It is a delight to be here to celebrate the official launch of Yale-NUS College, and it is an honor to be able to acknowledge publically, Prime Minister, your vision for higher education and your commitment to create here at NUS a new model of undergraduate education for Singapore and Asia. We at Yale are deeply grateful to you, your Cabinet, and the Ministry of Education for the opportunity to participate in this important and exciting endeavor. It is a special pleasure to be able to salute in your presence the inspiring leadership of President Tan Chorh Chuan, Vice President Lily Kong, and the senior staff of NUS. You have here as impressive a team of university leaders as I have ever encountered.

This is a momentous day for Yale, and, we hope, for Singapore, and for Asia. We celebrate today something old and something new: the rebirth, recreation, and revitalization of one nation’s tradition in an entirely new and vibrant setting. Nearly two hundred years ago, in a set of related reports, the President, the Governing Board, and the faculty of Yale College defined for a young nation the type of education that it hoped would be provided for the nation’s future leaders. They wrote in 1828:
"By a liberal education has been understood, such a course of discipline in the arts and sciences, as is best calculated, ... both to strengthen and enlarge the faculties of mind, and to familiarize it with the leading principles of the great objects of human investigation and knowledge."

These two ideas – that a liberal education is intended to develop analytic thinking, and that it does so by giving students exposure to the broad range of human knowledge across the arts and sciences – remain central features of undergraduate education at the finest colleges and universities in the United States today. The 1828 *Yale Reports* were, in a sense, the founding documents that encouraged the spread of these ideas to liberal arts colleges throughout North America in the nineteenth century, many of them founded by alumni and faculty from Yale.

This is a momentous day for Yale for at least four reasons. First, this new venture allows us to participate in the continuation of this tradition. By collaborating in the development of a distinctly new liberal arts curriculum, we have an opportunity to influence the course of 21st century education in Singapore and in Asia, much as we did in our own country during the 19th century.

Second, this is a momentous day for Yale because we have found a partner worthy of and committed to this ambitious undertaking. NUS is among the most innovative and the most collaborative of universities in Asia; in the course of developing our shared vision, with abundant contributions coming from both sides, we have learned that this endeavor will be a true partnership.

Third, this is a momentous day for Yale because in Singapore your government understands that education and research are the twin engines of the economic development of the country and the social advancement of its citizens. Singapore’s elementary and secondary education systems are the envy of the world. We know this first hand from the extraordinary Singaporean students we admit annually to Yale College in New Haven. And, in our visits here, we have also seen first hand the remarkable advances made in Singapore’s tertiary education sector. NUS’ rapid advance in the rankings of global universities underscores the seriousness of your
government’s commitment to make Singapore a leading global center for higher education and research.

Finally, this is a momentous day for Yale because we believe that we ourselves, on our home campus, will benefit greatly from the innovations that will be introduced at Yale-NUS College. How often does a 310-year old institution have the opportunity to invent a college “from scratch?” I am confident that there will be curricular, extracurricular, and residential life innovations that will instruct, inspire, and improve Yale’s programs in New Haven. For example, we have been working with our NUS partners on the design of a first-year humanities course for the new college that will draw equally on Asian and Western literary and philosophical traditions. As a consequence, some of our faculty are already thinking about offering such a course in New Haven.

We hope you see this as an equally momentous day for Singapore. As President Tan has said, your nation will benefit from the new college and its stream of graduates who will be equipped with a broad-based, multi-disciplinary, and rigorous education that very deliberately prepares them for leadership. By seeing problems from the perspective of multiple disciplines, and by developing their powers of critical thinking, graduates of the new college will have the capacity to tackle the kind of complex problems facing leaders of business, governmental, and nongovernmental organizations in a highly interconnected and interdependent world. By learning to live in residential college communities, and by developing leadership and teamwork skills in a wide variety of student organizations, Yale-NUS students will acquire the capacity to nurture communities and to contribute as citizens. We trust that Yale-NUS College will help to enhance Singapore’s reputation for innovation in education. Just as Singapore Airlines now sets the standard for air travel worldwide, Yale-NUS College aspires to set a standard for undergraduate education throughout Asia.

Finally, I think that this will prove to be a momentous day for Asia. There has never been greater need for undergraduate education that cultivates critical thinking. The goals of liberal education are to prepare students to question relentlessly, to think through problems carefully and to analyze consequences. Today, these qualities of mind developed through liberal education are perhaps more indispensable than
ever. All of Asia and the developing world need college graduates who understand and appreciate differences across cultures and national boundaries, and who can address problems for which there are no easy solutions.

Yet, today, in virtually all of Asia and much of the rest of the world, undergraduates pursue specialized courses of study. Entering students enroll to prepare immediately in medicine, law, or a single academic discipline, and the pedagogy, in much of the world, focuses on memorization and mastering a particular body of knowledge. Liberal education gives students exposure to multiple disciplinary perspectives, and it steeps them in a pedagogy that encourages independent critical thinking. This will enable graduates to contribute most effectively to the economic and social advancement of their nations and facilitate the greater understanding among peoples that is so desperately needed in this century.

The idea of a four-year liberal arts education is gaining momentum in Asia. China and South Korea are already experimenting in this domain. A model college in Singapore, drawing students from throughout Asia as well as Singapore, can have a profound influence on the future of all of Asia—and thus on the future of the world in the century ahead. Let us dare to be this ambitious, together.