LONG INTERVIEW / CHANGE-MAKERS
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Susan Long

Prof Cheong on...

The e-learning system of his dreams

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His personal watchwords

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Taking the leap

The bespectacled radical, brimming with ideas to improve the work of others, is known as a “naive guy who wants to change the world.” Prof Chang Tao Soon, who served as the president of SIM University, wants to serve, so that when they think of SIM, they think of “doing them a disservice. A per- son who’s going through university and all of a sudden, he says, ‘Yes, academic grades are still important but we need to move beyond that’.”

While many universities have an obligation on ethics, SIMUniversity does not. Instead, ethics and issues of sustainability crop up throughout the curriculum, case studies and assignments.

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The future

But Prof Chang insists that creating more alternative pathways to success is not a replacement for traditional universities. “We need both, we can’t have a world where there’s no traditional university and everyone goes to SIMUniversity. That’s not the solution,” he says.

The new SIM

While traditional universities have sought to keep on top of what is possible, Prof Cheong has opened wide its gates to let in as many people as possible. The 60-year-old is the pres- ident of SIM University, which has given some 2,000 working adults a second chance at getting a degree. He has spent 12 years teaching in the university, which opened its doors last year, and is passionate about what he is doing.

“I was a little bit skeptical at first. When I first heard the idea, I thought ‘it’s a lost cause’. But I went ahead and agreed to teach there,” he says.

Professor Cheong Kiat Kiat, 65, hopes to make it more accessible for people to work, explore what they want to do and find their roles before getting their degrees.

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