NUS to set up overseas college in Israel

Students picked for 7th college will be interns with start-ups there

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SENIOR WRITER

THE National University of Singapore (NUS) will set up an overseas college in Israel to develop the spirit of entrepreneurship among the students it sends there.

A total of 10 selected undergraduates and postgraduates will spend six months doing internships with high-tech firms in what has been dubbed “the start-up nation”; they will also attend entrepreneurship-related seminars taught by the region’s gurus.

NUS, for whom this will be the seventh overseas college set in a global entrepreneurial hub, hopes that chutzpah – that derring-do of Israelis, that willing¬ness to challenge accepted norms – will rub off on its students during their stint in Tel Aviv and Haifa.

Ten students will be picked each year for the programme, in the same way students are selected to be sent to NUS’ other overseas colleges in Sweden, India, China and the United States to garner work experience in entrepreneurial outfits.

This decade-old programme sends about 100 students overseas every year.

To clinch a place on the programme, applicants have to clear three rounds of interviews – two by NUS and one by the firm offering the internship.

Associate Professor Teo Chee Leong, the director of NUS Overseas Colleges, explaining why Israel was picked as the site for its latest overseas college, cited statistics from the book Start-Up Nation by Americans Dan Senor and Saul Singer.

He said: “Israel has the highest density of tech start-ups in the world. More importantly, these start-ups attract more venture capital dollars per person than any country – 2½ times that in the US.”

He further noted that Israel has more companies listed on the Nasdaq than any country outside the US, and that Israel-designated technology lies behind major tech leaders such as Intel, Microsoft, Google, Cisco and Motorola.

Prof Teo said the seven colleges each have a different focus and offer different programmes and experiences.

NUS’ first overseas college in Silicon Valley, set up in 2001, aims to nurture entrepreneurs in the IT and telecommunications industry, while its college in Philadelphia, home to most of world’s major drug companies, targets students interested in the biotechnology industry.

Its Shanghai college concentrates on business opportunities in manufacturing and services, while students going to India focus on IT.

To students and their parents who may have safety concerns about being in Israel, he said NUS would take steps to ensure the safety of the students, with the help of its partners there.

“But that’s something we want our budding entrepreneurs to cope with as well – being in an environment that is different, perhaps a bit challenging,” said Prof Teo.

He said he is not too worried about getting students to go there when the programme begins in August; three have already put in their applications.

One of them, biomedical science student Michelle Lau, 22, who has been on a short business study trip to Israel, said she was amazed at the creativity of its people.

“It’s an exciting place and people there are original. I would love to be immersed in that environment for a while to see if I can come up with some original ideas myself for a start-up.”

Computing student Ong Howe Shang, 25, who is already working on a business idea with three friends, hopes that a stint in Israel will hone his ideas and business know-how.

He said: “When I was there for a short trip, I was struck by the gutsy never-say-die spirit of their entrepreneurs and how they think global from Day One.

“I hope to come back from Israel with the same spirit and savvy.”

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