NUS ex-president gets uni’s highest title

Tan Chorh Chuan appointed university professor, joining four other academics

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The National University of Singapore (NUS) has given Professor Tan Chorh Chuan — who served as its president for nearly a decade — the title of university professor.

The status is NUS’ highest academic appointment, and is given to senior faculty members who have made long-term contributions and are deeply committed to the university.

Since this month, Prof Tan Chorh Chuan has been the chief health scientist at the Ministry of Health (MOH) and executive director of its new Office for Healthcare Transformation, which looks at issues in healthcare outcomes and delivery.

Prof Tan Eng Chye, who succeeded Prof Tan Chorh Chuan as NUS president this month, read the citation yesterday at a lunch event at Shangri-La Hotel.

Under Prof Tan Chorh Chuan’s watch as NUS president, there has been much growth in new initiatives, from opening University Town (UTown) and Yale-NUS College to getting an entrepreneurial ecosystem up and running and embarking on research across borders, said Prof Tan Eng Chye.

The citation said Prof Tan Chorh Chuan has been instrumental in the progress of NUS, now recognised as a top institution in Asia and has adopted new models of learning.

The 56-year-old joins the ranks of four notable figures who hold the same university professor status — Prof Lim Pin, Prof Chong Chi Tat, Prof Wang Gungwu and Prof Shih Choon Fong.

In a speech yesterday, Minister for Education (Higher Education and Skills) Ong Ye Kung said Prof Tan Chorh Chuan is someone who “thinks deeply” and “always goes for the higher goals in life”.

The kidney specialist, who has been appointed NUS’ senior adviser, has had a long association with the university, graduating from it in 1983, joining its Department of Medicine as a lecturer in 1987 and becoming the youngest NUS dean at the age of 38 in 1997.

He served as NUS provost in 2004, before taking on the role of president at the end of 2008 until last year.

Before that, he was MOH’s director of medical services from 2000 to 2004, during which he led the public health response to the Sars crisis in Singapore.

He was awarded the Public Service Star award in 2003 for that, followed by the Public Administration Gold Medal in 2004 for his work at MOH.

At NUS, he played a key role in setting up the Duke-NUS Medical School, Singapore’s first US-style graduate-entry medical school, which opened in 2005.

In his speech yesterday, Prof Tan Eng Chye also shared future plans for NUS. The 56-year-old, who was its provost since 2007, has been actively involved in leading initiatives such as the UTown residential college programme. The NUS president will be assisted by Prof Ho Teck Hua, 56, as senior deputy president and provost.

NUS, over the next five years, will re-imagine teaching and learning for the future, said Prof Tan Eng Chye. For example, it will gradually integrate adult learners into more classes, up to 20 per cent for each class, as well as build new start-up nodes globally.

It will also aim to hire 200 new researchers for a start, and pursue top global talent in areas such as data analytics, artificial intelligence and fintech. Prof Ho, a world-renowned behavioural scientist, will work with these new hires to develop research areas such as health innovation.

About 300 guests including faculty, alumni and students attended the lunch event. They included President Halimah Yacob, Deputy Prime Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam, Emeritus Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong and Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat.

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