

## NUS appoints new president, outgoing president to move to Health Ministry



The 23rd president of the National University of Singapore (NUS), Professor Tan Eng Chye (L), will be assisted by Prof Ho Teck Hua (R) as senior deputy president and provost. Prof Tan and Prof Ho were hostel mates back in their university days and dub themselves the "Tan-Ho partnership". Photo: NUS

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SINGAPORE — The National University of Singapore (NUS) has appointed its current provost, Professor Tan Eng Chye, 55, to succeed Professor Tan Chorh Chuan, 58, as the university's 23rd president.

Prof Tan Eng Chye, who will take over the reins in January next year, has served in various capacities in NUS for 32 years, most recently as provost and deputy president for academic affairs.

Since taking on these two positions in March 2007, Prof Tan — who is professionally trained as a mathematician — has championed the importance of a broad-based education through a revamp of the varsity's general education curriculum.

He also introduced a grade-free semester for freshmen, where they get to decide whether to include or exclude the grades from their modules in an overall score, so as not to affect academic performance.

At a media briefing on Friday (July 28), he said: "NUS has indeed transformed tremendously in the last 10 years or so... In the years ahead, we expect to further accelerate this transformation."

As president, Prof Tan will be assisted by Prof Ho Teck Hua, 56, as senior deputy president and provost. Prof Ho is NUS' deputy president for research and technology.

Prof Tan and Prof Ho — who were hostel mates back in their university days in NUS and who dub themselves the "Tan-Ho partnership" — plan to make learning in the university more inclusive and flexible, such as by introducing aptitude-based admission and opening up classes for Singaporean members of the public.

Under a pilot initiative starting next January, NUS will open up a basic programming course to prospective students, and those who do well will be "favourably considered" for admission into the School of Computing, Prof Tan said.

Interested applicants are not required to have any prior certification.

To facilitate flexible and lifelong learning, it also plans to allow future undergraduates to divide and complete their university studies in "two or more parts", so that they can spend a few years in between seeking work experiences and return to seek other qualifications, he said. Details for this are still being worked out.

"The world is changing very fast. Our graduates need to be very adaptive... (but even with these changes), learning has always been a constant factor," he added.

Prof Tan noted that more students have been opting for "gap years", where they put their studies on hold for other ventures, such as internships or starting their own businesses.

Adapting a song lyric from the Eagles' blockbuster hit, Hotel California, he said: "You can check out anytime you like, but you will never leave... That probably is the way we hope our university could be to all our students, that constant contact and engagement with them."

From next year, NUS also plans to offer 5,000 spaces across hundreds of modules per academic year to members of the public, to make the learning experience more "inclusive" for more Singaporeans.

This is an expansion of its recent initiative for alumni students to study two modules without charge over a three-year period, which has been "heavily oversubscribed", Prof Tan disclosed.

Its inaugural run, to be held in the upcoming semester this August, saw 8,000 applicants vying for 400 available seats. More than 100 modules were offered across various faculties, such as managerial accounting, advanced mathematics for engineers, foundations in pharmacy practice and software engineering.

In its effort to create value for the society at large, the university is also launching a "Smart Nation research building" at the end of this year, to facilitate "synergies" among students, educators, and start-ups, Prof Ho said.

The facility, which will be sited on campus at the former Institute of Materials Research and Engineering, will house a "Google-like makerspace", a co-working space which can be used by start-ups.

Congratulating Prof Tan and Prof Ho on their appointments, Education Minister Ong Ye Kung (Higher Education and Skills) called Prof Tan a "well-respected academic", a "passionate educator" who kickstarted a series of efforts to use technology to enhance classroom learning, and one of the "instrumental contributors to NUS' development as a world-class university".

"Specifically, he is the architect of NUS' current academic system, having seeded initiatives such as... (the) university scholars programme, and the grade-free year for freshmen," Mr Ong said on Facebook.

Prof Tan Chorh Chuan, who has been NUS President since 2008, will be taking on a senior position at the Ministry of Health at the end of this year.