

NUS sets up Hollywood lab for digital media

BY LEUNG WAI-LENG

SINGAPORE will soon get help from the best in the business — Hollywood — in its efforts to build a digital media industry here.

The help will come in the form of a research lab that the National University of Singapore (NUS) has set up at the doorstep of the world's entertainment capital.

The NUS Hollywood Lab — the university's first full-fledged overseas research lab with full-time staff

— will enable postgraduate students to work with media giants such as Disney and Sesame Workshop, which produces popular children's shows such as Sesame Street.

The students will work with Hollywood's leading lights on games, animation and even theme park rides.

The lab is the latest move in an ambitious attempt to help Singapore become a worldwide digital media centre, and comes on the back of other recent initiatives, such as luring some of the industry's biggest names, including

Star Wars movie makers Lucasfilm, to Singapore.

Singapore aims to double the gross domestic product contribution of the media cluster from 1.53 per cent now to 3 per cent in 10 years.

The NUS Hollywood Lab will share a new facility with the University of Southern California's School of Cinema-Television, widely regarded as the No. 1 film school in the United States.

NUS Mixed Reality Labs director Adrian Cheok said that an initial batch of 10 graduate students will be

trained at the lab.

Professor Cheok, who oversaw the setting up of the research centre, said the students can come from any faculty in the university.

That number may increase and the programme extended to undergraduates, depending on the number of projects and available funding.

Details of the programme are still being worked out.

The selected students will work on real projects with Hollywood's top creative minds before returning to Singapore to help build the

digital media industry here.

Prof Cheok stressed the need to immerse interested students with firms like Disney: "Interactive and digital media is different from industries like manufacturing and shipping...it's very difficult to manufacture creativity."

The lab will be headed by Mr Newton Lee, who has developed artificial intelligence systems at AT&T Bell Labs and was a senior producer at Disney Online, working on over 100 online games and interactive media like animated storybooks for Disney

before joining the NUS lab.

Another computing luminary, Dr Alan Kay, will act as adviser to the lab. Dr Kay is a pioneer in computer programming who helped develop early operating systems. He has also worked with Apple Computer and was chief scientist of pioneering computer game company Atari, which produced the first video game for the home, Pong.

Eventually, the lab hopes to receive funding from the National Research Fund, which has \$5 billion to aid research in strategic areas, including interactive and digital media.

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