

New interdisciplinary engineering and science school at NTU

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The Nanyang Technological University (NTU) is setting up a new School of Chemistry, Chemical Engineering and Biotechnology and is slated to start taking in students in August next year.

The new interdisciplinary school is a joint initiative of the engineering and science colleges and formed by merging the chemistry and biological chemistry division in the School of Physical and Mathematical Sciences and School of Chemical and Biomedical Engineering.

The move will affect about 1,800 current students.

It is part of the NTU 2025 strategic plan, which seeks to create more collaboration among different disciplines, NTU said in a statement yesterday.

The new school will aim to encourage interaction between students and staff in the pure sciences and engineering, said College of Engineering dean Louis Phee. Merging the schools, he added, will help engineering students understand the fundamental science behind their work better, and allow science students to gain a better understanding of the applications of their studies.

The academic approach will come in handy when students enter industry, where these fields of knowledge often overlap, Professor Phee told The Straits Times.

Students will be grouped together for projects, and may share key modules, but will still continue to graduate with separate science and engineering degrees, he said.

This is the first school merger announced at NTU. There has been a recent shift towards interdisciplinary

learning at Singapore's two oldest universities, resulting in several mergers within the National University of Singapore (NUS).

In October, NUS said it would merge Yale-NUS College with the University Scholars Programme – garnering a strong reaction from staff, students and alumni.

NUS also said it would combine the Faculty of Engineering with the School of Design and Environment to form the College of Design and Engineering.

Last year, it announced a merger between the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and the Faculty of Science to form the College of Humanities and Sciences.

Yesterday, Professor Ling San, NTU deputy president and provost said: "The new school will be a cross-college school which is strongly aligned with NTU's goal to develop interdisciplinary curricula for undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes, as well as for continuing education and training."

When asked if he expected any issues, Prof Phee said there may be teething problems as this is the first time lecturers from both sides would be working together.

He added that he and his colleagues have been working to engage students and alumni, and will take any feedback seriously.

Prof Phee said the move to join the engineering and science disciplines in the field of chemistry into a single school has a precedent at successful institutions like the California Institute of Technology. He said: "Our chemistry and engineering programmes are well ranked internationally, and I think this new school will continue to do well."

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