New NTU programme to groom future leaders

BY LIN ZHAOWEI

FROM this year, the academically brightest of each freshman cohort at Nanyang Technological University (NTU) will be invited to join a special programme that will stretch them even further.

The University Scholars Programme, which will take its first students this August, aims to attract and groom future leaders and innovators.

Participating students will take at least 10 specially designed modules across various disciplines, in addition to those in their major subjects.

These modules will include medical humanities, quantitative reasoning and evolutionary psychology.

The students will be mentored by top NTU professors during the course of their studies.

They will also be given a one-off travel grant of up to $5,000 each, and study for a semester overseas at partner institutes such as Imperial College London, the Georgia Institute of Technology and the University of Toronto.

And they will be guaranteed accommodation at NTU’s dormitories throughout their four years of study.

Speaking to reporters at a press conference yesterday, NTU deputy president and provost Freddy Boey said the programme will be one of the most prestigious for undergraduates at the university.

"NTU needs to produce the future generation of leaders and high achievers equipped with multi-disciplinary knowledge, skills and qualities. This is what is needed for the workplace in the 21st century... This programme will stretch the students well beyond that of a regular undergraduate programme."

The University Scholars Programme will take in just 50 students this year, although the intake may increase in the future. Students will need to meet minimum grade-point average requirements to remain in the programme.

In recent years, NTU has started two other specialised programmes – the research-oriented CN Yang Scholars programme for science and engineering undergraduates, and the dual-degree Renaissance Engineering Programme.

The new scholars programme, however, is open to undergraduates from all schools and departments in NTU, with the likely exception of the upcoming Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine.

The National University of Singapore (NUS) has a similar scholars programme for undergraduates, which started in 2001.

Professor Alan Chan, dean of NTU’s School of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences, said the scholars programme was set up not to compete with NUS, but to offer the best for the university’s students.

"Going forward, we would like to see cooperation, collaboration between the two scholars programmes,” said Prof Chan, who is an adviser to the NTU scholars programme.

In terms of the timing, Prof Boey said NTU’s recent success in attracting top researchers and the establishment of the School of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences have made the setting up of the scholars programme – with its emphasis on inter-disciplinary learning – possible.

Unlike NUS’ programme, entry to NTU’s scholars programme will be by invitation instead of open application.

"We will look at the academic profile of all potential scholars and invite those we think will benefit from the programme to join it," said NTU’s associate provost of undergraduate education Kam Chan Hin, adding that there will be an interview for candidates as well.

"We’re really looking at the best of the best, because we are putting in a lot of extra resources and giving great opportunities to this group."

Prof Kam said the university hopes that as the programme becomes more established, more top Singaporean students will consider going to NTU to pursue their undergraduate studies instead of going overseas.