BY LEOW SI WAN

THE National University of Singapore’s (NUS) new residential colleges welcomed their pioneer batches of students yesterday - more than five years since plans for such colleges were first announced.

More than 1,000 freshmen and seniors who will stay at the spanking new University Town (UTown) took a symbolic walk across the link bridge connecting the existing Kent Ridge campus and the new academic year.

Unlike students living in NUS’ halls of residence, those at UTown will get to experience what it is like to study and live in the same building.

The concept of residential colleges has long been in practice at top English universities such as Oxford and Cambridge, and top American liberal arts colleges.

Addressing the excited bunch of students, NUS president Tan Chorh Chuan said “Today marks the first start of a new academic year, as well as a new milestone in the history of NUS.”

“With the completion of the state-of-the-art Education Resource Centre, the initial phase of UTown is now complete.”

The pioneer batches of 1,200 undergraduates will reside in Cinnamon and Tembusu colleges; two other residential colleges will be ready by next April.

The already completed Graduate Residence will house about 1,700 graduate students.

Undergraduates at Tembusu College will take on five modules under the UTown residential programme - two on ideas and exposition, and three multidisciplinary seminars on global issues with emphasis on Asian perspectives.

Some interesting seminars include examining counterfeits and forgeries, and forensic analysis.

Cinnamon College will house students from NUS’ 11-year-old University Scholars Programme (USP), an interdisciplinary programmes.

All USP incoming freshmen are required to live in the residential college during their first year and another.

Besides the remaining two colleges, UTown’s second construction phase will include an Edutainment Complex for sporting and cultural activities to be ready by October next year.

Although the residential halls go into operation only today, some students like Mr Marvin Kang, 30, moved in last week.

Said the final-year business student, who is part of the USP: “I used to stay in Prince George’s Park and what struck me since I moved here is that my room is not just a place for me to sleep in. We eat, study, learn and play together.”

Third-year chemical engineering student Rohin Iain, 21, who stays in Tembusu, said he has seen “an amazing mix of nationalities since moving in a week ago”. “I did a quick count and I have seen students from 14 to 15 nationalities already. I think this is a great opportunity for diversity learning,” he said.

Among those making up the diverse group is freshman Yoo Seung Hee, 20. “The South Korean said he is looking forward to next week, when lessons begin.

The first-year economics student said: “For the semester, I am taking a subject called innovation, which is about creative learning and thinking outside of the box.

“I am hoping that it will be a lot of fun and that I will be able to develop an enterprising mindset.”

The Mac commons room at the Education Resource Centre in NUS University Town where students can have access to laptops and computers. The centre will also be a test bed for collaborative technology.

Students (left) crossing a bridge towards UTown yesterday to mark the start of the new academic year and (above) relaxing in the University Town’s Education Resource Centre’s PC commons room where they can use their own personal computers.

ST PRINTS: JABARIEH

LEARNING HUB OPEN 24/7 FOR EXCHANGE OF IDEAS

THE Education Resource Centre of the University Town (UTown) is poised to become a self-sustained learning hub of the National University of Singapore (NUS). The $80 million, four-floor building, to be open 24/7, bristles with technology that will act as a catalyst for ideas among students, including collaborations across disciplines.

Its walls do double duty as whiteboards. It also has retractable plasma screens, recording studios and a multi-media hub.

This facility will be the disposal of students living and studying in the two residential colleges making up UTown, as well as all other NUS students.

During a media tour yesterday, the director of NUS’ Centre for Instructional Technology Ravi Chandran explained that the Education Resource Centre will be a test bed for collaborative technologies.

He said: “We are working with companies to test the latest software and hardware, and if it works well here, we plan to extend these technologies to the Kent Ridge campus.”

NUS president Tan Chorh Chuan added that the centre will be improved constantly and will not be ‘static’.

The first two levels of the centre house technology-infused common rooms to encourage presentations and discussions.

Mr Chandran said: “We have power points all over the centre so students will not have problems plugging in.

“Our rooms, even the furniture, are multi-purpose so students can use them as classrooms, for projects and for discussions.”

The top two levels have study rooms.

ST PRINTS: JABARIEH