

BY AMELIA TENG

» New Yale-NUS campus

YOUNG men and women at Yale-NUS College can soon live in suites together, in a move announced last week to give students more choice in flatmates.

All of the college's 332 undergraduates are now staying in single rooms in a residential college of the University Town campus at the National University of Singapore (NUS) until their new 63,000 sq m campus in Dover Road is ready.

Four or six of these rooms, and a common area including a toilet, make up a suite.

Currently, students in a suite have to be of the same gender, and male and female students

Shared living spaces for students of both sexes

stay on opposite ends of corridors.

But when students move into three residential colleges in their new campus in July, they can choose suitemates of the same or opposite gender. The latter option is described as "open housing" by the college.

Yale-NUS College, Singapore's first liberal arts col-

lege, is a tie-up between United States Ivy League institution Yale and NUS.

Other universities here, such as NUS and Nanyang Technological University, currently do not offer open housing.

Most of their students stay in single or double rooms, and young men and women live on separate floors.

But some US universities such as Harvard, Princeton and Stanford have adopted the practice, also known as "gender-neutral housing", to give students more choice in selecting roommates.

Yale University in New Haven first approved gender-neutral housing for older undergraduates in 2010.

At Yale-NUS College, fewer

than 5 per cent of students chose open housing during suite selection for the new school year on Saturday.

The option was introduced as a pilot in response to "student feedback for more diverse housing options", a college spokesman said.

More than half, or 58 per cent, of some 200 students surveyed by the college's student leaders this year said they support "gender-neutral housing" in the new campus.

Another 25 per cent of those polled did not support it, while the rest were indifferent.

Last week, one of the college's online student publications applauded the move, saying: "The very ethos of setting up a liberal arts college in Singapore was to challenge and redefine norms...At present, there are no gender-neutral suites in the whole undergraduate landscape of Singapore, and we are now the first to offer such an option."

Students said that the change in housing policy is in line with the college's goal of being inclusive and encouraging interaction between students.

Chris Tee, 23, who just finished his second year and will stay with three male friends, said: "In terms of embracing diversity, it's a step forward. It's part of moving away from strict gender binaries."

Said Meghna Basu, 20, who is in Mr Tee's batch and will stay with four other girls and a boy: "I have male friends with whom I know I could live more harmoniously than some female friends. My parents and I have enough trust in myself to know that I will use this living structure responsibly."

The change shows the college's "faith in our ability as young adults to make independent decisions", she added.

"Furthermore, it breaks down the idea that men and women are fundamentally different, and therefore need to live separately."

Said Grace Yeo, 51, whose 23-year-old son is at Yale-NUS College: "These are not teenagers, but young adults. I trust my son to make responsible choices. When students go overseas, they also share houses. They share a common dining and living room space, but they have their own rooms to go back to."

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