

Diverse first cohort of 400 students for new NUS College

College formed from merger of Yale-NUS and scholars programme drew 7,000 applicants

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Despite doubts expressed by some over the popularity of the new National University of Singapore (NUS) College formed from the merger of Yale-NUS College and the University Scholars Programme (USP), it is off to a strong start, with about 400 students selected from 7,000 applicants.

About 300 of the places went to Singaporeans and 100 to students from 21 countries.

Among the Singaporeans, there is a good mix, with many coming from a wide range of junior colleges and 20 from the polytechnics. Five madrasah students were also offered places.

A college survey of the students' household incomes found that about one in four can be classified as "needy" students who are likely to qualify for bursaries.

The college dean, Professor Simon Chesterman, also revealed

that 38 of the incoming students are "deferred applicants" – mostly national servicemen who had applied previously to Yale-NUS College and been offered places. They agreed to join NUS College instead.

Prof Chesterman said that of the 65 faculty members who have joined the college so far, 20 are from Yale-NUS, while 35 are from the USP and 10 are new hires.

The announcement last year of the merger and closure of the USP and Yale-NUS in 2025 generated much controversy, with many students, parents, faculty and alumni petitioning to reverse the decision.

NUS said the new merged college will bring together the best of its 20-year-old USP and the liberal arts college it started in 2011 with Yale University.

It will also broaden access to interdisciplinary liberal arts education, with a bigger intake and lower fees.

However, many in the Yale-NUS community asserted their exceptionalism and mourned the loss of academic and political freedoms.

Among the concerns expressed

by NUS officials over Yale-NUS College were the high costs of providing a liberal arts education.

There were also questions over the accessibility and affordability of the college to Singaporeans, who had to fork out \$20,000 in tuition fees and another \$10,000 in college fees – much higher than the tuition fees paid by Singaporean students doing an arts and social sciences degree at NUS, which was about \$8,250.

NUS College students will pay their home faculty tuition fees, which for a Singaporean arts and social sciences student this year is \$8,250. They will also pay about \$7,000 a year to stay in Cinnamon College residential college.

Prof Chesterman, who is also vice-provost (educational innovation) and head of the law school, said the college is able to keep the fees and living costs low because of the economies of scale from being part of NUS.

He added that the college has taken some of the best elements from both USP and Yale-NUS, including the small class sizes of 18 to

20 students. But it will be an independent entity, not a continuation of either programme.

He added that despite the dismay and anger, in recent months, some of the senior Yale-NUS students have banded together and will be involved in the orientation for incoming students.

Prof Chesterman said the college wanted a diverse cohort of students, so it cast the net wide.

"We didn't say, unless you've got straight As, don't bother applying."

He stressed: "Diversity is important, not just for creating opportunities for a wider range of people... It's also important for everyone else. If you only had one type of student, they might have a good experience, but it would be limited, narrow."

Incoming students Larraine Lim, 19, Jane Ho, 19, and Hakeem Samsuri, 19, said the broad, interdisciplinary curriculum offered by NUS College and its other offerings, including the opportunity to take on a social impact project, appealed to them.

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(From left) Incoming NUS College students Larraine Lim, Jane Ho and Hakeem Samsuri, all 19 years old, with college dean Simon Chesterman. The students were drawn to the broad, interdisciplinary curriculum offered and the opportunity to take on a social impact project. ST PHOTO: LIM YAOHUI

College offerings complement students' major studies

NUS College is termed an honours college, where high-achieving students can access a more rigorous education.

The broad-based, interdisciplinary curriculum, residential life programme and flagship Global Pathways Programme are aimed at complementing a student's major studies.

Although the students will belong to a home college, faculty or school in NUS, they will take part in a common curriculum and fulfil elective requirements at NUS College. They will live in the NUS College's residential colleges for at least two years.

This will give the students the opportunity to form a close-knit community with peers from as many as 50 majors across NUS,

working closely with and alongside the faculty members.

Under the Impact Experience Project, students will form interdisciplinary teams and work with non-profit partners to come up with solutions to problems faced by communities and society.

The Global Pathways Programme aims to crystallise the foundational learning of global perspectives and world issues by immersing students in an international programme located in five regions in the world.

It also includes a specially curated module involving seminars with guest professors, workshops with practitioners, masterclasses with experts and fireside chats with important personalities.

After the first few years, the college will have 100 faculty members and take in 500 students a year.

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