

Yale-NUS should offer more than just an Ivy League moniker

I AM perplexed as to why Yale-NUS College, which is described by Mr Bryan Chow as a trendsetter (“Making Yale-NUS education even more relevant”; Nov 13), is not offering subjects that do not already exist in Singapore’s higher education landscape, and appears to offer little more than an iconic Ivy League brand name.

Let me recount the experiences of my niece, who is studying sociology and finance at the Singapore Management University’s School of Social Sciences.

She had to take a set of modules common to all freshmen at the School of Social Sciences, to get a grounding in different social science disciplines, and another set of core modules that all students across the university are required to take.

This “common curriculum” approach appears to be one that Yale-NUS is adopting (“Common Yale-NUS subjects for 1st 2 years”; Nov 10).

My niece has gone on two overseas study missions – one related to rural development in China and another related to the media industry in New York – where she applied what she had learnt in the classroom to the real world.

This removes students from an ivory tower and shows the links between academia and the larger context, as Mr Chow advocates.

She has gone on two internships – one with a local non-governmental organisation and another with a local corporation – to help prepare her for “future careers”.

My niece has served as an assistant to faculty members on various research projects. Students are also apparently allowed to take any permutation of double majors offered at the university, with few restrictions. Both empower students to develop their own areas of interest.

It is heartening to know that my niece has made the right choice for her tertiary education, seeing how Yale-NUS is emulating the liberal-arts style of education offered by her school.

But I urge Yale-NUS to bring something new to the table. Imitation may be the best form of flattery, but it does little to bring Singapore’s higher education landscape to the next level.

Sandra Lam (Madam)