UNIVERSITY TOWN
Speech by Professor Tan Eng Chye
NUS Deputy President (Academic Affairs) and Provost
at the State of the University of Address 2010
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Introduction
Distinguished Guests,
Friends and Colleagues,

I am honoured and grateful that you have taken time to be with us today. You have heard President Tan Chorh Chuan’s challenge for us to spur our students to take off and soar; to read the water and “to boldly go where no one has gone before”. My friends, these are exciting times for come August next year, NUS will take a giant leap forward when the University Town springs to life. UTown is by far, one of the most ambitious efforts of its kind by NUS. It is our response to the challenges set ahead of us. It is to distinguish us through excellence in learning and student engagement, well into the future. And it is ready.

The Building of UTown and its Physical Infrastructure
Over the past few months, you would have witnessed its physical growth, in particular, the completion of the Link Bridge that now conjoins Kent Ridge campus to UTown. The Link Bridge will not only facilitate physical movement between the two parts of NUS, but should be seen as a symbol of integration of the UTown and Kent Ridge into one larger campus.
Here, I should emphasise that UTown is NOT built only for its residents. It is for ALL NUS. Students residing in the Residential Colleges or RCs will continue reading most of their modules in their respective Faculties and Schools.

The Educational Resource Centre, with its prime location at the centre of UTown, would have lecture theatres, seminar rooms, e-learning cafes and numerous clusters of study spaces.

Further, the Edusports Complex, which will be ready in 2013, will house more educational and sporting facilities such as a swimming pool, gym, competition hall, training hall and a fitness centre as well as facilities for the arts and culture.
The ERC and Edusports Complex will be the pulse of activities at UTown. This would mean expanded state-of-the-art teaching, sports and performing arts facilities for all of NUS.

Classes will be scheduled to allow many of our non-resident students to avail themselves of these facilities as well as F&B and retail outlets at UTown. At steady state, we can expect to see at least 10,000 students from Kent Ridge reading their modules in UTown each week.

We are therefore off to a good start. However, for UTown to make that qualitative difference to the educational experiences of our students, we need to put in place two sets of critical success factors: people and programmes.

**People**

The RCs are designed as learning communities where students live and learn together, in an intellectually, socially and culturally vibrant environment - one that will promote open exchange of ideas, creativity and multi-disciplinary engagement.
The Master and Fellows of the College will play a critical part in creating and sustaining the kinds of environment and programmes to achieve these objectives. In addition, we have appointed Professor Wang Gungwu and Professor Tommy Koh as Rectors of our first two RCs.

They will be working alongside the Masters, John Richardson and Gregory Clancey, to facilitate programmes, provide direction, raise the international profile and shape the academic tone of the Colleges.
The mission of the RCs is to seek promising students from NUS, and to educate them through mental discipline and social experience, to develop their intellectual, civic and creative capacities. To this aim, the Masters will put in place a rigorous method of selection to identify students with the right qualities for their Colleges. We will also ensure a good mix of freshmen and senior undergraduates, from across all Faculties. There will also be a healthy balance of international students. All these will hopefully foster an environment that is diverse and multi-perspectival.

**Programmes**

UTown is to be a trail-blazing initiative. For the first time in Singapore, a model of teaching and learning that is integrated into residences will be offered to our undergraduates.

![Residential Learning](image)

A carefully thought-out curriculum, emphasising communication skills, interactive peer group learning and interdisciplinary engagement will be introduced for residents.

Each class will have no more than 15 students, enabling intimate and in-depth discussions. The RC curriculum complements the regular curriculum in their Faculties and Schools, and will be rolled out over a two-year residency period. It will help nurture intellectual and life skills, while enabling students to develop a deep understanding of global issues with Asian and local perspectives.
Through the curriculum and pedagogy in the RC, we seek to “creatively disrupt” some of the old learning habits that our students may have developed in their pre-tertiary education; to “un-Connie-the-Condor” them.

They will realise that rote learning will no longer be sufficient, that they need to constantly question their teachers and their readings, learn to frame their own lines of queries and present their points of view and ideas convincingly.
Needless to say, much of the learning that takes place in the RCs will go beyond the classrooms.

Each College will undertake its own activities and events to provide a high degree of social and intellectual stimulation, and opportunities for effective interchange between the academic community, the students, and - crucially - the wider community beyond campus.

Apart from our pilot runs of the Freshmen Seminar modules and writing modules, our first two Colleges have also started pilot programmes at the Prince George’s Park Residences. I am heartened to hear that the students participating in these programmes have enthusiastically immersed themselves in proto-types of College-activities.

For example, the USP students have organised their week according to activities – “Macro Mondays” for talks by visitors, “Community Tuesdays” for student-led seminars, and “Fun Fridays” for sports.

Here are some pictures of students from our second College, temporarily named Tembusu, in reference to the trees in proximity to the College.
Tembusu College currently has about 50 highly motivated pioneer students who are being groomed to be leaders for the College when it opens in August next year.

The enthusiasm of the students and their eager participation in these early activities augur well for the future of the Colleges.

We confidently expect that in the new college setting not only ideas but friendships will grow and flourish.

**Conclusion**

President Tan Chorh Chuan has said that UTown represents one of NUS’ key strategic thrusts, to make a large qualitative enhancement to the educational experience that we offer to our students. Yes, UTown is not about new facilities or additional campus space; it is not even about a new type of campus residential experience, it is a fresh and exciting approach to undergraduate teaching and learning, based on a model that is distinctively, NUS.
By providing for residential learning that is global in orientation yet rooted in Asia, UTown will offer a platform for our students to develop into sophisticated thinkers and effective leaders, capable of negotiating an increasingly complex world.

Colleagues and Friends, we have “read the water”: the time has come for us to move to residential learning, “to be where others are not going to be”. To get this right, we need your strongest help and support.

Thank you.