COLLEGE NOW HAS 500 STUDENTS FROM 38 COUNTRIES

Yale-NUS must adapt US model to Asia to succeed, says PM Lee

Institution is relevant, valuable to its ‘hosts in Asia and to intellectual parents in the US’

SINGAPORE – In spite of its top global standing as a university, Yale will have to experiment and adapt its model to Asia for its “bold collaboration” with the National University of Singapore (NUS) to succeed, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said yesterday.

Yale-NUS College needs a curriculum and an ethos that responds to the regional context as it seeks to produce graduates with a good understanding of the region, “who can work in Asian countries and lead them forward”, he added. Mr Lee wrote on Facebook: “This is a learning journey for both NUS and Yale. Yale is one of the top universities in the world. But it has been operating in the United States, and will have to experiment and adapt its model to Asia.”

Earlier in the day, Mr Lee officiated the college’s campus inauguration ceremony. At the event, he noted that Yale-NUS’ broad-based liberal arts education programme, which draws on Yale’s intellectual traditions, adds something “different and valuable” to Singapore’s educational eco-system.

Nevertheless, in order to succeed, Yale-NUS cannot be a “carbon copy” of the American Ivy League institution. “We are building an institution here that is relevant and valuable both to its hosts in Asia and to intellectual parents in the US,” he said.

Mr Lee said that Yale-NUS’ graduates must understand countries in the region — not just theoretically and intellectually, but by actually experiencing living in Asia to have a feel of how the countries work, what they need and how they can move forward. “Then (the graduates) can be effective working in these countries, and helping them to change and adapt to a rapidly changing world,” said Mr Lee.

The Yale-NUS College’s 64,000 sq-m campus in Clementi includes three residential colleges, 1,000 student rooms, sky gardens, a library and a performance hall among other facilities.

Many countries are facing similar challenges, such as income inequality, ageing population and rapid social change. However, there is no single model for countries, each with its own constraints and possibilities, to deal with these issues. “Each country is different and has different situations — different natural endowments, historical experiences, geopolitical situations, social structures, cultures and values,” said Mr Lee. “None can stay static, but each will have to find its own way forward. Yale-NUS needs a curriculum and a college ethos that respond to this regional context.”

Founded in 2011, Yale-NUS took in its first batch of 155 students two years later. Enrolment has grown to 190 this year. In total, it has 500 students from 38 countries, and about 100 faculty members. Noting that the composition of its students reflects the college’s purpose, Mr Lee said he was glad that the college was “off to a good start”.

The college’s 64,000 sq-m campus in Clementi includes three residential colleges, 1,000 student rooms, sky gardens, a library and a performance hall among other facilities.

The first batch of Yale-NUS College students will graduate in 2017. Mr Lee said he was confident that the Singaporean graduates would go on to make valuable contributions to society. The international students who choose to sink their roots in Singapore would be welcomed, given their good understanding of the culture and environment, he said. As for those who choose to leave the country after graduation, they will remain part of “Singapore’s extended family”, Mr Lee said.

The inauguration ceremony was also attended by 300 guests, including Acting Minister for Education (Higher Education and Skills) Ong Ye Kung, Yale-NUS founding president Pericles Lewis, Yale president Peter Salovey and NUS president Tan Chorh Chuan.