

PREMIUM

NUS expands overseas colleges programme to Toronto, Shenzhen



In Shenzhen for the NUS Overseas Colleges programme are students (front row, from left) Chen Kai Yue; Fatim Mohrini Ahmad Mohri; Rohini Subramanian; Helen Tan Meng Zhen; and (back row from left) Aaron Ramzeen and Lim Heng Guang; and programme manager Loh Weiren. PHOTO: NUS OVERSEAS COLLEGES PROGRAMME

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A National University of Singapore (NUS) programme to nurture entrepreneurs in different nodes of the world has now expanded to Toronto and Shenzhen.

The Canadian city is an artificial intelligence (AI) powerhouse, while Shenzhen is shaping up as China's version of Silicon Valley.

Since 2002, NUS has set up 10 overseas colleges, including in Silicon Valley, New York, Stockholm, Israel, Jakarta, Beijing, Shanghai, Lausanne in Switzerland and Munich in Germany. Students take up courses in partner universities and work in start-ups.

Professor Wong Poh Kam, who heads the [NUS Entrepreneurship Centre](#), said the university currently has about 300 students who head to different overseas colleges across the world yearly.

The professor in entrepreneurship and innovation strategy at NUS Business School added that the university has set up these colleges to expose its students to different kinds of industries and technologies. For example, for students heading to Munich, the aim is that they will gain engineering knowledge by working in "deep tech" start-ups based on scientific discoveries and technological innovations.

Toronto is making waves in AI, driven by the MaRS Discovery District, a 1.5 million sq ft facility that houses hundreds of start-ups across a variety of industries.

It includes Uber's first non-US facility for researching autonomous cars; Borealis AI, an academic AI research institute for the Royal Bank of Canada; and Element AI, an AI start-up incubator.

Shenzhen, said Prof Wong, was once known as the place for "copycat products". Now, though, the Chinese city has emerged as a world-class cluster for innovation.

It is at the heart of China's Silicon Delta and home to tech giants such as Huawei, ZTE and Tencent. Even Apple, the American technology giant, is building a research and development centre in Shenzhen.



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Prof Wong added that it is dubbed as the "maker's dream city" as it has almost everything that one could possibly need for hardware innovation readily available, which allows for quick prototyping and rapid iteration.

As such, Shenzhen has attracted many top tech multinational corporations, start-ups, programmers and engineers, as well as investment money.

At a steady state, about 25 to 30 NUS students will head to Toronto every year, while another 20 will head to Shenzhen.

Since 2002, more than 2,400 NUS students have benefited from an entrepreneurial education through NUS Overseas Colleges.

NUS civil engineering student Fatim Mohrini Ahmad Mohri, who headed to Shenzhen last week, said "it is the place to be" for would-be entrepreneurs.

The 21-year-old, who learnt Mandarin by watching television serials, also hopes to improve her Mandarin while she is there.

"Being in China, especially since I am not that proficient in the language, will be challenging, but

it will also be a very good opportunity for me to learn to thrive in a different environment and out of my comfort zone," she said.

The third-year undergraduate will be interning at Ankeao, which provides visual marketing services to international clients.

Her role will be multi-faceted, from the coordination and production of marketing materials to client management.

Prof Wong noted that the alumni of the NUS Overseas Colleges have created more than 350 companies. He hoped that those who are sent to the various nodes of the world will return with deep technological capabilities and new ideas to translate them into commercial solutions.

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