Rising academic stars to teach at Yale-NUS

By SANDRA DAVIE
SENIOR WRITER

SIX professors billed as “rising stars” have been hired to teach at the new Yale-NUS College.

All but one of them are giving up positions at top universities and research institutes in the United States and Britain.

The PhD holders, whose names were revealed yesterday, are part of the first group of 30 faculty members hired by the Singapore college, which opens next year.

Associate Professor Jeremy Kua, 39, will move from the chemistry department of the University of San Diego, while 34-year-old theoretical physicist Shaffique Adam is from the US National Institute of Standards and Technology.

Also joining the college are Yale political science professor Keith Darden, 42; Oxford University psychology professor Ananthi Al Ramiah, 34; University of Michigan classical studies scholar Mira Seo, 38; and 35-year-old Singaporean Claudine Ang, who recently completed her PhD in history at Cornell University.

All six told The Straits Times they were eager to seize the opportunity to teach and conduct research at the liberal arts institution, which will pioneer a curriculum synthesising Western and Asian perspectives.

College officials said the resolution in April by Yale faculty members concerned about academic freedom in Singapore had been discussed with the new staff, but none had expressed undue concern over it.

Yale-NUS president Pericles Lewis, who was appointed last month, described them as “an impressive group of young faculty who show tremendous commitment to the idea of developing a liberal arts and science education in an Asian context”.

The six were among 100 candidates shortlisted following a recruitment exercise that attracted more than 2,300 applicants.

Professor Lewis described Prof Kua as “an outstanding scientist who really understands how to teach chemistry to undergraduates”.

He said Associate Professor Darden was a highly respected teacher who is “eager to see how the Yale model of education can be adapted in Singapore”.

The president added that the college will hire a total of 100 faculty members over the next several years, but currently has enough to teach the first year’s classes.

Professor Charles Ballyn, dean of faculty at the college, said that over the next year the professors will be planning the details of the curriculum and co-curricular programmes.

“We expect to study modules and programmes in place at Yale, National University of Singapore and many other institutions around the world, and combine them with ideas of our own to create a unique and exciting educational programme for our students,” he said.

Assistant Professor Adam said he took on the position at the new college because he is a “strong believer in liberal arts education”.

He is a recipient of the 2012 Singapore National Research Foundation Fellowship, given to outstanding young scientists to conduct cutting-edge research here.

Assistant Professor Al Ramiah said that having experienced the value of a broad education at Oxford, she was excited about developing and teaching a curriculum at Yale-NUS College.

When asked about the Yale faculty resolution, the Malaysian, who has family in Singapore, said: “I welcome the expression of the shared values. That is important to liberal arts education. But I disagree with the tone of the resolution, which I felt is not an accurate reflection of what is going on in Singapore.”