NTU rolls out new core curriculum for freshmen

Interdisciplinary skills will be focus in effort to prepare students for changing workforce

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Professor Sin Ming Teh, the director of new academic series at the new academic year in August will take up a new core curriculum that spans a variety of subjects. They will also need to complete more internships to graduate.

These are among the initiatives that NTU laid out yesterday – as part of its plans for the next five years – to better prepare students for a changing workforce.

The core curriculum, which emphasizes interdisciplinary skills, comprises seven modules covering topics such as digital literacy, communication and inquiry, ethics and global challenges.

The aim is to help students make connections between disciplines and prepare them for a world where complex challenges need solutions from diverse fields.

The revamped curriculum starts this August – except those entering first-year students.

Students will take courses in the first two years, make up a full of the overall academic workload.

Higher learning institutions have been making a greater push for students to see connections across disciplines.

The National University of Singapore will roll out new first-year modules into its new College of Humanities and Sciences, marking a shift from the traditional way of learning in separate disciplines.

Speaking to The Straits Times, NTU president Subra Suresh said that with the overhaul of the core curriculum, undergraduates will take classes alongside peers from other disciplines and listen to a wider range of faculty members.

Students could, for example, take courses in computer science and statistics, which would naturally be offered in different departments.

But he would also need to understand other aspects of technology, such as the ethics of computing, and acquire cross-disciplinary skills.

"As a student, you will see a professor from mathematics, who will talk about data privacy, or you will see a professor from economics talk about the business world, or somebody who does microbiology," he said.

"So it’s these kinds of multidisciplinary courses that we want to foster at the undergraduate level."

"The university degree that we need to offer must be relevant to the changing times."

"There cannot be the same kind that the generations that came before them, ended up their portfolios and securing work stints in the hope of beefing up their resumes from August, as well as higher degree programmes.

"The increasing focus on interdisciplinary courses also extends to staff," said Prof Suresh.

"NTU, which currently has some 4,450 faculty members, will in the next five years create just one professorship for each existing and new staff.

"The impact (of) how we look at promotion, how we award (faculty), how we acknowledge their achievements," Prof Suresh said, noting that NTU has adopted broader evaluation mechanisms in recent years.

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"I think the main benefit is that the freedom to move around in a much broader space," he said. "And they'll find many, many better teachers."

"In the past, I may not get the opportunity to meet a computer science professor and a professor from the business school or somebody who does... So it’s these kinds of serendipitous encounters we want to foster at the undergraduate level."

"I do consider other job opportunities."

"I'm also being exposed to different industries and learning at a much faster pace."

"It's very common to take up more than one internship, because you will lose out if you don't," she said.

"I come from a junior college and I had to work very hard. Occasionally, it changes your examples of your strengths."}

Mc Fong, 24, accepted a management trainee position with Novis, and started working full-time later this year.

"I really enjoy the company culture," he said. "The internship is a no-brainer for my future, because the learning and experience will help me to be my best."