

By PEARL LEE

NANYANG Technological University (NTU) is spending \$70 million over the next four years to convert up to half of its courses to an interactive online format, giving students the option of learning more flexibly.

Instead of physically attending a two-hour long lecture each week, for instance, students can watch lecture videos, each no longer than 30 minutes, at their own time and place. The online lessons will include quizzes and assignments.

NTU's deputy president and provost, Professor Freddy Boey, revealed plans for more interactive formats yesterday at the Higher Education Planning in Asia Forum at the Singapore Management University (SMU).

In a speech, he said it was not easy for professors to make the conversion, given their existing teaching and research duties.

To ease their workload, NTU has put together a team with the technical know-how to help the

professors do the conversion.

"If a professor says, 'I'd like to convert my course into interactive online,' this team will say, 'Can I please help you?'" said Prof Boey.

Both NTU and the National University of Singapore (NUS) offer students online courses via the popular massive open online course platform Coursera.

Last year, NTU allowed students to earn three credits each for some online courses - the equivalent of an elective module

in its undergraduate programme.

SMU adopts a "blended learning" approach where classroom instruction is combined with online curricula.

This means a student may take a quiz online before going into class for discussions.

The changing way of educating students was a topic both SMU president Arnoud De Meyer and NUS provost and deputy president Tan Eng Chye spoke about at the two-day forum held by the Hong Kong University of Science

NTU converting half of courses to online format

\$70m project will give students more flexibility, says varsity

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TECH SUPPORT

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— NTU's deputy president and provost, Professor Freddy Boey, on the team that will be set up to help convert courses



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and Technology.

Prof Tan said universities need to think about how technology can be used to help students learn better, but it is a challenge trying to shift the mindsets of faculty members and students

"Even though students are very tech-savvy, it takes a while to get them accustomed... to being freed from lectures and (to) access materials online and make their learning more effective," he said.

Similarly, SMU's Prof De Meyer said now that students have all the information at their fingertips, he has had the experience of being corrected when teaching in class. Some students, for instance, pointed out that some of his information is outdated.

This shows that the role of educators has changed from being a source of knowledge and wisdom to a facilitator of students' thoughts.

"We have to help them structure their thinking and knowledge," he said.

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