

Students get to assess and ‘invest’ in social enterprises

Priscilla Goy

Which social enterprise would you invest in if your team had \$5,000?

About 40 students had to think through this question, and give actual dollars to social enterprises, or businesses with a social mission.

This was part of the Measuring Success in Philanthropy and Impact Investing course offered for the second time by the National University of Singapore Business School.

The total amount of \$30,000 was donated by Mr Keith Chua, who chairs the advisory board of the school’s Asia Centre for Social Entrepreneurship and Philanthropy (ACSEP).

Students learnt about different ways to assess the social enterprises’ performance, looking at areas such as their relevance, sustainability and scalability of operations.

The course – inspired by a similar programme funded by American investor guru Warren Buffett’s

family – was first offered here last year.

Students assessed charities then, but the latest batch considered social enterprises, which are usually for-profit and less transparent about their financial information.

ACSEP director and course instructor Lam Swee Sum told *The Sunday Times* that globally, more people want products and services from companies that positively affect the environment or society.

“Companies are paying more attention to this, and finance stu-

dents must be aware of these new trends,” she said.

Seven teams of students each chose their top-rated social enterprise out of a pool of 24 businesses which took part in an ACSEP survey and gave more information about their finances and impact.

The selection process was not easy, with enterprises’ lack of financial data online.

While students could interview some of the enterprises, they also hoped the sector would be more transparent to attract investors.

Five social entrepreneurs received their \$5,000 grants last week, including one whose business was picked by two teams, and another who had her two social enterprises selected by students.

The class also voted Ms Carrie Tan’s enterprises to be most “investment-worthy”, so she got another \$5,000.

She founded Daughters of Tomorrow, which teaches underprivileged women here basic business literacy and craft skills, and Alice in Dot’s World, which sells

children’s wear and accessories made by DOT beneficiaries.

Social entrepreneurs and students found the course beneficial.

Ms Tan said: “Having to crunch the numbers for the students gave us more discipline to track our progress.”

Undergraduate Eugene Tan, 24, said: “This course changed my perspective to consider the social, not just the financial, returns of my investment.”

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