

# NUS freshmen get grade-free year to explore

BY SANDRA DAVIE

**F**OR the last two years, the National University of Singapore (NUS) has allowed its freshmen a grade-free semester to help them transition into degree studies – a scheme which has proven very popular.

Now, it wants to take it further, by allowing a virtually grade-free first year.

Currently, the university allows its students to write off their less-than-stellar grades in up to five modules in their first semester.

From this August, first-year students can write off grades for up to eight modules – just two short of the 10 modules they take.

Under the scheme, all students, even if they have an A, may choose to include or exclude the grade in their final grade point average. But those with a D+ and below, who want it crossed out, must retake the module or take another.

The scheme applies to nearly all NUS faculties and schools, including arts and social sciences, business, computing, engineering and science.

The law and medical faculties already have a grade-free system for freshmen.

NUS provost Tan Eng Chye said the scheme has proven to be a hit with its first-year students.

Around 87 per cent took up the option to drop their grade for at least one module. A small proportion, around 5 per cent, did so for five modules.

He said the aim was to reduce academic stress and encourage students to explore subjects outside their specialisation, including areas they are less confident in.

But those who do well will

still be rewarded as they can keep their grades.

Prof Tan reported that students have become more adventurous in their choice of modules, venturing beyond their “academic comfort zones”. Nearly a third of the modules read by first-year students last year were non-core types, outside of their immediate field of study.

In the previous year, the figure was about a quarter.

“This is a positive development. Students are increasingly making good use of the opportunities of being in a comprehensive university, to broaden their perspectives and horizons by reading modules beyond their degree discipline.”

Highlighting the Education Ministry’s push to reduce the over-emphasis on grades, he hopes that the further extension of the scheme will create even more time, space and opportunities to pursue “adventurous and deep learning, and to move away from the over-emphasis on grades”.

“In the same spirit, the freshman year is an opportune time to immerse oneself in the social and academic culture of university life, to uncover, discover and pursue one’s intellectual curiosities and passions.”

English Literature student Samantha Nah, 19, said she would not have taken a course in Chinese linguistics if not for the grade-free semester scheme.

“I wanted to take up the course as it would allow me to compare Chinese linguistics to English linguistics.

“But my Chinese is not that strong and I didn’t think I would do well in it. So if not for the fact that I could write off the grade, I would not have taken up the course.”

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