Liberal arts degree more relevant than ever, say corporate leaders

SINGAPORE — With prospective students and their parents wondering what a liberal arts degree is all about, a panel of corporate leaders at a Yale-NUS College dialogue yesterday set out to address the question.

Commenting on a liberal arts education — which Singaporeans will get a taste of when Yale-NUS opens next year — Google Asia-Pacific managing director Aliza Knox stressed the importance of students being able to switch roles quickly and well when they enter the workforce.

“My understanding for people your age is the view that you’re going to be switching roles every two to three years,” she said. “What you need to be able to do is to go, ‘I have the ability to be mentally agile and move from one thing to the other’ as opposed to, ‘I really know this kind of science, or I really know this French literature.’”

As companies which previously looked to hire graduates from United States and United Kingdom universities look to hire more graduates from Singapore universities, Mr Louis Lim, partner at Bain & Company, said the opening of Yale-NUS increases the number of resources his company can tap into when hiring.

“Right now, we’ve seen a huge shift in terms of the quality of students that we’re getting applications from. We’ve hired from SMU, NTU and NUS. We think that the quality has dramatically increased because I think people are a lot more confident and conversant as well on different topics,” he said.

The dialogue session was part of a series of events at the NUS Open House this year. Parent Yogesh Jerath said the dialogue helped parents better understand the different emerging fields. “I’ve been brought up in an Asian culture where the three or four successful professions are engineers, doctors, or accountant for example,” he said. “That myth is going to be dispelled over a period of time when we start seeing the next generation of leaders coming from other areas. But right now, it’s very well ingrained.”

The deadline for the college’s inaugural round of applications is April 1 this year. There will be three more rounds of applications until April next year. MONICA KOTWANI