Yale-NUS should not be carbon copy of US college to succeed: PM Lee

The Prime Minister says that Asia is different from the United States and therefore Yale-NUS College "needs a curriculum and a college ethos that respond to this regional context".

By Hetty Mustfrah Abdul Kharrisid, Channel NewsAsia

SINGAPORE: In order to succeed, Yale-NUS College should not be the carbon copy of Yale in the United States, said Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, who was the guest-of-honour at the official opening of Singapore's first liberal arts college on Monday (Oct 12).

Mr Lee said that the rest of Singapore's tertiary system can benefit from the new institution's innovative pedagogy and learning approaches. At Yale-NUS, students study a broad range of subjects in their first two years, including natural and social sciences, humanities and the arts before choosing their majors. Students will be trained to think critically across disciplines, and build up their communication and leadership skills.

The new college is valuable to Singapore's educational eco-system as it offers a unique experience for students with its broad-based liberal arts education programme, Mr Lee said.

However, the Prime Minister also noted that Asia and the US are different.

He said: "Globalisation and technology are changing the way we live, presenting many countries with similar challenges - income inequality, wage stagnation, youth unemployment, ageing population, rapid economic, social and political change."
“But while the challenges are similar, the countries are not converging on a single universal social or political model that will best deal with these challenges under all circumstances.”

Mr Lee said that for graduates of the college to be effective in working in the region, they need to acquire skills that will enable them to help countries in Asia adapt to a rapidly changing world.

“Yale-NUS therefore needs a curriculum and a college ethos that respond to this regional context. Its graduates have to understand these countries, have a feel of how they work, what they need, how they can move forward,” said the Prime Minister.

About 500 students from about 40 countries are enrolled at Yale-NUS. The first batch will graduate in 2017.

Yale University President Peter Salovey and Founding President of the Yale-NUS College Pericles Lewis were also present at the official opening of the 64,000 square metre campus, which boasts facilities such as three residential colleges, 1,000 student rooms, seminar rooms, a library and an art studio.