



Hopes that Yale-NUS will produce critical thinkers

PM Lee outlines his vision for Singapore's first liberal arts college

By SANDRA DAVIE
SENIOR WRITER

AS THE much-anticipated Yale-NUS College gears up for its opening, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong has set out one hope for the school: that its graduates will think critically and understand complexities.

With a style and approach drawn from world-famous universities like Yale, Oxford and Cam-

bridge, Mr Lee hopes that the college can also produce students with strong communication and leadership skills.

He outlined his vision for the first liberal arts college here yesterday at a groundbreaking ceremony for the new campus. Due to be completed in 2015, it will be sited next to NUS University Town in Dover Road. Before the campus is ready, the first cohort of 150 students will start classes in August

(From left) Mr Tan Kok Hiang, Forum Architects director; Mr Fred Clarke, partner at Pelli Clarke Pelli & Associates; Ms Diane Abbott, Yale-NUS Design and Construction project director; Madam Kay Kuok, chair of the Yale-NUS governing board; Professor Tan Chorh Chuan, NUS president; Mr Joseph P. Mullinix, NUS deputy president of administration; PM Lee; Professor Pericles Lewis, Yale-NUS College president; and Mr Wong Ngit Liong, NUS Board of Trustees chairman. They are looking at a scale model of the new campus. ST PHOTO: DESMOND WEE

next year at the U-Town.

In the first two years, they will take general education courses bringing together Western and Asian perspectives before going on to concentrate on a major.

Students can choose between 14 majors such as anthropology, urban studies and life sciences and two joint degrees. At the end of four years, they will graduate with a Bachelor of Arts or Science (honours) awarded by NUS, but their scrolls will include the Yale-NUS College name.

Speaking to NUS and Yale leaders, faculty and students at the event yesterday, Mr Lee described the college as a "new offering" in the education landscape here.

It brings together the best of American liberal arts education and the distinctive Asian and global strengths of NUS, he said.

But it will not be a replica of Yale but "a bold effort to create

something new and different", he pointed out. The curriculum, for instance, will be adapted to Singapore's social and cultural context.

Mr Lee also expects the novel teaching and learning approaches developed by the college to spread to other institutions, just as the Duke-NUS medical school's teaching methods have been adapted by other schools.

To date, the college has recruited 50 students, mostly Singaporeans. It will focus its next round of recruitment on top students from the region, Europe and the US. Mr Lee hopes some will see opportunities and sink roots here.

The Government, however, is not focusing just on the tertiary sector, he said. At the primary level, it is striving to make every school a good school, especially in the heartland. It is also strengthening the Institute of Technical Education and polytechnics.

Yale-NUS College president Pericles Lewis, who took office this month, agrees that the college "is breaking ground on multiple dimensions".

He said the three residential colleges will help create "nested communities" or smaller group settings, as in Yale. Such settings will enable students to learn from each other as much as they do from the faculty. He noted about 20 per cent of the faculty will live with the students in the residential colleges, including himself.

He said the curriculum will bring together Eastern and Western intellectual traditions. The Iliad by Homer, on the Trojan War, for example, will be studied with the Hindu epic Bhagavad Gita.

He said the campus will have many open spaces - such as 30 sky gardens - to maximise opportunities for students to interact.

By 2015, the college will have 1,000 students and 100 faculty.

sandra@sph.com.sg