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Yale-NUS College picks new president

Historian and former NMP plans to enhance major programmes, build culture of trust

Jose Hong and Lee Min Kok

Historian Tan Tai Yong has been named the new president of the Yale-NUS College, the college announced yesterday.

Prof Tan, 56, who is currently the college's executive vice-president for academic affairs, will assume office on July 1. He will take over from current president Pericles Lewis, who has helmed the liberal arts college – a collaboration between Yale University and the National University

of Singapore (NUS) – since its establishment in 2011.

Yale-NUS' governing board met here yesterday and unanimously elected Prof Tan following an "extensive global search" which took seven months, and considered 80 to 100 initial candidates.

In his current role, Prof Tan, a former nominated Member of Parliament, worked with Yale-NUS students, staff and faculty to improve the college's academic programmes and educational experience.

He holds a doctorate in history from the University of Cambridge

and taught at NUS before joining Yale-NUS in 2014. He was dean of NUS' Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences from 2004 to 2009 and vice-provost for student life from 2010 to 2014.

NUS president Tan Chorh Chuan, who helped lead the search for Yale-NUS' new president, said: "In Tan Tai Yong, I think we find somebody really experienced, with the knowledge, with the ability, but also with the deep passion, the deep commitment to this form of education."

Yale University president Peter Salovey said his institution and Yale-NUS plan to strengthen links. For instance, more Yale-NUS students will spend a semester at Yale in New Haven, Connecticut.

Currently, there are 24 slots per

year. Yale-NUS has a student body of more than 700.

Prof Tan said he plans to review all the college's major programmes to enhance, refine and possibly expand some of them.

Since taking in its first students in 2013, Yale-NUS has not been without controversy. Last year, the college rejected a student's call for Professor Chan Heng Chee to step down from the college's governing board after she spoke in defence of why Singapore maintains a law that criminalises sex between men.

Last month, it had to engage some students who were irked by a change in policy on the use of college space that they said occurred without their input.

With regard to college-student communication, Prof Tan acknowledged it was "an area... we want to improve", and said the university will broaden its existing channels while creating a more structured system to ensure effective dialogue.

"What we want to build is a culture of trust," he said. "Our students must believe that we have their welfare at heart."

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BUILDING TRUST

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PROF TAN TAI YONG, who will assume office on July 1.