New college well on its way

Top candidates appointed as faculty members, says inaugural Yale-NUS president

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SINGAPORE – With about 15 months to go before the Republic’s first liberal arts college opens its doors, it is still looking for key members of its leadership team.

But Professor Pericles Lewis, 48, who was introduced to the media as the inaugural Yale-NUS College president-designate, assured that the team will be ready in time for the college’s opening in August next year.

Prof Lewis will take office in July and his immediate priority is to recruit key faculty members to complete his administrative team, he said.

Asked by TODAY whether the recent controversy over the college might have affected its faculty recruitment efforts, he reiterated that it was “not a problem at all”.

In fact, it received about 2,500 applications and “hired the top 30”, the professor in English and Comparative Literature said.

“The new faculty members continue to be attracted to the opportunity and excitement of creating a liberal arts and sciences education for the 21st century, innovating pedagogy, experience living and learning, and deepening academic research and interest in Singapore and the region,” Prof Lewis said.

Nevertheless, he added: “One of my first priorities will be to appoint certain key positions, including a dean of students and a dean of international experience and education, because I am very interested to start building our co-curricula and student activity programmes.”

Prof Lewis described the faculty which have come on board as people who “want to be out there with students and involve students in the process of learning and knowledge creation”. Among them is Prof Lai Choy Heng, 59, who hails from the National University of Singapore and will be executive vice-president of academic affairs.

While the college is a tie-up between a Singapore and an American institution, Prof Lewis said it aims to recruit the best administrative leaders and the selection will not be “restricted by geography or institution”.

Outlining his vision for the college, the doctorate holder from Stanford University said he hopes to provide a liberal arts and science education for the 21st century, where pupils are given the breadth of knowledge to ask questions in any discipline, while also having the rigorous training to go deep into a particular field.

Prof Lewis, who holds American and Canadian citizenship, has been involved with the college since the initial planning stage. He will be relocating to Singapore with his wife and two children from next year.

Speaking on the recent controversy, he acknowledged that his fellow professors in the United States might not be up to date with the rapid developments in Singapore.

Still, he said: “It is not the job of an educational institution to tell other people what to think politically … It is the job of an institution to encourage dialogue. The dialogues and conversations … that contribute to the development of the society.”