NUS UTown widens campus living options

BY RACHEL CHAN

Those enrolling in the National University of Singapore (NUS) next year or who have just begun their term of study there will soon enjoy more options to live and learn on campus.

Come August next year, the first phase of the much-awaited NUS University Town (UTown) will receive its first intake.

The 19ha establishment in Clementi will have two residential colleges, a graduate residence, and an education-resource centre in its initial phase. Construction started in January 2008.

The Campus for Research Excellence and Technological Enterprise, a $360-million research-and-development complex funded by the National Research Foundation, also part of UTown, will be ready next year.

The 21-storey residential colleges will admit up to 600 students, and the graduate residence, up to 1,000. Facilities are open to all NUS students.

UTown is expected to add more than 1,000 beds to the current 7,000 in student hostels in the NUS campus.

Modelled on residential colleges of Oxford, Cambridge, Stanford and Harvard universities, it is considered the first of its kind in Asia.

To provide an "interactive and highly personalised academic experience", students at the residential colleges will also have to read at least three "core curriculum modules".

A writing programme, freshmen seminars, platforms for groups to engage in in-depth discussions and a multi-disciplinary module, which focuses on discussing global issues from an Asian perspective, will be part of this compulsory curriculum.

Applicants will have to write an essay and pass an interview before gaining admission.

The NUS University Scholars Programme (USP), an interdisciplinary programme for undergraduates, will also move its annual intake of 180 students to one of the residential colleges.

Each residential college will have a live-in master, who will determine the character of the college and the type of students it wants to attract, said Professor Tan Eng Chye, who is deputy president of academic affairs and provost of NUS.

USP director John Richardson and NUS history department's Associate Professor Gregory Clancey, both from the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, have been identified as UTown's first residential-college masters.

Applications for existing NUS students will be open at the end of this year, while next year's A-level graduates can apply after receiving their results.

The project will be completed in three phases. Phase 2 of the project will see the completion of two more residential colleges by the academic year of 2012, and phase 3, an Eduports complex in 2013.

A total number of eight residential colleges and two graduate residences were originally planned for UTown, but construction has been confirmed only for the buildings listed in the three phases because of a lack of funds, revealed Prof Tan.

Each residential college costs between $60 million to $70 million to build.

"We're trying to raise funds from donors and not pass on the cost to our students," he said.

First-year engineering student Mohammed Hafiz, 22, is looking forward to being among the first admitted to UTown, so that he can develop "a sense of rootedness" for his school.

"I want to be a part of that vibrant culture...that wholesome university experience, and not just study and go home after class," he said.

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