



PROVOST'S MESSAGE



Dear Students,

Thank you for your understanding, patience and cooperation with the various measures the University has implemented in response to Covid-19. I appreciate that these may have caused different levels of inconvenience but at all times we have been motivated by the need to safeguard the health and safety of the SMU community and to ensure that our students can progress with their studies and graduate as planned.

I am writing to update you on the University's decisions with regard to international student exchanges and other overseas student programmes and activities.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT EXCHANGE PROGRAMME (ISEP)

Given that the Covid-19 global pandemic is still affecting countries all around the world and will continue to have a significant impact on our daily lives and how the University operates for some time, SMU has had to assess the risks to our students and take appropriate precautionary measures beyond the current suspension of overseas student programmes and activities. In this regard, we have taken the difficult decision to suspend the International Student Exchange Programme (ISEP) for Term 1 AY20/21. We did this having carefully considered three key factors that impact directly on your health, safety and academic interests.

First, the continuing uncertainty and volatility of the Covid-19 pandemic in countries across the world.

While some countries have seen their numbers of Covid-19 cases fall or stabilise, there remains concern over "hidden reservoirs" of cases and under-testing that could result in a change in the situation for the worse. We have seen the virus resurging in countries that were declared "safe" or who seemed to have the spread of the virus under control. Similarly, a large number of countries are operating under their own version of a Circuit Breaker with strict social distancing measures which have resulted in the suspension of campus-based activities at universities. As countries emerge from these different measures, it is not clear what level of continuing social distancing measures will remain and how they will permit their universities to operate.

Secondly, the high degree of uncertainty among our partner universities (PUs) about their exchange programmes.

While we are aware that PUs are still processing applications for exchange in Fall 2020, to date at least 27 have suspended their exchange programmes for the upcoming term – either entirely or partially – across 11 countries (Australia, China, France, Hong Kong, India, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, New Zealand, Peru, Spain, Thailand, the UK and the US). Another 35 have alerted us of possible changes to their exchange programmes. From consultations with 20 further PUs, we are aware that university administrators are currently working out scenarios, precautionary measures and alternative arrangements in response to possible disruptions to Fall exchange programmes. The general sense is that it would be risky for exchange programmes to continue in the latter half of the year.

Against this backdrop, we considered various possible scenarios, including PUs accepting our students but cancelling their exchange programmes mid-way, or that of PUs delaying the start of their programmes and eventually cancelling them.

The critical issue in each of these scenarios is that unlike Term 2 there is no special term for students to fall back on at the end of Term 1 in which the University could run an Exchange Replacement Programme should PUs' exchange programmes be suspended mid-term. While some PUs may have the capability of conducting exchange courses online, there is currently no guarantee from the majority of our partners that they would be able to offer such alternatives to exchange students. Furthermore, given exchanges are reciprocal arrangements, we are very unlikely to be able to offer online learning on an ad hoc basis in return. If an ISEP was to proceed and then be cancelled mid-way or a PU delay the start of its term, there is then no academic fall back at SMU in the form of a special term and you will have missed BOSS bidding in June/July and/or be left without your course of choice, should you re-join SMU's regular Term 1 AY20/21 late.

In these scenarios, students would face the possibility of not being able to continue courses at the PU and having little or no alternatives at SMU. This would impact students' academic progression and graduation plans.

Thirdly, we looked into the practical and operational challenges to running the ISEP in Term 1 AY20/21 given current travel and entry restrictions locally and overseas.

Students would need to proceed with registrations, visa applications and travel and accommodation confirmations from now, which is several months before term commences at their PUs (the majority are between July to early September), at a time when travel and entry restrictions, quarantine requirements or lockdowns are still in force in all 34 ISEP destination countries for Term 1 AY20/21. These financial commitments are to be made at a time when countries remain locked-down and/or when visitors are still prevented from entering countries. Students would not have the assurance of eventually being able to proceed with their overseas programmes and are effectively subjecting themselves to a full range of financial commitments that may be irrecoverable.

