

Official Opening of University Town
Opening Remarks by NUS President, Professor Tan Chorh Chuan
17th October 2013

Prime Minister, Mr Lee Hsien Loong

Pro-Chancellors

NUS Chairman and Trustees

Excellencies

Distinguished guests, students, colleagues, alumni, and friends

A very warm welcome, and thank you very much for joining us for this special occasion. The official opening of University Town today marks the achievement of a major milestone.

The most obvious aspects of University Town (U Town) are clearly the attractive physical facilities and spaces. These are well designed, nicely appointed and much appreciated by our students, faculty, staff and alumni.

However, what is less visible but even more important is the deep and positive impact that UTown is having on our NUS community and the way it functions and grows.

In some ways, UTown has become the campus core that had previously been missing in our otherwise lovely Kent Ridge Campus.

Every week, some 10,000 students from across NUS attend classes and lectures at UTown. But many students tell me that they come here because they just love the place, for its openness, the sense of lively activity, and a buzz which is hard to define. I am also always happy to hear from students who have taken up sports, dancing or music because there are conducive facilities to support these activities.

UTown has proven to be a wonderful venue for signature NUS events such as Rag and Flag and the Supernova Rock Concert. The way the buildings are laid out around the spacious Town Green helps to create a vibrant, exciting setting which attracts strong and lively student participation. As Winston Churchill aptly put it: “We shape our buildings, and afterwards our buildings shape us”.

All these come together to make the campus experience even more memorable and interesting for our students. The inviting spaces at UTown promote interaction amongst students from across very different disciplines, raising the intellectual liveliness of on-campus encounters, sparking new ideas and novel collaborations.

The bustle and energy so evident at UTown is anchored by a thriving NUS sub-community of some 4,000 students living in the Residential Colleges and UTown Residence. Our Residential Colleges in particular have evolved into exciting communities that promote intellectual curiosity and strong peer-to-peer learning that benefits from the rich diversity designed into the composition of the Colleges’ resident population.

In addition, the Residential Colleges, like our Halls of Residence, provide a myriad of opportunities for students to initiate projects and pursue new interests, that will help them develop the resourcefulness, resilience and inter-personal skills so vital for their future success.

At UTown's groundbreaking ceremony in January 2008, Prime Minister had urged us in his speech, to ensure that UTown does not become "an ivory tower, but an active community integrated into our society, and connected to the world." I am pleased to report that the NUS community has taken this to heart and worked actively to respond to this call with energy and imagination.

All of UTown's core learning pathways, whether it be the University Scholars Programme or the Residential Colleges, involve a strong global orientation as well as a close focus on the issues of community engagement and active citizenry. These provide important opportunities for students to develop social awareness, and a nuanced appreciation of the complexities of cultures and community. Students are also encouraged to be bold and to pursue ideas and initiatives that could help benefit society.

A good example is the Chua Thian Poh Community Leadership Programme. Funded by a generous gift of \$5 million from Mr Chua, this innovative leadership-training programme combines relevant coursework with real-world projects. Through it, our students discover how connectedness to the wider society can test and shape their ideas and understanding, and raise their interest in engaging the community.

In summary, UTown and its programmes have gotten off to the best possible start.

Going ahead, we will develop more programmes and take active steps to enable students who are not staying at UTown to enjoy the full benefit of its amenities and activities. We will also continue to raise financial aid to ensure that financially needy Singaporean students can fully access our residential programmes. In this academic year to date, generous gifts from donors and internal NUS support provided more than 250 scholarships and bursaries for students to stay in the UTown Residential Colleges, and a further 200 bursaries for students in our Halls of Residence.

A successful building and academic programme of this scale and complexity can only be achieved through the leadership and hard work of many, who have fully committed to developing and realising the vision of UTown and its transformative potential for NUS.

I would like to express our deep appreciation to Prime Minister Lee for gracing this occasion with his presence, and for his strong support and encouragement. We are indebted to the NUS Board of Trustees for its guidance and the Ministry of Education for its unstinting support.

Special mention must be made of the leadership shown by Provost, Professor Tan Eng Chye, Deputy President for Administration, Mr Joseph P Mullinix, Vice Provost for Student Life, Professor Tan Tai Yong and Vice President for Campus Infrastructure, Professor Yong Kwet Yew. I am very grateful to our Rectors and Masters, who have done a remarkable job in shaping the Residential College programmes. I also acknowledge the able leadership of Professor Pericles Lewis, President of the Yale-NUS College, which has just started its inaugural term in temporary facilities at UTown.

NUS is also deeply grateful for the strong support of our donors and well-wishers, especially our Founding Benefactors who have given so generously in support of our students and our shared vision.

The success of UTown will add great impetus to NUS' drive to distinguish ourselves as a leading university in Asia and globally. UTown and its programmes are enabling our students to have a richer, more multi-dimensional intellectual and personal development. At the same time, many of the successful initiatives pioneered in UTown will be adapted and rolled out in other parts of our campus.

Ultimately, the best measure of success for these and all our other efforts in NUS education, would be if our students emerge from our university as leaders and contributors of tomorrow, who will positively influence the future in Singapore, Asia and beyond. Thank you.