

NTU students to set up society on gender and sexuality issues

SINGAPORE – An official student organisation looking to tackle discrimination against sexual minorities — a first among varsities here — will be established at the Nanyang Technological University (NTU).

NTU Kaleidoscope, which plans to organise dialogues, panel discussions and film screenings on gender and sexuality issues, has received in-principle approval to register as a student society after its constitution — adhering to the university's guidelines and code of conduct for student bodies — is drawn up. Recruitment of members can begin only after it has been officially set up.

Last month, during a co-curricular activity fair on campus, the group drew attention after it pinned up a rainbow flag — a common symbol of gay and lesbian community pride — at its booth, but NTU Kaleidoscope's Public Relations Officer Lim Jialiing stressed that the society just wants to get people talking about gender and sexuality issues "in a neutral and frank manner".

Society President Dhanashree V Shelgaonkar added that there are "events here and there to try to get people talking, but it's not enough".

In an Our Singapore Conversation survey released last month, researchers from the Institute of Policy Studies found that 47 per cent of 4,000 Singaporeans polled did not accept gay lifestyles. Among the younger and more educated respondents, however, 29 per cent of polytechnic and university graduates were not accepting.

NTU Kaleidoscope told TODAY that more than 100 students have already expressed interest in joining the society. The other local universities do not have similar official student bodies, according to checks.

But a National University of Singapore spokesperson said it "advocates a culture of respect for individuals, regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion, nationality, political or sexual orientation".

The Singapore Management University said everyone at its campus, regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity, "deserves the right to learn and work in a safe environment, without fear or prejudice". **XUE JIANYUE**

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