Yale-NUS College looking to recruit new deans

Three did not renew contracts and the fourth will stay until next June

Amelia Teng

Yale-NUS College is on the lookout for new leaders; all four of its deans have left or have announced plans to leave for institutions abroad.

Three of them did not renew their three-year contracts. Only Professor Charles Bailyn, the dean of faculty, whose contract initially ended last year, is staying – until around June next year.

He told The Straits Times that their departures have nothing to do with "any issues relating to academic freedom". Some of the deans had also said that, from the start, they had not intended to stay long term at the institution.

Yale-NUS College, a tie-up between the National University of Singapore and the American Ivy League institution Yale, took in its first batch of 155 students in 2013. This year, it had its third and largest intake of 190 students. It will reach an annual class size of 250 over the next few years.

It has 100 faculty members, 10 others on visiting or seconded appointments, and 140 staff.

Students said they were sad to see some of the deans go but they understood that they had different reasons for leaving.

Third-year student Jared Yeo, 24, said: "It's a bit sad but at the same time it's part of leadership renewal. It's good for someone to lay the foundations and for others to build on it."

Prof Bailyn will be going back to Yale as A. Bartlett Giamatti Professor of Astronomy and Physics. He has been involved in Yale-NUS' early years as part of the team which studied the feasibility of such an institution in 2009. He also led the recruitment of faculty and played a key role in the design of the college's curriculum.

He said he had been "so excited about the progress of the college" that he asked to stay beyond his first contract. However, he added: "By next academic year, my obligations to my students and research team in New Haven will become very strong, and so I am returning, having spent a significantly longer stint here in Singapore than I originally anticipated."

He noted that the deans' departures were not surprising.

"Everyone started at the same time. If contracts start at the same time, and are of the same length, the natural moment of departure is also similar," he said.

Yale-NUS College dean Anastasia Vrachnos told students in January that she wanted to be closer to her extended family and serve her alma mater.

At Yale-NUS, she led a team to provide academic, research and job opportunities for students. In April, she became vice-provost for international affairs and operations at Princeton University in the US.

"It's extremely difficult to give up one of the world's most exciting jobs, but with two young kids and a third on the way, our children are living far from extended family," she said.

Her role has been taken over by Dr Trisha Craig, the former executive director of Wheelock College, Singapore.

Meanwhile, former dean of students Kyle Farley, who had helped to set up Yale-NUS' residential college, left at the end of August. He is now the associate vice-chancellor and dean of students at New York University-Abu Dhabi.

Dean of admissions and financial aid Kristin Greene, who is reaching the end of her term this month, will be returning to the US.

A Yale-NUS College spokesman said it was "privileged to have us inaugural deans whose verve and vision have helped shape much of the college's curriculum and culture", adding: "Interest in Yale-NUS College remains strong and the search for the new deans is progressing well."

ateng@sph.com.sg