

Only the brave enrolled in business school

Unlike the popularity it enjoys today, the National University of Singapore (NUS) Business School had difficulty attracting students when it first started in 1965.

Until then, business administration was just a subject in the economics department of the University of Singapore, NUS' predecessor.

It was so tough attracting students that its first leader, the late Dr Andrew Zecha, had to personally persuade undergraduates to sign up. Eventually, 21 students did, and they were dubbed the "21 brave souls" in the school's commemorative book, *First To Market*.

Among them was Mr Peter Seah, then an undergraduate in the university's arts programme.

The 68-year-old, now the chairman of DBS Group Holdings and DBS Bank, said: "Those of us who signed up were people with a sense of adventure, people who had the courage to try something different."

The small cohort size also meant the everyone knew each other well, said Mr Seah. "Besides studies, we had a lot of socials and we interact-



Professor Bernard Yeung (left), the current dean of NUS Business School, with Dr Lee Soo Ann, 76, who served as the business school's head from 1979 to 1985. Every head of the school has had an Asian connection. ST PHOTO: YEO KAI WEN

ed a lot with our professors and lecturers. We were close knit."

Dr Lee Soo Ann, 76, who started out as an economics lecturer in the university in the 1960s and rose to head the accountancy and business school in 1979, said: "Every head brought in to lead the school had an

Asian connection. We actively looked out for them because business is about people and how you connect with them." It was thus important for the teaching to be grounded in the Asian context.

This is something that has remained till now, even though much

of the business school has changed.

The school merged with Singapore Polytechnic's accountancy programme in 1969. In 1987, the accountancy programme moved to Nanyang Technological Institute, the predecessor of Nanyang Technological University.

Today, students from the business school regularly participate in international case competitions. It has also built up strong postgraduate and executive programmes, boasting partnerships with universities such as Stanford and Hautes Etudes Commerciales.

Professor Bernard Yeung, 61, who became the dean seven years ago, said the NUS Business School today has "the intellectual content, is relevant, innovative, and has a community that works together".

He added that it emphasises and advocates Asian content, which gives it the competitive edge.

"We have matured to the point that we can call the shots on what a leading business school is."

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