

Undergrads tough it out

Two from NUS share about their challenges as more than 10,000 prepare to graduate

Cheow Sue-Ann

More than 10,000 graduates will complete their studies at the National University of Singapore (NUS) this year – the institution’s 110th anniversary.

President Tony Tan Keng Yam, who is the chancellor of the university, will preside over NUS’ main commencement ceremony at its Kent Ridge campus today.

A total of 23 commencement ceremonies will be held at the University Cultural Centre until July 14. Among this year’s graduates are Mr Jeremy Lim and Mr David Hoe, who have overcome daunting

personal difficulties to attain academic success.

Mr Lim, 25, was born with brittle bone disease and uses a wheelchair. He requires assistance to move about, but this did not stop him from attending classes.

Mr Hoe, 27, entered the Normal Technical stream in Beatty Secondary School and, at the time, felt education was not important.

Mr Lim, an avid fan of Japanese animation, pursued a degree in Japanese studies.

His teacher Izumi Walker said: “Jeremy is very motivated and bright. His happy nature is felt in every class he attends.”

From planning his classes in ac-

cessible locations close to each other to shaping opportunities for him to participate, the faculty paid attention to Mr Lim’s needs.

Mr Lim said: “While they made physical exceptions for me, I always appreciate that they never made academic ones...”

He added: My condition was never an excuse.”

Mr Lim is graduating with a Bachelor of Arts degree, with second-class upper honours.

He said he plans to study the Japanese language before becoming a translator or maybe work in a field related to Japanese media and pop culture.

For Mr Hoe, it all started with a dare. In his first year at secondary school, he met a group of seniors, and they challenged him to pay attention in class.

“As a proud boy, if people dare

me, of course, I will say ‘bring it on’,” he said.

He started working hard and became good at mathematics. Soon, he was approached by classmates and friends for help, and those mentoring sessions motivated him to become a teacher.

But Mr Hoe found out that to be a teacher, he needed O-level qualifications. He wrote to then Education Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam and explained his situation. His e-mail included a request to sit the O-level examinations.

Mr Tharman responded and, today, Mr Hoe is a Ministry of Education scholarship holder, running mentorship programmes for children. He will graduate with a Bachelor of Social Sciences with honours in economics.

sueannc@sph.com.sg