

Yale defends plans for new college in Singapore

July 21 2012, by MATTHEW PENNINGTON

Students at Yale University's new liberal arts college in Singapore will have academic freedom but won't be able to stage protests on campus, Yale officials say.

A human rights group has accused the university of betraying its own principles by accepting the constraints imposed by Singaporean law. Members of the university's arts and science faculty have also criticized the plans.

Yale is based in New Haven, Connecticut. It is establishing the college with National University of [Singapore](#) to open in 2013.

Singapore's schools are internationally renowned, and the national university already cooperates with other American universities, including Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Duke University.

But Singapore retains restrictions on speech and assembly it says are needed to preserve [economic prosperity](#) and harmony among its 5 million people. It has democratic elections but has been ruled by the same party since independence five decades ago.

"Yale entered its partnership with the National University of Singapore in full awareness that national laws concerning freedom of expression would place constraints on the civic and political behavior of students and faculty," Yale University President Richard Levin said in a statement issued Thursday.

Levin said academic freedom and open inquiry on campus would be protected, as would the freedom to publish in academic literature. But students and faculty would have to observe national laws "as do students and faculty in Yale programs from London to Beijing."

Human Rights Watch says Singapore's 2009 Public Order Act requires a permit for people to meet for a "cause-related activity," and outdoor gatherings of five or more people require police permission. Limited demonstrations and rallies are allowed, however, at Singapore's Speakers' Corner.

While Yale has other international programs, the Singapore campus will be its largest overseas endeavor. Yale says the new college can advance liberal arts education in Asia and teaching that encourages critical inquiry.

In April, shortly after the two universities announced the new venture, members of Yale's arts and science faculty passed a resolution expressing concern over "the lack of respect for civil and political rights" in Singapore and called on the new college to uphold principles of civil liberty, nondiscrimination and political freedom, which it said are at the heart of liberal arts education.

Singapore law also criminalizes sexual relations between consenting adult males.

"Yale is betraying the spirit of the university as a center of open debate and protest by giving away the rights of its students at its new Singapore campus," said Phil Robertson, Human Rights Watch's deputy director for Asia. "Instead of defending these rights, Yale buckled when faced with Singapore's draconian laws on demonstrations and policies restricting student groups."

The president of the new college, Pericles Lewis, said that as is the case with National University of Singapore, students would be able to join any political party, but such organizations are based off-campus.

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