

# Male, female students in Yale-NUS can soon share suites

## Pilot option rolled out in response to call for more diverse housing choices

By **AMELIA TENG**

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 suitemates.

All of its 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 such rooms and a common area, including a toilet, form a suite. Students in a suite now have to be of the same gender and men and women stay on opposite sides of corridors.

When they move into three residential colleges in their new campus in July, they can choose suitemates of the same or opposite gender. The latter arrangement is called open housing.

Yale-NUS College, Singapore's first liberal arts college, is a tie-up between United States Ivy League institution Yale University and NUS.

Universities here such as NUS and Nanyang Technological University (NTU) do not offer open housing.

Most of their students staying on campus use single or double rooms, and young men and women live on separate floors, except in some residential colleges at NUS and in NTU halls.

Some US universities such as Harvard, Princeton and Stanford have adopted open housing, also known as gender-neutral housing, to give students more choices in

selecting roommates.

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

At Yale-NUS College last Saturday, fewer than 5 per cent of students chose open housing for the new school year.

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

More than half, or 58 per cent, of about 200 students surveyed by their student leaders this year said they support "gender-neutral housing" at the new campus.

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

One of the college's online student publications last week 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 appreciated the freedom to decide for themselves.

Ms Meghna Basu, 20, who has finished her second year and will stay with four other females and a male, said: "I have male friends with whom I know I can live more harmoniously than with some female friends. My parents and I have enough trust in me 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.

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

Mr Chris Tee, 23, who is in Ms Meghna's batch 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."

Mrs Grace Yeo, 51, whose 23-year-old son is at Yale-NUS College, said: "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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