

PILOT PROGRAMME TO START FROM JANUARY

NSmen to get academic head start at NUS

Students can take up to two modules before matriculation to earn advance credits

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SINGAPORE – The obligation to serve National Service means males who are eligible for university studies fall two years behind their female peers in their education and career track.

This disadvantage will be eased somewhat come January, with the National University of Singapore (NUS) launching a programme which will allow male students to take selected courses and earn academic credits in advance before they are matriculated.

This pilot programme, which will offer eight modules from four faculties, is to give these male students more time to adapt to the academic environment, said NUS Provost and Deputy President (Academic Affairs) Tan Eng Chye. Some 2,600 NSmen who will be matriculating in August will be eligible, said NUS. Each module costs S\$746.

“By allowing (these incoming students) to take selected courses and earn advance academic credits, we hope to give them a head start in university education as they are about two years behind their female peers while committing their time to serve National Service,” said Professor Tan.

“Students usually pay fees at the start of their academic year ... they’re not officially our students but we allow them to access our modules.”

Classes for these modules will run from January to June, comprising online learning and then lessons on campus between April and June. The online components include 10- to 12-minute lecture videos, discussions, homework, self-practice exercises and pop quizzes.

Lessons on campus, which will last for up to two hours and will be held weekly or fortnightly, will include interactive discussions, as well as laboratory-based work, tutorials and teaching assistant-guided activities. Those who sign up will also need to sit for a test at the end of the course.

Prof Tan said the lessons on campus are needed because online learning “is still not perfect” as it “cannot replicate the campus experience, neither can it replace face-to-face interactions with the course instructor or with classmates”.

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“That’s the reason why in the later three months we will have very intensive discussion sessions. But the benefit is that the students would have learnt a lot of the materials, and they would have some sufficient level of foundational knowledge,” he added.

Asked why the NUS was introducing this programme, he said students had found that three-month bridging semesters — offered previously to help students waiting to be matriculated get up to speed in their courses — were carried out in a “rushed” manner.

Mr Lim Xiao Feng, 20, who will be matriculated at the NUS Faculty of Science next year, said he will consider signing up for the pilot programme. “But it depends on the details of the modules being offered; if these are just introductory modules, then I feel paying over S\$700 for a module is too steep.”

At the Singapore Management University, since Academic Year 2006/07, full-time National Servicemen here have been able to take courses during the summer term before matriculation which allow them to earn academic credits.

Apart from these courses for incoming students, the NUS will be offering another two General Education modules to current undergraduates. These are Reason and Persuasion, and Towards an Understanding of the Complex World, for the Arts and Social Sciences and Engineering faculties, respectively.

Returning students can earn advance academic credits for these modules:

- Arts and Social Sciences: Communications, New Media and Society
- Engineering: Chemical Engineering Principles;

Emerging Technologies in Electrical Engineering; Statics and Mechanics of Materials

- Science: Introductory Mathematics; Physics 1E; General Biology Computing; Programming Methodology