

'Not the job' of Yale-NUS College to tell students what to think

BY REICO WONG

IT IS not the role of Yale-NUS College to tell its students what to think, politically or otherwise, said the college's newly appointed president, Professor Pericles Lewis, yesterday.

Instead, the education institute's role is to encourage them to engage in more critical dialogue to help move Singapore's society forward, he added.

Speaking during a media conference to announce his appointment, Prof Lewis, 43, made clear that his key focus was to broaden the knowledge of students at the new liberal-arts school and for them be able to ask important questions in any field they join.

"It is not the college's job, or mine, to tell Singaporeans what direction to move their society...in," he said.

"(But) it is the job of an education institution to encourage dialogue that contributes to the development of society."

His comments come after controversy surrounding the tie-up between Yale University in the United States and the National University of Singapore (NUS) to establish a liberal-arts school here, whose fundamental principles are closely aligned with the notion of freedom.

NEW PRESIDENT LIKES CHILLI CRAB

THE newly appointed president of the Yale-NUS College, Professor Pericles Lewis, certainly has many things to check off on his to-do list during his term in Singapore.

And one of them is to not put on too much weight.

This is because his one big weakness is the food here, especially chilli crab, dim sum and a variety of Malay dishes.

"I love to eat whenever I'm in Singapore and I'll definitely keep eating a lot now that I'm staying here permanently," he told *my paper* with a laugh. "I'm really going to have to find time to exercise."

The 43-year-old has a doctorate in comparative literature from Stanford University.

Originally from Toronto, Canada, Prof Lewis will relocate from New Haven, Connecticut, in July, and will live on the NUS campus, together with students of the new liberal-arts college.

His wife, Shelia, 41, and two children, aged 10 and 12, will move



here to join him next year. The new college's facilities are expected to be ready next year.

Asked to describe himself in three words, Prof Lewis said he is "open-minded", "intellectual" and "friendly". He said he is highly supportive of "open discussions, the exchange of ideas, and conversations - things which I believe others expect from the heads of all colleges".

Last month, the US university's faculty reportedly voted 100 to 69 to pass a resolution expressing "concern regarding the history of lack of respect for civil and political rights in the state of Singapore".

It also called on the planned Yale-NUS College to uphold principles of "non-discrimination for all...civil liberty and political freedom on campus and in the broader society".

Asked if he was concerned about censorship or other restrictions when it comes to teaching, Prof Lewis said Yale had an agreement with NUS and the Ministry of Education that academic freedom at the new college would be strongly protected.

Prof Lewis added that he did not foresee any interference in the subject materials used for teaching.

"People are going to be able to pursue the research and teaching they want to do, the students are going to be able to discuss any issues they like, including Singapore politics."

He added that the college will offer political courses and other disciplines such as anthropology, philosophy and law.

Prof Lewis emphasised that he has always supported the collaboration between Yale and NUS.

He added that Singaporeans may have the impression that a lot of people at Yale are angry over the setting up of the college, but the debate highlighting different views is simply part of the academic environment of the university.

A total of 30 faculty members have been hired for the new college, and 50 students have been accepted so far.

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