

Yale-NUS College gets its first president

Pericles Lewis is a top British/European literature scholar

By **LEE U-WEN**

A LEADING British and European literature scholar has been named as the inaugural president of Singapore's first liberal arts college.

Pericles Lewis, a Yale University professor of English and comparative literature, will be president of the Yale-National University of Singapore (NUS) College from July 1 this year.

The 43-year-old was chosen after a global search that yielded "dozens of outstanding candidates", said visiting Yale University president Richard Levin yesterday.

But in the end, Prof Lewis – a Canadian-American who was involved extensively in planning the new college's curriculum – was the search committee's "unanimous" choice, said Prof Levin at a press conference held at NUS' University Town.

"We interviewed a number who were sitting presidents of liberal arts colleges as well as others who were senior administrators of leading research universities," said Prof Levin.

"Pericles was a unanimous choice. He's an intellectual leader, and has played an active role in shaping this institution," he added. "He was the obvious and superior candidate. A fine scholar, very articulate and with a real passion for what we are trying to accomplish here."

In his remarks, Prof



Towards a cosmopolitan education: (from left) Yale University president Richard Levin, Yale-NUS executive vice-president (academic affairs) Lai Choy Heng, Yale-NUS College president Pericles Lewis, Yale-NUS executive-vice-president (administration) Doris Sohm-en-Pao and NUS president Tan Chorh Chuan

Lewis – a Yale faculty member since 1998 – outlined his vision for the new college, which he said would provide a "cosmopolitan education in which students explore not only their own cultural backgrounds, but also the great contributions of cultures from around the world".

The Yale-NUS College is due to open in August 2013 and the plan is to have a first intake of 150 students.

"Through its curriculum, programmes and community, the Yale-NUS College will contribute to a

deeper understanding between Singapore and the United States, and more broadly between Asia and the West, in a century when such understanding is going to be crucial to all forms of progress," said Prof Lewis.

During the press conference, he also addressed concerns following an incident in April where the faculty of Yale College, its undergraduate liberal arts body, voted 100-69 to endorse a resolution expressing concern about political and civil rights in Singapore.

While the body did not directly object to the Yale-NUS College, the resolution urged the institution to "respect, protect and further the principles of non-discrimination for all, including sexual minorities and migrant workers".

Said Prof Lewis: "From a Singaporean's point of view, looking at it from the other side of the world, it might seem as if there are lots of angry people, but I don't think that's the case. We have addressed their concerns and we have dozens of Yale faculty who have been involved in help-

ing to plan Yale-NUS College, and dozens more who are willing to come and teach and be part of this project."

Meanwhile, it was also announced yesterday that NUS professor and physicist Lai Choy Heng, 59, would be the college's executive vice-president of academic affairs from July 1.

The college's other executive VP is Doris Sohm-en-Pao, a former director of human capital at Bain & Company. The 40-year-old is in charge of administration and all non-academic issues.