New tack for NTU freshmen

Students will now spend at least 30% of their time on subjects other than their major

By KELLY TAY

FRESHMEN at the Nanyang Technological University (NTU) can look forward to a more flexible and varied undergraduate educational experience, following a major curriculum makeover. This means that students will now spend at least 30 per cent of their time on subjects other than their major.

The changes that were announced yesterday are the result of recommendations from NTU's Blue Ribbon Commission on Undergraduate Education, which was convened in 2007 to review all aspects of undergraduate education at the university.

Freshmen matriculating in this 2011-2012 academic year will thus be the first to get more flexibility when planning their undergraduate coursework, with the ability to pursue a variety of courses beyond their core discipline of study.

This is made possible by NTU's new 70-30 curriculum guide, where up to 70 per cent of the curriculum consists of the student's core discipline, while a minimum of 30 per cent is made up of subjects from other disciplines.

Bertil Andersson, NTU president-designate and provost, said that the changes were spurred by "philosophical and pedagogical" questions of what the ideal NTU graduate of the 21st century should look like. "The working world of the future will require T-shaped professionals with in-depth knowledge of one discipline and a broad knowledge base in adjacent areas," he said.

Er Meng Hwa, senior associate provost in charge of undergraduate study, also stressed that the revamp extends beyond curriculum changes.

With employers increasingly looking for graduates with overseas experience, the university plans to raise the number of students embarking on overseas opportunities from 50 per cent to 70 per cent per cohort.

As for classroom dynamics, NTU plans to not only reduce class sizes, but to also entirely reconfigure the way its tutorial and seminar rooms are laid out.

In contrast to traditional classroom settings with rows of front-facing seats, NTU's "classrooms of tomorrow" will feature group-friendly set-ups to enhance discussion and peer-to-peer learning.

In tandem with the university's push to move "from Gutenberg to Gates", Prof Andersson also said, the new classrooms will be fitted with e-learning tools such as giant interactive screens.