Diverse first cohort of 400 students for new NUS College

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

Sandra Davie
Senior Education Correspondent

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 were not notified by NUS College.

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 exception- alism 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 forgo $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 $8,409.

NUS College students will pay their home faculty tuition fees, which for a Singaporean arts and social sciences student this year is $8,409. 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 disappointment 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.

“While we didn’t say, unless you’ve got straight A’s, don’t bother applying,” he stressed. “Diversity is important, not just for creating opportunities for a wider range of people, but 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 Lorraine Lim, Jane Ho, and Hakeem Samsuri, 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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