NTU campus poised for major makeover

Exciting changes afoot in campus masterplan, and interactivity will be key

BY JANE NG

THE Nanyang Technological University (NTU) campus will be remade in 15 years into a veritable lifestyle hub with accents on informal learning spaces and more interactivity among its users.

It will have, for example, covered walkways and cycling lanes for electric bicycles, outdoor classrooms and lookout points, along with new-age tutorial rooms and a mini Holland Village-style student centre with restaurants, pubs and cinemas.

The academic buildings on the Boon Lay campus will be connected to the hostels through a new campus centre.

Five thousand more hostel places will be added to the 9,200 available now, and a light-rail system could thread through the campus in 10 years.

This masterplan, NTU's fourth and most ambitious since 1953, was outlined for reporters yesterday by NTU president Su Guanying and president-designate Bertil Andersson.

Dr Su said: “It not only addresses the physical needs of NTU, but also acknowledges our need to adapt to changing pedagogical requirements and to develop facilities that can sustain new forms of teaching and research.”

With interdisciplinary research one of NTU's areas of focus, new schools in cross-field graduate studies, and in earth and environmental sciences, will be set up.

From this year, a third of its 3,000 PhD students will take the interdisciplinary route. They will be accommodated in a building by 2014, one designed in such a way as to encourage research collaboration across various disciplines.

Professor Andersson, likening the building to a hotel, said throwing researchers of different disciplines together will encourage them to launch collaborations.

"Many projects today need competence from disciplines like physics, engineering and medicine, but they are located in different buildings. If you have a 'hotel' where these researchers stay on the same floor, same corridor, they can work together and when the project is over, go back to their school again."

A new learning hub with 70 new-age classrooms, to be shared by all schools, will be ready in two years and will be designed to promote group discussions.

Interactivity will be key.

Whiteboards will be replaced by giant interactive screens.

Outside the classrooms, more informal learning spaces will be created for students to study and discuss projects any time of the day or night.

A new campus student centre "with an atmosphere like Holland Village" will also be created in the heart of the campus.

Prof Andersson, who lives on campus himself, said: "A university must be interactive. We must create meeting places where the humanities girl can meet the engineering boy, where the professor can meet students, where the art professor can meet the engineering professor. That's what being in university is about - interaction between brains."

NTU, which now has 33,000 students and 3,000 faculty and researchers from over 70 countries, will in 2013 open the Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine on the Boon Lay campus to complement the one in Novena.

There, virtual learning, clinical simulations and interdisciplinary collaborations will be a way of life. First-year medical students will be expected to stay on campus for cross-disciplinary courses in business, management and technology.

The campus will eventually be a living laboratory for NTU's research.

For instance, the hydrogen electric bus and electric bicycle developed by its researchers could be tested as an alternative form of transportation within campus. Also, the new ponds on the campus will collect rainwater for the irrigation of its greenery.

Prof Andersson, who will take over as president in July, said:

"NTU has taken a quantum leap in recent years. In the coming 10 years, it will be a very exciting place for students to study and play. We're going to make NTU a tourist attraction - almost."