Students hope for wider range of modules as NTU draws more top researchers and faculty

By KENNETH CHENG

SINGAPORE — Drawing more top researchers and faculty members to Nanyang Technological University (NTU) could raise its international standing and attract more funding and resources, said students and staff in response to the university's five-year plan unveiled on Monday (Aug 27).

Students also hope the plan will translate to a wider range of modules on offer.
NTU will, from this year, support 350 new two-year post-doctoral positions in an effort to woo highly sought-after researchers. About 300 faculty members will also be recruited, and up to 100 new named professorships created in the next five years, said its president Subra Suresh.

Last year, NTU had 1,726 faculty members excluding adjunct faculty.

Ms Tan Jing Wen, 22, a third-year humanities undergraduate majoring in Chinese, said the number of modules on offer presently is "quite few". She hopes a larger academic team will mean more interesting modules for students.

Mr Elgin Chong, 23, a second-year communication studies student, said it can be difficult landing a place in certain modules due to limited spots available.

"If they can take this opportunity to open up more classes, then it gives us more options... throughout NTU because we've to take modules outside our faculty," said Mr Chong, who has an interest in philosophy and psychology.

NTU academics also welcomed the plans.

Political scientist Woo Jun Jie, from NTU's School of Social Sciences, said the move to attract more post-doctoral researchers, giving them time and resources to develop their research agendas before moving into teaching, builds on the university's strength in research.

Assistant Professor Woo welcomed having more colleagues to discuss ideas and conduct research with, and hopes to see social and natural scientists doing more interdisciplinary research on issues such as climate change, and new technologies and industries.

"Given that our university is diversifying the courses it offers, there's a need for a more diverse pool of faculty with different expertise who can teach more courses," he said.
Asst Prof Woo, who is with NTU’s Public Policy and Global Affairs programme, said Prof Suresh – who took over as NTU president from Professor Bertil Andersson in January – has so far shown himself to be an engaging leader who takes a "very personal approach" in engaging students, researchers and faculty members.

"That’s something... very unique for a university president... (and) that’s very good for staff morale," he said.

Asst Prof Woo is also a recipient of the new Community Research Fellowship introduced by Prof Suresh, which incentivises faculty members to carry out research that benefits the local community and neighbourhoods. "I’m very thankful that he’s taken this very community-centred approach," he said.

Associate Professor Tan Ying Ying, from NTU’s Division of Linguistics and Multilingual Studies, said the move to attract more faculty members and researchers was "absolutely exciting" amid budget and hiring freezes at universities around the world.

"For any university to be able to work, one of the most important things is to be able to attract good professors," she said. "With that, you bring in good students, (which) ups the reputation of the university. Everything goes in a cycle."

Assoc Prof Tan said that the importance Prof Suresh has placed on the issue of female faculty and leadership — as borne out in his speeches — was "inspiring" as women make up the minority in academia and leadership positions.

Meanwhile, business and accounting undergraduates look forward to the new 40,000sqm academic building — Asia’s largest wooden building when completed in 2021 — which will house the Nanyang Business School and the activities of several other colleges and schools.

First-year business and accounting undergraduate Dickson Ng, 21, looks forward to using the new facility's smart classrooms, which will be equipped with the latest technology.

Bioengineering student Eugene Wong, 24, said the new building will also benefit students from other schools, as there is a general lack of space for students wishing to study for exams on campus.

He welcomed the provision of more study spaces for students preparing for their exams.