Academia must engage society: don

New NUS Business School dean wants to develop school’s social impact and responsibility in ‘Asian renaissance’

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These are troubling financial times, but also the years of an “Asian renaissance”, says Bernard Yeung, the new dean of the NUS Business School.

Now, more than ever, academia must step out of its ivory tower to engage with and proactively contribute to society, he said.

When the financial crisis hit a few weeks back, Professor Yeung said: “I lost a lot of money, but my heart sank also because I was thinking, ‘what will all this mean for my students, for the economy, for society?’”

This led him and his colleagues to contribute articles to newspapers explaining the crisis to the general public.

It led also to an oversubscribed forum earlier this week where students quizzed a panel of businessmen and bankers on the impact of the crisis on the hiring landscape.

Prof Yeung cited these as examples of how NUS Business School intends to develop its social impact and responsibility.

“Leading business schools all have a distinctive personality. I hope we can create a culture of intellectual integrity, intensity and excellence,” he said, sharing his plans at a media briefing yesterday.

Relevant and intellectually rigorous teaching is another focus of his.

He said: “We are ‘Asia’s Global Business School’. The ‘Asia’ is crucial – key emerging economies are in this region, and applying US and Euro-centric theories wholesale to the Asian context is impossible.”

Prof Yeung, who left New York University to take up his current post in August, said he was “humbled” by his colleagues’ leadership in research and expertise on the region.

He stressed that the school’s core purpose is still to plant “deep roots of knowledge” in students, educating them “for careers and not just the first job” so that they will “bear fruit as socially responsible business professionals”.

His three-year term as dean is renewable and Prof Yeung said he has taken this up as a “long-term commitment”. His wife and daughter moved to Singapore with him, while his son is still studying in the US.