Further, if inbound exchange students are unable to be granted entry visas/student passes to enter Singapore while Singapore's current entry restrictions are in force, our PUs would not be able to accept our students under the reciprocal arrangement of the exchange programme, even if there are no entry restrictions in their countries. Strict entry requirements into Singapore remain in force as Singaporeans are advised against travelling out of the country.

It is for these considerations surrounding the well-being of our students that the University has taken the difficult decision to extend the current suspension of ISEP to the end of Term 1 AY20/21. Students affected by the suspension of the ISEP are to register and bid for Term 1 AY20/21 courses from June 2020, together with the rest of SMU students.

OTHER OVERSEAS STUDENT PROGRAMMES AND ACTIVITIES

We have also decided to suspend all other overseas student programmes and activities scheduled from August 2020 until the end of the year, if they cannot be conducted online or fulfilled by alternative means that do not require students to travel overseas.

However, there are some programmes and activities that are of a much shorter duration as compared to the ISEP and may be organised with a shorter lead time later in the year, should the global outlook improve. We will continue to closely monitor the Covid-19 situation and decide if we should proceed with those scheduled for late 2020, i.e., November or December. The following table outlines the various programmes and activities that will be adjusted:

1	Fast-track and Integrated Programmes	MOVING ONLINE Students who are scheduled to continue their subsequent leg of study at a PU such as Carnegie Mellon University or UCL in August 2020 would be subject to significant risk, both in terms of international travel restrictions related to the ongoing Covid-19 situation globally but also uncertainties in PUs as to what they can deliver. To mitigate this, SMU schools will work with PUs to explore/implement online-based remote learning options for students to begin their PUs' coursework in Singapore. If online options are not available, schools would follow up with affected students to advise them on the next steps.
2	Overseas Community Service Projects	CANCELLED Due to concerns with international travel restrictions related to the ongoing Covid-19 situation globally, the uncertainty of the future Covid-19 situation in the countries where we carry out projects, considerations relating to medical and emergency response plans for Covid-19 in rural overseas locations, as well as the financial exposure of our students and stakeholders, all OCSs, including those which have completed their preliminary visits, will be rescheduled to 2021.
3	Overseas Study Missions and SMU-XO courses	REPLACED WITH ALTERNATIVES Due to concerns with international travel restrictions related to the ongoing Covid-19 situation globally and the uncertainty of the future Covid-19 situation in the countries where the activities for OSMs and SMU-XO courses are planned (China, Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam), these overseas activities will be replaced with local and/or virtual alternatives. Should the global outlook improve, schools may assess the feasibility of running missions scheduled for November or December 2020, by end-September.
4	Short-term Study Programmes (SSPs) – self-arranged and through IO.	CANCELLED To avoid subjecting students to risks associated with international travel restrictions related to the ongoing Covid-19 situation globally and the uncertainty of the future Covid-19 situation in the countries across the world, students who have signed up for SSPs, including summer and winter schools and self-arranged programmes, should arrange to participate in the editions next year.

5	Short-term Internship Immersion Programme	TO BE ASSESSED Should the Covid-19 situation improve in Vietnam and Indonesia, and their companies re-open for internships in December 2020, DKHMCC may assess the feasibility of running the programme by end-September.
6	Structured Exchange Programmes	MOVED ONLINE PUs like the Copenhagen Business School have arranged for online versions of their structured exchange programmes to enable exchange students to complete their courses in their home countries. SMU students enrolled in these programmes should participate in their online versions.

We recognise that this is an extraordinary and challenging time for everyone concerned, and we wish to reassure you that we remain fully committed to assisting students affected by this decision. SMU schools and the International Office will work with affected students to make adjustments to your study plans, as well as to identify alternative global exposure opportunities when the situation permits.

Please contact the International Office at io@smu.edu.sg should you require more information pertaining to ISEP and SSPs, or consult your schools and the relevant SMU offices for the latest information on other programmes and activities.

Do take good care in these difficult times.

Kindest regards

Timothy Clark
Provost