Yale-NUS College all set to open in 2013

Singapore’s first liberal arts college to take in 250 students a year

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THE Yale-National University of Singapore liberal arts college is finally a done deal.

Yesterday, Singapore’s leading university and the prestigious American university announced that the Yale-NUS College, as it will be called, will open in 2013 and admit 250 Singaporean and foreign students a year.

Education Minister Ng Eng Hen described the college as a “strategic addition” to the university sector here, while Yale President Richard Levin said it will offer “a unique brand of liberal arts education that blends Eastern and Western intellectual traditions”.

Students will study and live in the three residential colleges that will be built next to NUS University Town sited in the former Warren Golf Club premises.

In the first two years, they will take general education courses bringing together Western and Asian perspectives, before going on to concentrate on a major.

At the end of four years, students will graduate with a bachelor of arts or science (honours) awarded by NUS, but their degree scrolls will include the Yale-NUS College name.

NUS will also look into offering double-degree programmes, which will enable students to combine their liberal arts education with a professional degree, be it in law or medicine.

The deal, which has been in the making for more than a year, hit a few road bumps along the way.

Singaporeans questioned the real value of a liberal arts education, given the expense of setting up a liberal arts college.

Over in New Haven, Connecticut, some faculty members of the Ivy League university were concerned more with the issue of academic freedom.

Citing Singapore’s laws on defamation and holding public demonstrations, some opposed the Yale-NUS collaboration.

In an interview with The Straits Times on Wednesday, Professor Levin acknowledged that academic freedom had been a sticking point in negotiations.

But Yale had done its “due diligence” on the matter, he said. It assembled committees to develop an understanding of the parameters of academic freedom in Singapore. It also consulted its faculty and alumni who have had dealings with Singapore, and spoke to other schools such as New York University’s law school, which runs a joint degree programme with NUS’ law school.

“We came away with the picture that conversation on the campus is open. Peo-
Clause assures academic freedom on campus

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ple feel free to express their points of view. Faculty can teach the subjects they want to teach and pursue the research that they want. So that has satisfied us,” he said.

He added that a clause had been included in the final agreement assuring academic freedom on campus.

The clause, though, states that this has to be “within the accepted scholarly and professional standards and the regulations of the college.”

“This covers areas like the prohibition of sexual harassment and defamatory language concerning race or religion. Policies governing such speech are common in US institutions,” Prof. Levin said.

Prof. Levin said a smaller concern had been Singapore’s three-year bond on foreign students who accept a fee subsidy from the Singapore Government.

Yale was concerned that it might constrain the choices of graduates who may want to seek opportunities outside of Singapore or go back home to serve their own countries or communities.

Prof. Levin said Yale had been assured that international students could also pay full fees and not be subject to the bond.

Yale and NUS will also raise funds to offer “community service fellowships” for students who may want to go back to do public service in their own countries or help communities in other parts of the world.

Prof. Levin said that contrary to the picture painted by some media, the majority of Yale faculty were for the partnership with NUS, and were excited at the prospect of evolving a unique brand of liberal arts education.

“Just as Yale shaped liberal arts education in the US in the 19th century, the new Yale-NUS College can play a pivotal role in shaping the many liberal arts colleges likely to be built in Asia in the coming decades,” he said.

NUS President Tan Chorh Chuan is confident that there will be support from students and parents here. He said, “The college provides an extraordinary opportunity to nurture talented young minds with the intellectual breadth and depth needed to address the complex issues of the future.”

He said that through cross-disciplinary studies of the arts, humanities, social, natural and physical sciences, students will develop the ability to navigate effectively across different fields of knowledge.

“Students will develop a broad intellectual base, learn how to see things from multiple perspectives and to present ideas and viewpoints effectively,” he said.

Yale is the first institution to be allowed to establish an international campus in Singapore. It is expected to open in 2013 and is expected to be ready in 2015.

Yale University is one of the most prestigious universities in the United States and is consistently ranked among the top universities in the world.