Liberal arts education: Lessons from Singapore

The first dean of faculty at Yale-NUS College, the first liberal arts college here, reflects on what is striking about Singapore: its ‘growth mindset’ and a culture of respect for respect.

Charles Bailyn
For The Straits Times

What do we mean by liberal arts education in Singapore? It means having a student-centered pedagogy that focuses on the development of critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills. The curriculum is designed to be interdisciplinary, allowing students to explore a wide range of disciplines and perspectives.

1. **Spirited Curriculum**
   - Courses are designed to be challenging and engaging, with a focus on critical thinking and problem-solving.
   - The curriculum is designed to be flexible and adaptable, allowing students to explore a wide range of interests.

2. **Respectful Community**
   - The community is built on a foundation of respect and inclusivity, with a focus on diversity and equity.
   - Students are encouraged to ask questions, challenge ideas, and engage in respectful dialogue.

3. **Practical Education**
   - The curriculum includes hands-on learning experiences, such as internships, research projects, and community service.
   - The focus is on practical skills and real-world applications.

4. **Global Perspective**
   - The curriculum includes courses on global issues and cross-cultural perspectives.
   - Students are encouraged to explore and engage with the world beyond Singapore.

5. **Personalized Learning**
   - The curriculum includes personalized learning plans, with students working closely with faculty advisors.
   - The focus is on individualized learning and growth.

6. **Community Engagement**
   - The curriculum includes opportunities for students to engage with the community, both in and outside of Singapore.
   - The focus is on service learning and community impact.

7. **Innovation and Entrepreneurship**
   - The curriculum includes courses and opportunities for students to explore entrepreneurship and innovation.
   - The focus is on creative problem-solving and innovation.

8. **Mentorship and Support**
   - The curriculum includes opportunities for students to work closely with faculty and mentors.
   - The focus is on personalized support and guidance.

9. **Global Mobility**
   - The curriculum includes opportunities for students to study abroad and participate in exchange programs.
   - The focus is on global mobility and cross-cultural understanding.

10. **Sustainable Development**
    - The curriculum includes courses and opportunities for students to explore sustainability and environmental issues.
    - The focus is on sustainable practices and social responsibility.

In conclusion, liberal arts education in Singapore is a unique and valuable experience that prepares students for success in a rapidly changing world. It is an opportunity to explore one’s curiosity, develop critical thinking skills, and become a responsible and engaged member of society.