

NTU plans to boost intake for its flagship AI scholar programme

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By academic year 2027, the Nanyang Technological University (NTU) aims to take in 60 students per cohort for a scholar programme on artificial intelligence (AI) that is named after wartime codebreaker and British computing pioneer Alan Turing.

The Turing AI Scholars Programme kicked off in 2024 with a first batch of 34 students. It now has another 47 in its second intake.

A four-year direct honours scholars track, the programme is offered to undergraduates pursuing Computer Science, Data Science and AI, and AI and Society at NTU's College of Computing and Data Science.

Students who are chosen will be put on a specialised curriculum combining advanced AI coursework and research projects. Other features include masterclasses, one-to-one mentorship, immersion trips and overseas exposure.

Professor Bo An, the programme's director and NTU's division head of AI, said it was created for students with a strong passion for advancing AI.

The programme is open to undergraduates with exceptional academic records and co-curricular achievements. Aside from leadership qualities, applicants should also show passion in AI development and have a strong foundation in mathematics.

For participants like Ms Yvonne Lim, 20, a second-year data science and AI student from the pioneer batch, getting to engage closely with global experts has been a key draw.

Over the course of their first year, Ms Lim and her fellow Turing AI programme participants attended weekly three-hour masterclasses at NTU by professors Michael Wooldrige and Peter Millican from the University of Oxford.

"We got to delve into the history of AI, and engage with foundational questions about AI's limits and what is the evaluation matrix for it to be considered intelligent," she said.

Now in their second year, they will also attend a masterclass by Professor Armando Solar-Lezama from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Mr Mohamed Farsat Ansari, 21, a first-year computer science student in the second cohort, said the sessions conducted by Prof Millican gave him interesting insights about how AI was conceptualised.

"We learnt how Turing, a scientist from the past, even without the technology that we have, came up with an idea of what computers can do in the future. This was quite exciting to learn about," said Mr Farsat.

As part of the inaugural cohort, for her immersion trip, Ms Lim travelled to Beijing in May and learnt about the importance of strong mathematical foundations and long-term research planning, through programmes such as Tsinghua University's Yao Class and Peking University's Turing Class.

"We saw the quantum computing research labs, and spoke to brilliant Yao Class students from Tsinghua, and this really revealed the immense potential and cutting-edge work being done in the field," said Ms Lim.

Calling it eye-opening, she added that while the trip inspired her to continue pushing boundaries, the professors there made her aware of

vulnerabilities like adversarial attacks and the importance of building robust, secure and ethical AI models.

Said Ms Lim: "It was a powerful reminder that with great innovation comes a deep responsibility to anticipate and mitigate potential misuse of AI... It reinforced my belief that a successful career in AI requires not only technical skill but also a strong commitment to ethical principles."

Prof An said the programme's international immersion trips and masterclasses provide scholars with invaluable exposure to global AI research and industry practices.

"They get to learn from leading experts, experience cutting-edge technologies first-hand and engage with diverse perspectives. This broadens their understanding beyond the classroom, fosters cross-cultural collaboration, and equips them with the skills and mindset needed to lead in an increasingly interconnected AI landscape," he said.

Mr Farsat said that he applied for the scholarship because of the opportunities it offers.

"We are offered something truly unique that no other programme offers – world-class mentors, specialised modules taught by renowned faculty... and resources to pursue research we are passionate about," he said.

"For me, the most exciting part is the research journey. We are encouraged to think outside the box... and I hope to contribute AI-driven solutions to address real-world challenges in the future," he said.

The first batch of participants from the 2024 intake will begin their individual Undergraduate Research Experience on Campus component in the coming months, mentored by NTU professors.

Apart from undergraduate programmes, NTU is launching four new master's degree programmes in 2026 focused on AI in medicine, digital humanities, enterprise AI and Chinese medicine.

NTU's deputy president and provost Christian Wolfrum said that as AI becomes increasingly embedded in healthcare, business and society, it is vital to prepare professionals who can harness these tools responsibly and effectively.

"Beyond technical know-how, graduates must understand the ethical, cultural and clinical dimensions of AI so they can apply it in ways that truly benefit patients, enterprises and communities," said Prof Wolfrum.

Other local universities have also introduced more AI-related course offerings, ranging from degree programmes to integrating AI modules in existing courses.

Prof An said he hopes NTU's AI cohorts will advance Singapore's AI capabilities, by developing innovative solutions and supporting digital transformation across industries and government, in line with the Smart Nation's AI Strategy.

"They are also expected to lead AI adoption through start-ups and leadership roles," he said, adding that this will help position Singapore as a global AI leader with lasting impact.

"Nurturing undergraduates early in AI is key to building a strong pipeline of home-grown talent who can lead in an AI-driven future," he added.

"As AI becomes central to the digital economy, early exposure to research and leadership helps Singapore address the talent gap and stay competitive on the global stage."

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Ms Yvonne Lim (second row, far right) went on an immersion trip to Beijing in May with other students from the inaugural cohort of the Nanyang Technological University's Turing AI Scholars Programme. PHOTO: COURTESY OF YVONNE LIM