

New NUS college to admit first cohort next August

College of Humanities and Sciences to take in over 2,000 undergrads; encourages flexibility in educational path

Amelia Teng
Education Correspondent

The National University of Singapore (NUS) yesterday officially launched its new college that will bring together two of its oldest faculties – arts and social sciences, and science – and take in more than 2,000 undergraduates.

The College of Humanities and Sciences (CHS), which will admit its first cohort of students in August next year, marks a major shift away from the traditional way of learning in separate disciplines.

Both faculties date as far back as 1929, and will continue to operate separately. Students will still graduate with a bachelor's honours degree in arts, social sciences or science within four years.

But a key difference is that they will have to take 13 common modules in areas that cut across different fields of study, such as design thinking, artificial intelligence and scientific inquiry.

Students will spend a third of their overall curriculum on such modules, which will focus on the intellectual approaches and connections across disciplines. Other topics include Asian studies, computa-

tional thinking and community and engagement.

They will also take two higher-level interdisciplinary modules of their choice. These aim to integrate knowledge across disciplines.

With this change, modules making up a student's major requirement will form one-third of the overall curriculum. This is lower than the current 50 per cent or more of the existing academic load.

Under the new system, a double degree can also be done within four years, and students taking up two majors from two different degree types will be awarded double degrees.

Currently, students usually have to extend their studies by a semester or a year to undertake such double degrees.

At a briefing yesterday, NUS president Tan Eng Chye said the new curriculum structure will give students more flexibility in carving out their own path, as the workload for second major and minor requirements will also be lowered.

Students will be able to pursue any major as well as a second major from either faculty, or take a major-minor combination. More than 1,000 modules per year will be



COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND SCIENCES

13

Number of common modules across different fields students must take.

>1,000

Number of modules per year that students can choose from.

1,400

Yearly intake for the arts and social sciences faculty.

1,000

Yearly intake for the science faculty.

available for them to choose from.

Both faculties offer about 30 majors in total. The yearly intakes for the arts and social sciences and the science faculties are about 1,400 and 1,000 students respectively.

Professor Tan noted that while there is interest from students to take up second majors or minors, only 15 per cent of those from both faculties currently do so.

The hope is that, with greater room to choose what they want to pursue, this will increase to 40 per cent to 50 per cent of students, he said.

Explaining the rationale for bringing both faculties together, Prof Tan said: "Jobs have been destabilised in an uncertain, complex and volatile environment, and the work we do is becoming increasingly integrated. More than ever, the speed and intensity of technological processes are increasing and reinforced by Covid-19."

"So the graduates of the future must be well prepared to navigate this new terrain and solve complex problems from multiple fronts. They need to not just work along-

side one another, but with each other."

To allow students more flexibility across disciplines, CHS will also offer three new cross-disciplinary degree programmes from next year – in data science and economics, environmental studies, and philosophy, politics and economics.

Citing examples like the University Scholars Programme and Yale-NUS College, Prof Tan said: "In education, NUS has experimented with various initiatives over the past 20 years and along the way, we have learnt and improved on them."

Now, with the new CHS, interdisciplinary learning will be done on a larger scale, he added.

The college is the first in the pipeline of new undertakings by NUS to offer even more interdisciplinary experiences for students, he said.

Students from other faculties and schools will be able to "reap the benefits of interdisciplinary studies in the time ahead", he said, adding that more details will be shared at a later date.

ateng@sph.com.sg

(From left) Second Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Education Lai Wei Lin, National University of Singapore president Tan Eng Chye and co-founder of tech giant SEA Ye Gang at the launch of NUS' College of Humanities and Sciences yesterday.
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