

## **The Straits Times, pg B17 16 March 2009, Monday**

### **BUSINESS SCHOOL RANKINGS**

## **Student-recruiter ties more vital now**

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WITH the economic downturn pushing the United States unemployment rate to a 25-year high of 8.1 per cent last month, it may come as little surprise that a university with superior career services has trumped the traditional pack leader in the latest ranking of business schools.

Since the inception of BusinessWeek magazine's annual ranking of The Best Undergrad Business Schools in 2006, the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School has been No. 1 on it.

But this year, Wharton has been unseated by the University of Virginia's McIntire School of Commerce, a programme that incidentally costs a quarter of the tuition fee Wharton charges.

The results of BusinessWeek's latest ranking of undergraduate business programmes reflect the job market's uncertainty in the economic downturn.

Since the recession in the US began in December 2007, 4.4 million people in the country have lost their jobs.

What tipped the scales in Virginia's favour on the latest list was the fact that nearly three out of four students had job offers in their graduating year, thanks largely to the school's innovative efforts to build student-recruiter relationships.

According to BusinessWeek's survey, 54 per cent of responding seniors, or graduating year students, lacked an offer as of January, up from 44 per cent last year.

Thus, the schools that excelled in the ranking were those that put an intense focus on guiding students through their career search, said BusinessWeek.

This included the second-ranked University of Notre Dame in Indiana, where administrators tap the school's well-connected alumni network to scout for jobs and offer advice to students.

Human resource consultants in Singapore say the relationship between students and the school's career office is becoming increasingly important in these uncertain times.

Mr Josh Goh, senior manager of corporate services at recruitment company The GMP Group, said: "More schools are being more proactive in assisting their students to find jobs,

## Top business programmes

- McIntire School of Commerce, University of Virginia
- Mendoza College of Business, University of Notre Dame
- Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania
- Ross School of Business, University of Michigan
- Marriott School of Management, Brigham Young University

as they realise the need to build stronger student-recruiter ties more than ever. Even the local universities in Singapore are doing so.

“A strong student-recruiter relationship is important not only in ensuring quality students for potential employers, but also in the branding of the school. ‘Branded’ schools will draw high-calibre students, which would in turn attract more employer-school collaborations.”

Mr Pan Zaixian, head of financial services at search firm Robert Walters, said: “The career offices in universities have been more developed and professional in the last few years. They tie up with well-known employers and headhunters to find jobs for their graduates.

“However, with the US restriction on employment visas for banks receiving government money, it will affect the ability of these offices to secure roles for their foreign graduates, who make up a big percentage of students for many universities.”

Virginia’s latest class profile showed 24 per cent of its students came from outside the US. It is not known how many, if any, are Singaporeans.

Recruiters say the student-recruiter dynamic will continue to be a “vital relationship” in universities as students often consider the industry standing and the ability to land a job upon graduation when they enrol.

But they also say that no matter how schools are ranked, Ivy League universities in the US - the University of Pennsylvania is one while the University of Virginia is not - will always have an added pull for employers.

This is because employers feel more assured of the quality of students from “brand-name” schools.

“Ivy League universities command respect and admiration because of their quality programmes. Unless the quality of their students deteriorates, it is highly unlikely that Ivy League universities will become less important (because of a temporary dip in rankings),” said Mr Goh.