NTU launches complexity science programme for researchers

SINGAPORE — Researchers at the Nanyang Technological University (NTU) will soon have opportunities to undertake complexity science research, which may, for instance, help alleviate traffic congestion or create genetically "tailored" medicine.

The NTU yesterday officially launched a complexity science programme that was set up in August last year.

The programme, which comes directly under the NTU president's office, will provide funding for its researchers to conduct cross-faculty research.

It aims to increase the depth of inter-disciplinary collaboration and to establish Singapore as an Asian hub in complexity science research.

Complexity science refers to the scientific study of systems such as cities, ecosystems, biosystems and the human brain.

NTU president Bertil Andersson said the university has "worked steadily since the late 2008" to establish such a programme that "eventually should transform (the NTU) into a complexity institute".

Possible research areas are urban, climate and energy studies. The programme consists of workshops, seminars and collaborations with other institutes and complexity scientists, including Santa Fe Institute's Brian Arthur, who is a visiting professor at the NTU, and Nobel Laureate Sydney Brenner.

Programme director Jan Vasbinder said the programme marks Singapore as a first mover in the field.

"All the major problems in the world that we deal with, whether it's urbanisation or climate or hunger or energy, have their bases in complex systems. And unless we understand those complex systems a lot better than we do, we will not be able to address those problems," he said.

You be the judge on CNA debates

SINGAPORE — Instead of judges, the audience will decide the winner of Channel NewsAsia's (CNA) latest debate programme, Bridging Asia — The Singapore Debates.

And they will do it all online, a first for the programme's producers.

The audience will come armed with their smartphones and iPads, receive a briefing from the moderator on how the online system works, and from the word "go", cast their votes and views for the motion being debated.

Those at home, too, can vote as the debate goes on.

"The ability to pose questions 'live', the ability to vote on these questions and whether you want these questions to be answered — it is a very revolutionary concept; it gives power to the audience," said audience member Shawn Khoo from Hwa Chong Institution.

"I have never done a debate like this before and it is actually quite novel, quite interesting, and what I like is the way it takes polls at different points," said debate participant Vikram Nair, who is MP for Sembawang GRC.

Another debate participant, Professor Simon Chesterman, who is dean at the National University of Singapore's Faculty of Law, added: "When people have the time to reflect ... and (are) not so nervous, you get very thoughtful questions online."

The programme's producers said the format to involve the audience from the outset has worked well.

CNA is exploring more ways to incorporate such interactive elements as part of television programmes so as to involve Singaporeans directly.

Bridging Asia will air every Tuesday, starting today, at 8pm. S RAMESH

ACUPUNCTURIST PRESCRIBED PILLS CONTAINING CONTROLLED SUBSTANCE

A registered acupuncturist has been suspended for three years by the Traditional Chinese Medicine Practitioners Board, which has also censured him and fined him S$10,000.

Tan Kang Hok, of Poh Kong Medical Hall on Depot Road, also has to pay for all costs and expenses of or incidental to the inquiry.

Tan further needs to provide a written undertaking to the board that he will not prescribe, dispense and/or give any form of medicine to his patients in the future.

Tan was found guilty of prescribing some orange-red pills to a patient who, as a result, developed Stevens-Johnson Syndrome.

The pills were tested by the Health Sciences Authority and were found to contain Piroxicam, a controlled substance under the Poisons Act.

Tan was also found guilty of dispensing "Xiao Yan Wan" to another patient when he should not have done so, and for not keeping proper and accurate records of the treatment he administered to the patient.

Tan had been given a warning in 2007 but the board found that he had not heeded it and continued to prescribe and dispense medicine to patients.

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