Yale-NUS College to take in 150 students in 2013

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SINGAPORE — First, it was the issue of academic freedom. Then British author Alan Shadrake’s conviction for contempt of court became a talking point in negotiations to set up Singapore’s first liberal arts college. There were also protracted budget discussions.

In the end, the United States’ Yale University reached a conclusion that Britain’s University of Warwick did not: Faculty members can research and teach in topics here without restrictions.

It was announced yesterday that in 2013, the Yale-National University of Singapore (NUS) College will take in its first 150 students, who will pay higher course fees than that for NUS’ other arts and sciences offerings.

Yale president Richard C Levin said: “We believe 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.”

The presence of a prestigious overseas university here comes after University of Warwick in 2005 dropped its plans to have a full-scale Singapore branch over concerns about limits on academic freedom and civil liberties.

Yesterday, NUS president Tan Chorh Chuan told MediaCorp his Yale counterparts are “fully satisfied” academic freedom is not an issue that will impede the autonomous college in the NUS or affect Yale’s branding.

“There are a small number of individuals who have concerns and it’s more widely reported than the rest who are in support of this,” said Professor Tan, who disclosed that the Shadrake case, while a discussion point, had enabled Yale members to understand the Singapore context better.

The initial unfamiliarity with the Singapore system extended to the financial options available for international students and the obligations required of them under the tuition grant scheme.

A budget agreement, to have been expected in January, took “a bit longer than expected”, admitted Prof Tan.

But now, an “adequate” budget has been finalised, although no details were given.

The first liberal arts college of its kind in Asia will offer modules that cut across Eastern and Western schools of thoughts and a smaller classroom size ratio (18 students to 1 faculty member).

NUS vice-president (university and global relations) Lily Kong told MediaCorp that it will cost less than at Yale and within the range for US state universities. The average fee for state universities in last year to this year is reportedly US$7,605 (S$9,583).

She said that various financial schemes will be given to all Singaporean and international students on a competitive basis.

The slated capacity for the four-year, broad-based degree programme is 1,000 students.

They will graduate with a Bachelor of Arts or Sciences (Honours) awarded by the NUS, with the Yale-NUS College name in their degree scrolls.

Another feature that sets apart the collaboration from existing university tie-ups: Three residential colleges, housing about 330 students each as well as faculty members.

The next step is staff recruitment of both experienced and young academics. Outreach to junior colleges here will begin in July.

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