

# Yale prof to head liberal arts college

## Literature professor picked after 10-month worldwide search

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SENIOR WRITER

A LEADING Yale academic was yesterday named as the first president of the Republic's new liberal arts college.

Professor Pericles Lewis was chosen to head the school – a collaboration between the American Ivy League institution and the National University of Singapore – following a worldwide search lasting 10 months.

After considering several eminent academics and university administrators, the partners decided to pick someone in-house.

The 43-year-old, who currently teaches in both the English and Comparative Literature departments at Yale, will take up his new position this July.

His appointment follows a turbulent few months for Yale-NUS.

Yesterday, Professor Lewis said Singapore was the “perfect place” to establish a liberal arts college, despite a resolution passed last month by some of his colleagues in the United States expressing concern over the move.

He added that the vigorous debate about academic freedom by faculty members in New Haven, Connecticut, may have left some Singaporeans with the impression that “a lot of people are angry over the setting up of the college”. However, he said that debate and controversy were part and parcel of the academic environment at Yale.

The professor referred to the clause that had been added to the final agreement signed last April assuring academic freedom on campus. He added that he had spoken to academics here, both local and foreign, and was satisfied that

staff were free to teach and research controversial issues.

Professor Lewis also said that dozens of faculty members at Yale have been involved in setting up the college and many of those not directly involved have also shown enthusiasm for the project.

Having said that, he added that there was a need for “continued communication”.

The college also announced that NUS Professor Lai Choy Heng will become its Executive Vice-President (Academic Affairs). A theoretical physicist, the 59-year-old has been vice-provost in charge of faculty career development at NUS since 2003.

Rounding up the new college's senior leadership team is Mrs Doris Sohmen-Pao, 40, who is already serving as Executive Vice-President for Administration.

Commenting on Professor Lewis' appointment, NUS president Tan Chorh Chuan said the search committee “had cast its net wide and considered many tal-



Professor Pericles Lewis, a graduate of McGill and Stanford universities, will take up his new position in July. ST PHOTO: DESMOND FOO

ented individuals”, including presidents of liberal arts colleges and senior administrators of leading research universities.

Yale president Richard Levin said that in the end it had recognised the value of picking a leader who has already played a role in shaping the college.

Prof Lewis has been involved with the project for two years, during which he demonstrated “superior analytic, organisational, and interpersonal skills, as well as remarkable thought leadership”.

A graduate of McGill and Stanford universities, he has made searching for more faculty members and staff, and drawing up a more detailed curriculum two of his immediate priorities.

He said that about 30 academics had been hired so far, of which about five were from Yale and five from NUS.

The professor added that about 50 students had taken up the offer of places at the college.

He said: “It is a privilege to have the opportunity to reimagine undergraduate education for the 21st century... that will bring the span of human knowledge together and draw on Asian, Western and other traditions.”

Prof Lai, who has a strong personal interest and expertise in Western classical music and Chinese classics, brings “highly complementary qualities to the Yale-NUS leadership team”, said Prof Tan.

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