New NTU programme to woo S’pore’s best students

By REICO WONG

The Nanyang Technological University (NTU) has launched a specially tailored programme to attract top-tier Singaporean students to pursue their tertiary education locally.

Called the University Scholars Programme (USP), it is aimed at equipping high-potential students with a diverse set of multidisciplinary skills and knowledge, in order for them to become future leaders and innovators in their chosen fields.

The programme, open only to the top 50 students entering NTU’s four colleges, will focus strongly on cultivating critical thinking and the articulation of independent thought to help them better realise their full potential, said NTU.

USP students will be required to maintain a “very high-level” grade point average to stay in the programme.

They will have a guaranteed opportunity to study overseas for a semester at prestigious partner universities such as Imperial College London and the University of California, Berkeley. A travel grant of up to $5,000 will also be provided.

They will enjoy student accommodation at NTU throughout their course of study and, upon graduation, will receive an additional certificate on top of their degree.

The first intake of USP students will be admitted in the new academic year, which begins end-July.

Professor Kam Chan Hin, the associate provost for undergraduate education at NTU, said: “Our target is the very top students who are looking at going overseas to study... We want to get them to stay back, save some money and get as good an education here – if not better.”

He expressed confidence in the quality of education offered in Singapore, saying that top scholars from all over the world are drawn to pursue their studies here.

NTU’s USP is not just offered to Singaporeans but is also open to all undergraduates applying for entry into the university, based on their individual merits.

“The whole remit of education is that you interact with people around the world. It would be our local students’ loss if we are only Singaporeans among Singaporeans,” said Prof Freddy Boey, the provost of NTU.

“But, clearly, this programme will benefit mostly Singaporeans.”

NTU’s USP programme follows in the footsteps of a similar one with the same name, rolled out by the National University of Singapore in 2000.

Both programmes offer the top students at their universities a range of exclusively designed courses in addition to the modules under their selected majors.

Students in the programmes also benefit from smaller class sizes for the USP modules, and closer collaboration with professors and other experts brought in to help with the classes.

In the case of NTU, its USP students will have to take five core courses, including a writing and reasoning course.

They will also be required to take five electives spanning topics such as Social Sciences; Arts, Humanities and Culture; Science and Engineering; and Inter-disciplinary Studies, which includes modules such as Innovation, Enterprise and Leadership.

Entry to NTU’s USP is by invitation only, unlike the NUS programme, which has an open application practice.

Prof Alan Chan, dean of NTU’s School of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences, said the university did not set up its own USP to compete with or copy that of NUS, but to offer the best to the university’s students.

“Going forward, we would like to see cooperation and collaboration between the two scholars’ programmes, and that would really bring benefit to the next generation,” said Prof Chan, who is also an adviser to the NTU’s USP.

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