NUS students getting a taste of real investing
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New trading lab will be equipped with live news and data feed on Asian stocks.

IT is probably something that students who have the ambition to become asset managers dream of. For those who want to make a career of managing investments, what can be better than having access to, as early as possible, a workstation equipped with live financial data, investment and risk management software and live feeds from Bloomberg?

These are exactly the sort of technology and infrastructure required to give students insights into what it would be like to manage investment portfolios for clients.

Thanks to the Center for Asset Management Research & Investments (CAMRI), this dream could well turn to reality. Set up in early 2009 in the National University of Singapore Business School, the center aims to improve the performance of students, individuals and organisations in the Asian asset management industry by providing investment management education and practice, through partnerships with industry players.

The partners it has secured include Lion Global Investors, DBS Asset Management and Credit Suisse's asset management division.

Said CAMRI director Joseph Cherian: 'We as academics can train them (students) to be good fund managers, and instill values such as the need to act within the law, all of which are paramount to being a good trader.'

The recent spate of scandals in the financial industry, such as Madoff's Ponzi scheme, has shown that there is a need to instill the proper values in those who want to enter the industry, said Prof Cherian. 'Students think it's all about stock picking. We want to teach them that it's about the whole package.'

Part of the teaching of this 'whole package' that forms the backbone of the center will come from the Investment Management and Trading Laboratory, which will boast of financial databases focusing on Asian securities.

To be built by early February next year, the lab will have close to 30 workstations, and 'will be equipped with what money managers use,' said Prof Cherian. Students can look forward to live feeds from Bloomberg and/or Thomson Reuters Datastream and tickers and panels displaying crucial financial data.

'We want to make sure that they have the key software, just like what managers will have,' said Prof Cherian.
Once the trading laboratory is ready, CAMRI will hold a stock pitch competition at the NUS Business School for MBA students in Asia come March. The aim: to allow the students to compete and showcase their stock-picking skills in front of a panel of judges from the investment industry.

It hopes universities will participate, including business schools like INSEAD (Singapore), China's Tsinghua University, Thammasat University in Thailand, and the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology.

CAMRI will also embark on studies in quantitative, behavioral and fundamental analysis.

Research and education areas will include asset pricing theories, portfolio management, regulation and incentive-compatible compensation structures.

It will also hold forums and public talks that will focus on research and policies relating to the theory and practice of risk management, among other things.

Students can also look forward to asset management-related projects where student teams, under the supervision of CAMRI and the finance faculty at NUS, will undertake research projects that are sponsored and overseen by financial industry players such as sovereign wealth funds, financial institutions and government statutory boards.

And perhaps the most exciting prospect is this - Prof Cherian revealed that CAMRI is looking into allowing students to manage a fund, giving them hands-on hand experience in managing investments.

'The idea is to allow students to handle live money and experience the rigorous process of how to manage that money,' said Prof Cherian.