

NTU's Female Undergrads Outnumber Men

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SINGAPORE — For the first time in 22 years, the number of female undergraduates at the Nanyang Technological University (NTU) has edged above that of their male counterparts — a by-product of the university's move to transform itself into a more comprehensive institution.

There are now 11,743 women and 11,741 men among its undergraduates, according to the latest figures from the university. In contrast, NTU had only 6,971 female and 9,440 male undergraduates — about seven women to 10 men — a decade ago.

“NTU has seen a gradual increase of female students over the past decade due to the establishment of the College of Science and the College of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences in 2006,” said Professor Kam Chan Hin, Associate Provost (Undergraduate Education) at NTU.

Bachelor programmes offered by these colleges, such as Biological Sciences, Linguistics and Multilingual Studies, as well as Fine Arts in Art Design and Media, are very popular with female students, he said.

Formed in 1991 from the merger of the Nanyang Technological Institute and the National Institute of Education, NTU had a high proportion of male undergraduates in its earlier years due to large male enrolments in information technology (IT) and engineering courses — fields that are popular with men.

These programmes still attract many male undergraduates today, with about two men to one woman among students in the NTU College of Engineering's six schools.

The reverse, however, is seen at the College of Business (which comprises the Nanyang Business School) and the College of Science (made up of the School of Biological Sciences and the School of Physical and Mathematical Sciences), with a ratio of about two males to three females.

Prof Kam said admission to all educational programmes at NTU is not gender-based and all qualified applicants are considered fairly.

TODAY understands that the gender ratio will not affect NTU's design of hall rooms and number of toilets available as they were constructed in gender-neutral proportions.

Over the last decade, other institutions have had varying gender demographic trends. Ten years ago, the National University of Singapore (NUS) had slightly more women than men among its undergraduate population, while the Singapore Management University (SMU) had more female undergraduates — one man to two women — but the gender ratio has roughly evened out.

Sociologists said they expect this ratio in universities to eventually stabilise at 50:50, although gender preferences for some disciplines would still remain. For instance, there

could still be over-representation of men in engineering, said NUS Associate Professor Tan Ern Ser.

However, NUS Associate Professor Paulin Straughan noted that there is a “good number” of women choosing engineering.

“With these shifting norms, we expect gender bias and barriers to these courses to be slowly eroded,” she said.

Assoc Prof Straughan added that as more women invest in education and, subsequently, their careers, ensuring work-life balance for working couples will be critical for Singapore “if we want our youth to consider marriage and family formation”.