

Combining schools of thought



BEST OF ALL WORLDS: As the new Dean of Interdisciplinary Graduate Studies, Prof Bo Gunnar Liedberg hopes to foster cross-disciplinary interactions. PHOTO: CHUA KHIPIN

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BIOLOGISTS, chemists and physicists being taught to speak the same language of science – that's what NTU's new interdisciplinary programme is setting out to achieve.

After all, interdisciplinary

research is meant to expand students' knowledge across curricula, said the newly-appointed Dean of the Interdisciplinary Graduate School (IGS), Professor Bo Gunnar Liedberg.

"We are not training students to be everything at the same time. Interdisciplinary research is about training them to have deep knowl-

edge in their area of expertise."

The IGS focuses on three main areas of research: the building of a sustainable Earth, innovations in new media, and developments in future healthcare.

To do so, Prof Liedberg developed a programme to tackle social issues such as ageing populations and global warming. The pro-

gramme will explore pertinent and complex questions, he added, such as how to understand the interaction between how we feel and see.

The Swede took over from Professor Yue Chee Yoon – who held the position of Dean since June – early this year.

But Prof Liedberg is no greenhorn to the role – having worked with interdisciplinary research teams for seven years in Linköping University.

Now at his new post, he aims to bring physics, chemistry, biology, and medicine students together at IGS to work on complex projects like sensor development.

"We're looking at developing methods to identify sensor samples in blood, urine and saliva – this requires a lot of input from different disciplines," he said.

The Dean also wants to make the IGS more global over the next year by establishing partnerships with graduate schools in Hong Kong, Germany, and Austria to offer students a more extensive global exchange programme.

There are also challenges ahead for the new Dean.

For one, he hopes that the new international outreach and global exchanges programmes will

attract more Singaporean students to pursue post-graduate studies.

"I think a problem Singapore faces is attracting students to higher education," he said.

Drawing a parallel to his personal experience, Prof Liedberg said it was his wanderlust that drew him to take up a permanent position in Singapore last year.

He was taken by the appeal of trying something new, after three years of doing the same research in his home university. Singapore's prime geographical location was another pull factor.

"You can reach a huge number of places very easily within a couple of hours," he said.

The avid traveller hopes to impart the same spirit of exploration to his students.

He also remembers to incorporate elements of Swedish culture into his new teaching environment.

"To *fika* is to go and have a cup of coffee. Our labs here are centralised around the *fika* room," he said.

Sharing his culture with the local staff and students is the first step to achieving a union of minds.

"Having coffee together helps promote interaction so people of different groups can come together," he said.