PM Lee: Singapore’s first liberal arts college must adapt Yale model to Asia

He adds that Yale-NUS won’t succeed if it’s just a copy of Yale in the US

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SINGAPORE’S first liberal arts college, a tie-up between Yale University and National University of Singapore (NUS), must experiment and adapt the Yale model to Asia, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said at the college’s official launch on Monday.

“It will not succeed if Yale-NUS is a carbon copy of Yale in the US,” he said of the college, which offers Singapore students a broad-based liberal arts education drawing on Yale’s intellectual traditions.

Yale has been very successful in the US context, he said, adding: “If we can adapt it successfully to the Singapore context, we will have created another pathway for our students.”

The programme at Yale-NUS College imbues its students with a cosmopolitan outlook, while keeping their roots in Singapore, he said.

Its students read a broad range of subjects in the first two years before choosing their majors; they are trained to think critically across disciplines and build up communication and leadership skills.

Mr Lee said that the rest of the university system and students in Singapore would also benefit from Yale-NUS College’s innovative pedagogy and new learning approaches.

Students from other Asian countries and international students who want to understand Asia stand to gain as well.

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ethos that respond to the regional context; its graduates must understand these countries, have a feel of how they work, what they need and how they can move forward.

The college has already made a good start, he said. “You have more than 500 students from nearly 40 countries from all continents, except Antarctica.”

The majority of the students are from Asia – more than half are from Singapore – but there is also a good number from countries such as Ghana and Trinidad and Tobago.

“This diversity of cultures and backgrounds adds to the richness of the student experience,” Mr Lee said.

The standard of the students at Yale-NUS College is very high. Among them is Isabelle Li, a top table tennis player and Public Service Commission scholar.

“This shows that Yale-NUS is as attractive as its peers in the world,” Mr Lee said.