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Oral History Interview with Khoo Teng Aun: Conceptualising SMU

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Singapore Management University

Li Ka Shing Library

Conceptualising SMU: The People and Ideas behind the SMU Story

Interviewee: Khoo Teng Aun

Interviewer: Patricia Meyer

Date: 26 November 2010

Location: Singapore Management University, Li Ka Shing Library Recording Studio

Accession No.: SMUOH-2011-0006PV

Note to Reader:

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Patricia Meyer: At the time that you joined SMU, what was the concept for the new university?

Khoo Teng Aun: Oh, the concept was very, very much different. It was meant to be only a business school. NUS and NTU business students were supposed to come over and there will be no more business school in NUS and NTU. That was the first concept. However, the Government changed their mind later and wanted competition. I suppose competition is good that way.

Patricia Meyer: Can you also just tell us a bit about what that pioneer group was thinking for the university library, what was their idea about how to plan for the library?

Khoo Teng Aun: We were thinking that because we are going downtown, space is rather costly and therefore the library, you know, we got to balance between the number of books we have and the space we are going to provide for the students to study. So that was the constraint there. So we tried to look into digital media instead of print copies which occupy space. So we looked into databases, you know, so that journals [from] number of years back...so that's the way we proceeded.

Patricia Meyer: Were you part of that first admissions exercise, what did you do?

Khoo Teng Aun: We had to interview students to evaluate their communicative skills, their interests. So we had two staff interviewing an applicant, and we asked various questions to assess the [students'] suitability, whether that person is made for that style of pedagogy. Because not every student would prefer that interactive style of teaching.

Patricia Meyer: And what were some of the students' concerns or questions in that early admissions period? What were they thinking about as they were considering this new university?

Khoo Teng Aun: I think this bunch of students were very great, you know. They had an X-factor. They dared to take on the challenge, and they want to show that they are pioneers that will establish SMU's name. Yeah, that's a great attitude.

Patricia Meyer: And the students, how did they react?

Khoo Teng Aun: Well, I think they were also having it the first time, because no tertiary institutions had adopted that interactive style. And I suppose they enjoyed it and we find that because of the interview, they're more communicative and more eloquent. So, not much of a difficulty.

Patricia Meyer: In looking back, what would you say are significant achievements of SMU?

Meyer:

Khoo
Teng Aun:

I think the most significant achievement is when our students went out to work; they were highly regarded by their employers. That they were doing a good job. They were not people who just did things but they questioned, why are we doing things in this way. So their mindsets were rather different. And because of that, the employers like such students, and as a result, I don't think any of our SMU students were unemployed. In fact, most of the students were being taken up, you know, employed even before they graduated.

Patricia
Meyer:

Thank you very much.

End of Interview

Acronyms List

| Acronym | Definition |
|----------------|-----------------------------------|
| CCA | Co-Curricular Activities |
| CFO | Chief Financial Officer |
| ERP | Enterprise Resource Planning |
| NLB | National Library Board |
| NTU | Nanyang Technological University |
| NUS | National University of Singapore |
| PhD | Doctor of Philosophy |
| SIM | Singapore Institute of Management |
| SMU | Singapore Management University |
| CCA | Co-Curricular Activities |