

Local varsities offering more computing places

Move caters to rising demand from students, and for tech professionals from employers

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Education Correspondent

Computer science graduates are in hot demand these days – and this is helping to fuel not just rising wages, but also an expansion of computing courses in universities in Singapore.

Many receive multiple job offers even before they finish school and their starting salaries have seen the largest jumps in recent years – to \$4,000 a month or more.

To cater to rising interest in the field, local universities will increase their intake by as much as 25 per cent when the new academic year begins in August.

The National University of Singapore (NUS) plans to take in about 900 freshmen across six computing courses, up from the current 732. In comparison, the arts and social sciences faculty admits about 1,500 students a year, while the business school had 826 freshmen last year.

The Singapore Management Uni-

versity's (SMU) school of information systems plans to take in 400 students, a jump of 80 from last year.

Nanyang Technological University (NTU), without giving numbers, said it plans to increase its computer science and computer engineering intake, which rose to 400 last year, up by some 15 per cent from 2016.

The number of applicants has also grown. Since 2015, NTU has seen a year-on-year increase of more than 15 per cent, with the number hitting an all-time high of more than 3,100 in the last academic year.

At SMU, 2,018 applicants listed the school of information systems as their first choice last year, a 30 per cent jump from 1,552 in 2015.

NUS computing dean Mohan Kankanhalli told *The Straits Times* that this explosion in computer science interest is a global trend. He said: "If you go into any of the major economies in the world today, there are a lot of computing jobs and the computing salaries are increasing."

NUS senior vice-provost (undergraduate education) Bernard Tan said: "We are talking about IT embedded in every industry. Every single industry transformation map that has been rolled out so far, you'll see a very strong IT element inside."



Professor Kam Chan Hin, NTU's deputy provost for education, said: "This is an exciting time to be a computer scientist or engineer, as computing has become an integral part of modern life.

"It enables advances in financial services, business, healthcare, education, social science, as well as science and engineering."

To meet the growing needs, new fields of study are being introduced.

NTU is starting a degree in data science and artificial intelligence in August, while NUS has been offering new specialisations such as financial technology, digital innovation and marketing analytics.

An NUS career fair to match em-

ployers with technology students has gone from being held once a year to twice a year since 2016.

Professor Kankanhalli also noted the strong demand for computing interns. Last year, 400 students took up internships while there were around 3,000 available.

While it takes in more students, NUS said it will ensure that it does not compromise on quality. In the past few years, 90 per cent of A-level students accepted into all its computing courses had at least three to four As, up from more Bs and Cs in 2013.

Students from other faculties also see the value of having computing knowledge. More than 220 SMU students chose analytics as a second ma-

ior last year, up from 24 in 2013. At NUS, 245 are taking computing courses as a second major or a minor.

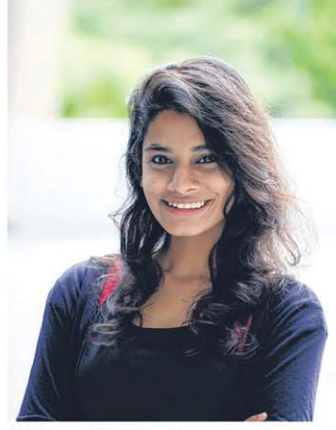
NUS computer science graduate Yeo Quan Yang moved to California in April last year to work as a software engineer at Apple. The 26-year-old, who also had job offers from Google and Amazon, works on detecting and preventing vulnerabilities in Apple's online services and applications such as iCloud.

"I like experiencing overseas living and working, and learning from the best people," he said.

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Computing students at NUS learning how technologies can improve daily living. The university will take in about 900 freshmen across six computing courses for the new academic year, up from the current 732.
PHOTO: NUS



Ms Poornima Venkataraman discovered her interest in analytics after junior college during a stint at a digital consultancy doing market research. PHOTO: COURTESY OF POORNIMA VENKATARAMAN

Grads get to work with big tech names

Even before Ms Poornima Venkataraman graduated from the National University of Singapore (NUS) in July last year, several tech companies had come calling.

Said the 24-year-old, who studied business analytics: "I knew it's a very interesting area with a lot of opportunities."

She is an account manager at Facebook Singapore where she is part of a team working with small and medium businesses in the Indian market to grow their business through Facebook platforms.

This involves using Facebook advertising solutions, customer insights and marketing analytics.

"It's a good time to be in computing," said Ms Venkataraman, whose older brother is a tech consultant.

She discovered her interest in analytics after junior college during a six-month stint at a digital consultancy doing market research. She did internships while at NUS, including one as a marketing analyst with a mobile social gaming start-up, Playphone, in California.

During the year-long stint, which was part of the NUS Overseas Colleges Programme in Silicon Valley, she worked on automating data support systems to measure the success of the firm's marketing and product launches.

Mr Yeo Quan Yang, who graduated with a computer science degree from NUS last year, said the skill set he acquired at university helped him to learn fast, such as when picking up new programming languages.

Like him, many of his friends have been given "big opportunities" to work with tech giants like Google, said the 26-year-old software engineer with Apple in California. "Many of us are over there – in Silicon Valley," he said. "My team is pretty diverse – there are Singaporeans, Chinese, Americans, Indians."

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