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NTU student Ahmad Farid Jumari in front of Tanjong Hall, where he is also the council president, and in his room at the residence. ST PHOTO: LAU FOOK KONG

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Convenience, camaraderie are strong pulls, causing NTU residential hall demand to spike

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A stay in one of the 21 halls of residence at Nanyang Technological University (NTU) brings a myriad of benefits, ranging from convenience to freedom, students tell The Straits Times.

"The proximity to class was the main reason I chose to live in a hall," said final-year mechanical engineering student Nathaniel Lee, who lives in the east and saw his commute to class drop from 90 minutes to 10 minutes since moving into an NTU hostel in 2014.

"You also have more freedom and don't need to account to anyone," Mr Lee, 23, added. "I like the community living here and have made some good friends during my stay."

Professor Kwok Kian Woon, NTU's associate provost for student life, said these experiences form "part of NTU's holistic education for undergraduates".

Prof Kwok was speaking to ST after a recent change in hall policy.

In the past, all freshmen were guaranteed a one-year stay but had to earn credits by joining activities to retain their rooms through a competitive entry-point

MULTIPLE BENEFITS

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PROFESSOR KWOK KIAN WOON, NTU's associate provost for student life.



system.

Freshmen, beginning from the 2017/18 academic year starting in July, will be exempted from the entry-point system and guaranteed a two-year stay on campus, NTU announced last Thursday.

Said Prof Kwok: "Living in a hall of residence, students learn to be independent, forge friendships and interact with students from other sociocultural backgrounds."

Academically, students stand to benefit from living on campus as newer buildings, such as Banyan Hall, are designed with "innovation garages" to encourage students of different disciplines to interact and come up with entrepreneurship ideas.

Prof Kwok added that students with promising ideas could potentially be mentored by NTU professors and even win seed money to develop their projects.

But these advantages have caused demand for rooms to spike. NTU's halls can now house around 12,380 students.

Come August, three new halls will open in Nanyang Crescent, with accommodation for 1,820 more students. This expansion is expected to cater to more than 90 per cent of demand for hall spaces.

The previous competition for hall spaces did not deter some seniors who felt the opportunities to forge new friendships on campus were too good to pass up.

Third-year accounting and business student Koh Jit Woon said: "You get to socialise more and try new activities with your hall mates."

Mr Koh, 23, who has been living on campus since his first year, added that he has taken up different commitments, like cheerleading, while living on campus.

The guaranteed two-year stay has raised the possibility that the halls may lose their culture as freshmen no longer have an incentive to join activities and bond with other residents.

But student Ahmad Farid Jumari, who is president of Tanjong Hall, is unperturbed. "There will always be a core group of seniors who have stayed for more than two years who will keep the culture alive (in every hall)," said the 24-year-old. "Residents here form a closely knit community. You can rarely experience this life unless you live in a hall."

He added that bonding activities such as "supper hops", where hall residents go for a late-night snack at eateries together, are organised at least once a month.

Even the campus cats have been playing a part in persuading students to live in the halls.

Ms Namita Kumar, 19, who has been living in NTU Hall 3 since last August, said: "The cats make hall life more fun and vibrant."