

Provost's Open Letter on Holistic Admissions

SMU Provost Professor Lily Kong has written an open letter on the University's holistic admissions that seeks to identify the young men and women who would benefit from SMU's transformative education.

Dear Prospective Applicants

First, I would like to congratulate you on all your achievements to date in school. You have had the privilege of an excellent education that stands you in good stead for the next phase in your growth and development. You stand poised to make decisions about which university to apply to and eventually enroll in. As Provost of SMU, I have penned this message to help you understand SMU's commitment to holistic admissions, our selection process, and ultimately, to convey our commitment to help you find the best university fit so that you will grow and thrive.

SMU's Commitment To Holistic Admissions

Since inception in 2000, SMU has been committed to holistic admissions, where we look for students who have not only been successful academically but who also possess qualities that we value.

After 15 years of assessing students for academic ability and other qualities at SMU, we are confident that our admission selection is robust and we are proud of the students we admit, the value that we add to their education, and the graduate outcomes. It was therefore with humility and gratification that we received the results of the 2015 Graduate Employment Survey. Even more pleasing than the excellent employment rate and high salaries, the survey reported that our graduates believe that SMU delivered on the pledge to give them a different, holistic and transformative education: 84% of our graduates indicated that they had experienced a complete transformation or significant growth at SMU.

We continue to be committed to our belief in holistic admissions and to add value to each and every individual student who is admitted to SMU.

How Do We Select?

SMU's Hallmark Face-To-Face Interview Approach

That SMU uses an interview approach is quite well known. Nevertheless, prospective applicants and parents often ask what the interview is about, is it necessary, what questions are asked, what is assessed at the interview, and so forth. I would like to "demystify" the interviews.

Shortlisting for interviews is done by looking at your academic results as well as your CCA records and personal statement. Because we are committed to holistic admissions, from the get go, we care about assessing you holistically beyond just academic results.

Shortlisted candidates are then invited individually or in small groups to meet with faculty members from the School of your choice for a face-to-face interview. These interviews help us to ascertain if applicants possess qualities such as critical thinking, communication skills and positive attitude. They also help us to assess if the applicant could benefit from the SMU education experience. The interview also gives shortlisted applicants the chance to interact with our professors, find out more, for example, about SMU's rich programme offerings, multi-disciplinary and experiential learning, award-winning faculty, overseas opportunities, vibrant student life, our comprehensive career services and coaching, information which we hope will be useful in helping you make an informed decision.

The interviews take a variety of forms. Some would be centered around a case study or an article that students will have time to read first, and the discussion surrounding it allows applicants to demonstrate their critical thinking, their oral communications, their interpersonal skills, and their general attitude. Some would be conversational where the professors ask questions about what the applicant is interested in, why they have chosen the course to apply to and so forth. The best way to prepare for an interview is to be yourself.

A Modification: "SMU Discovery Day"

For most applicants including those to our School of Law, our SMU hallmark interview approach for every shortlisted applicant will continue. However, I would like to share that, this year, we will be adopting a modified approach for a select group of applicants.

We have noticed over the years that there is a group of students whose application material demonstrates very well the academic ability and qualities that we value. Invariably, they also excel at the traditional interview, are admitted, and thrive at SMU. We believe that we have learnt, after 15 years, how to spot these applications. For a select group of students, therefore, on the basis of the quality of their submission and a rigorous pre-selection process, they will be deemed selected for admission. They will be invited to visit SMU on "SMU Discovery Day". Our engagement will then be directed at confirming that they are indeed an excellent match for the education that SMU offers, and for them to confirm that SMU is the university of choice for them. Our commitment is to work with applicants to help them make the best decisions for themselves.

Participating in SMU Discovery Day is critical to our making the final offer of admission. This is because we firmly believe that we must meet and engage with each and every student whom we eventually choose to admit. We value this opportunity highly not only because it helps us to confirm our selection but because it helps students make an informed decision about their choice of university and programme of study.

SMU Discovery Day will take a variety of forms in individual Schools, including meeting with faculty, senior students and alumni to understand what SMU offers and to respond to questions that students may have, participation in mock seminars and meeting employers of graduates from those Schools. Offers will be made after these sessions. Given our years of experience of reviewing the application material, we expect that the vast majority of this group will receive offer letters after these sessions. If they do not, it is because there is mutual agreement of a lack of fit with SMU, ascertained through the interaction at SMU Discovery Day.

Discretionary Admissions

As part of SMU's commitment to holistic admission, we will continue to consider applicants who may fall slightly short of the academic criteria for admission, but who have a strong record of co-curricular activities and can show prima facie evidence of qualities that SMU values. Shortlisted applicants will be interviewed and assessed for both the qualities SMU values as well as their ability to succeed academically in SMU, and if successful, will be admitted via discretionary admissions.

Educating the Whole Person

At SMU, we aim to put together a cohort of bright undergraduates with diverse interests and talents. We would like every single student to benefit from SMU's educating of the whole person through our broad-based curriculum, coupled with depth in one or two areas of study, and complemented by an unparalleled co-curriculum involving global exposure, community service and internship. We are deeply committed to developing well-rounded young men and women who are confident, communicative, self-aware and capable of being trusted leaders and responsible global citizens.

I look forward to your application, and hope that you will find in SMU a good fit for the next phase of your education. Congratulations again for coming this far.

My best wishes to each and every one of you.

Professor Lily Kong

Provost and Lee Kong Chian Chair Professor of Social Sciences
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