A confident Yale-NUS College announces two new programmes

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SINGAPORE — An uncertain economic climate and concerns over job prospects have not prevented the first liberal arts college here from remaining confident that a broad-based education can take root here.

The Yale-National University of Singapore (NUS) College, which will receive its first batch of 150 students in August next year, announced two new programmes in law and in environmental studies yesterday.

In law, a combination of liberal arts and law studies can be pursued in five years, compared to the typical seven years required in the United States. The programme will accept its first intake of students in August next year. About 15 to 25 students are expected to be admitted into the programme each year.

In environmental studies, meanwhile, students will graduate with Bachelor of Arts (Honours) or Bachelor of Science (Honours) degrees from Yale-NUS, and a Master of Environmental Science (MES) or Master of Environmental Management (MEM) degree from Yale University after five years of study. The programme will begin accepting students in December 2016.

The introduction of a liberal arts education here has drawn questions over its practicability, with parents expressing concerns about their children’s future job prospects.

At a press conference yesterday, Professor Lily Kong, acting executive vice-president of academic affairs at Yale-NUS, argued that having a liberal arts degree would make students “recession proof”. “The liberal arts degree prepares you for a whole range of careers ... if you did a professional degree, you are prepared for one career,” she said.

While the final ratio of local to international students has not been fixed, Prof Kong reiterated that the overall foreign student numbers in NUS would be capped at 20 per cent, in accordance with guidelines here.

More details of the curriculum were also revealed yesterday. Students can choose among 14 majors, including anthropology and physical sciences, in their last two years of studies. Overseas exchange programmes and internships will also be available to students.

The college will be finalising its tuition fees soon as applications start next month, but Prof Kong said yesterday that the fees would be costlier than those for other existing courses.

Students, however, would not be denied because of their financial inability, she added, where selection is based on both academic and non-academic qualities.

The college has also received more than 2,000 applications to join its faculty and it is in the midst of shortlisting them.

Yale-NUS is planning to select 50 faculty members for its first batch of students and will add another 50 later when the student enrolment eventually goes up to 1,000.