Explaining the change, the MOE said yesterday that it was made so that students could make informed course decisions. Said a spokesman: "The data gives prospective students a general indication of the employment conditions of the graduates from the various degree courses offered by our local universities.

"We understand employment conditions may have changed since, but we hope that the data may still be useful as one point of reference for the students."

The latest figures threw up one surprise: Those who picked teaching as a career emerged among the top earners.

Those who received Arts (with Education) qualifications from the National Institute of Education made an average of \$3,207 a month.

Engineering graduates, too, did well.

Those from NUS made between \$2,864 (environmental engineering) and \$3,448 (computer engineering from its School of Computing), while those from NTU earned

between \$2,891 (environmental engineering) and \$3,232 (chemical and biomolecular engineering).

These figures may prompt more interest in the field, which has struggled to attract students.

Enrolment in courses such as mechanical and electrical engineering has plunged in popularity in the last decade as undergrads moved towards “softer” options such as business.

In recent years, attempts have been made to increase interest in engineering by introducing new areas such as aerospace engineering, but interest has still flagged despite the relatively high starting salaries for graduates.

Of the three universities, only SMU was able to provide overall average monthly salaries for its graduates across all courses: The figure was \$3,170, up from \$3,040 in 2007.

Overall, employment rates were also positive, and were little affected by the financial crisis, which began biting last September.

At SMU, eight in 10 graduates secured job offers either before graduation or within a month of graduation.

At NUS, information systems students from the school of computing as well as dentistry students saw a 100 per cent employment rate, as did maritime studies students from NTU, and SMU information systems students with cum laude and higher qualifications.

However, human resource and wage consultants interviewed warned that the picture will not be as rosy for those about to graduate over the next few months, and they should not expect the same kind of pay and employment prospects as their seniors.

Human resource consultancy GMP Group’s senior manager Josh Goh said many firms are already slashing new hires’ pay by 5 per cent to 15 per cent. He expects further cuts if the recession deepens.

Singapore Human Resources Institute executive director David Ang said it will be tougher for fresh graduates to get employed as they will also be competing with recently retrenched workers for jobs.

“My advice to students is to be open to jobs which they were not specifically trained for. You can learn on the job too.”

The full employment survey can be found at [www.moe.gov.sg/education/post-secondary](http://www.moe.gov.sg/education/post-secondary)

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