

**SPEECH BY PROFESSOR TAN CHORH CHUAN, PRESIDENT, NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE, AT THE LAUNCH OF YALE-NUS COLLEGE, NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE, MONDAY, 11 APRIL 2011**

Prime Minister, Mr Lee Hsien Loong,

Dr Ng Eng Hen, Minister for Education and Second Minister for Defence

Your Excellency David Adelman, Ambassador, United States of America

Professor Richard C. Levin, President, Yale University

Chairman Mr Wong Ngit Liong, and members of the NUS Board of Trustees

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

“There is a tide in the affairs of men,  
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune.  
..... On such a full sea are we now afloat,  
And we must take the current when it serves”

These lines, though used in a different context by Shakespeare, capture for me the essence of the venture we are launching today. The National University of Singapore, Yale University and, if I may add, Singapore, are seizing a unique opportunity to make a significant contribution to global higher education, and to create a novel high-quality educational programme that will position our students well for the future.

The time is ripe for the introduction of liberal arts education in Singapore and Asia.

Our world is marked by increasing complexity, rapid change and much greater cross-cultural interaction. To flourish in such a world, university graduates must have a broader intellectual base, be able to think critically about complex issues, and be effective across cultures and disciplines.

Over the past decade, NUS has achieved substantial broadening of education across our university. Today, a quarter of the courses NUS undergraduates take, are in subjects outside their specific discipline. We have also created many academic pathways and innovative programmes such as the NUS Overseas Colleges, University Scholars Programme and global education programmes. Our goal is to provide a wide range of opportunities which our students can pursue based on their interests and capacity, and which will challenge each of them to be self-surpassing.

The Yale-NUS College will add an exciting new option for high-potential students who are interested in a very broad-based education - one that nurtures curiosity, thinking from first principles, reasoning, communication, and quantitative skills. The College will offer an intense, broad-based multi-disciplinary programme covering the natural and social sciences, mathematics and the humanities. Learning will be through small-group highly interactive classes, integrated with residential living and co-curricular activities that create a vibrant community and fosters leadership skills.

The novel “West-meets-East” educational approach that will be taken by the Yale-NUS College will also place us at the leading edge of the profound currents of change sweeping higher education in Asia, particularly China. In this regard, the Yale-NUS College is closely aligned to NUS’ vision and strategy to be a Leading Global University Centred in Asia. It will enable our students to benefit from a world-class programme which also incorporates the ideas and contexts of Asia. At the same time, this strategic partnership with Yale will also allow NUS to leapfrog ahead in an increasingly competitive higher education landscape.

We have been able to seize this favourable tide because of a striking alignment of factors in the constellation of decision-making. We are very fortunate in Singapore to have a far-sighted government which believes in innovating well ahead of the curve in order to create new value for our society. Our Minister for Education in particular has charted a powerful vision for our educational landscape, which NUS is happy to be able to contribute to.

In President Rick Levin and Yale, we have a truly remarkable leader and world-class partner. Today, Yale stands out as one of the very finest universities in the world, known internationally for the outstanding quality of its education and research. Yet it is driven by a continual desire to innovate and to forge new pathways which will help shape higher education for the future. It is this striking similarity in outlook, attitude and vision in both NUS and Yale, which underpins our partnership and drives our strong collective commitment to this highly strategic project.

Boldness to break new ground is also a prominent feature of the NUS Board of Trustees, ably led by Chairman Mr Wong Ngit Liong. They have encouraged my colleagues and me as we pursued un-trodden paths and given us the benefit of their advice and full support.

There are many whom I must thank for their support and help in bringing the Yale-NUS College into reality. But in particular, I would like to thank Prime Minister Mr Lee Hsien Loong for his strong support and for agreeing to be the Guest-of-Honour for this event. We know that Prime Minister is particularly busy during this period, so we are truly grateful that he has kindly made the time to join us today.

I would also like to thank Minister for Education Dr Ng Eng Hen for gracing this occasion with his presence, and for his guidance and strong support.

Many NUS and Yale colleagues have worked incredibly hard on this project. I am very grateful indeed to all of them. I particularly want to acknowledge the two pillars around which all the work spun – NUS Vice President Lily Kong and Yale Vice President Linda Lorimer. I consulted my thesaurus but could not find the superlative of superlatives that aptly describes the leadership, dedication and attention to detail that the two of them provided, and which were absolutely pivotal to the outcome we are celebrating today. Thus, lost for words, I can only say “Many thanks indeed!”

I also want to say how grateful I am to NUS Deputy President Joe Mullinix who has provided such great leadership for the design and planning of the physical facilities for the College, a model of which we will be unveiling later.

Finally, as we launch the Yale-NUS College today, to “take the current when it serves” I would like to end by reflecting on my personal aspirations and dreams for the College. I believe the College can really make a strong contribution to enhancing the talent pool so critical for Singapore, and help Singapore further its reputation as a major centre for higher education globally. I hope the College’s unique approach will serve as a catalyst and model for new thinking and innovation in liberal arts education in Asia and globally.

But above all, I hope and do believe that the graduates from the Yale-NUS College will make a strong positive impact on the advancement of society, and become the leaders we will need in different fields of endeavour in a future of unprecedented opportunities and daunting complex challenges.

Thank you.