"Many problems are now multifaceted, so people must be agile enough to manage the interface between disciplines."

PROFESSOR SUSANNA LEONG (LAW '89), VICE PROVOST (MASTERS’ PROGRAMMES & LIFELONG EDUCATION) AND DEAN, NUS SCALE

WALKING THE DISRUPTED PATH
HOW NUS IS MOULDING STUDENTS TO EMBRACE AN EVER-EVOLVING FUTURE
Dear alumni and friends,

2020 will go down in history as a year most of us wish did not happen – in the way it did.

As COVID-19 continues to cause unparalleled disruptions to lives and livelihoods, governments, organisations, businesses, and individuals across the world are dealing with the uphill task of trying to bring allying economies and societies back to health. As we journey with the rest of the world in the common struggle to define the ‘new normal’, at NUS, we have also been making adjustments to curricula, programmes, and class arrangements to ensure that the NUS Community of students and alumni continue to receive and benefit from an NUS education.

Clearly we are not out of the woods yet and probably will not be for a while. Nevertheless, my colleagues and I at NUS Alumni Relations are grateful to have had opportunities to engage with many of you virtually throughout the past year. Going forward, we will adopt a hybrid format, allowing both physical and virtual participation, in all our programmes and activities. We hope to meet you in person when it becomes safe to do so. Team OAR has put in place a rich and diverse line-up of programmes and activities over the next twelve months to meet the varied interests and needs of the NUS Alumni family – please refer to pages 24-25 for more information.

This issue’s cover story examines how NUS is achieving her vision of being a leading global university shaping the future. A key development is the transition to interdisciplinary learning and a broad-based education – a move that is best reflected in the recent establishment of the College of Humanities and Sciences, a collaboration between the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and Faculty of Science. 2020 has catalysed the pace of change in many industries as well as the job market, necessitating a diverse and well-rounded education. Through this new initiative, NUS will strive to meet the evolving needs of each cohort and we welcome you, our alumni, to embark on this new endeavour with us.

Together with my colleagues, let me wish everyone a happy, healthy, and blessed 2021. Do stay in touch with us at nus.edu.sg/alumni, via our social media channels, or through AlumniApp which provides all alumni services in the palm of your hand.

Please continue to keep well, stay safe, healthy and stay strong.

Warmest wishes,

Mr Bernard Toh
(Architecture ’84)
Director, Alumni Relations
LEARNING GOES GLOBAL: NUS LAUNCHES ONLINE COURSES FOR LEARNERS WORLDWIDE

These learning opportunities are targeted at working professionals who are seeking to upskill.

The last 25 years working in different countries, from Australia to China and now Kenya, “I attended this course to help me understand more and learn what could be done to better tackle these issues.”

The course is part of eight massive open online courses (MOOCs) offered by NUS since January 2020 on edX, a learning platform founded by Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The MOOCs are open to learners worldwide.

AS A SINGAPOREAN WORKING IN A CHINESE COMPANY BASED IN KENYA, Mr Lim Yew Seng is no stranger to dealing with intercultural issues – from adjusting to different habits to changing how he communicates so as to prevent conflicts.

But it wasn’t always easy. When he found out that NUS offered an online course that taught effective intercultural communication at work, the 62-year-old jumped at the chance. “In all the entities I [have] worked in, there have been issues related to intercultural communications,” said Mr Lim, a senior advisor who has spent the

A CLINICIAN’S GUIDE TO BEFRIENDING CHILDREN

The MOOCs not only help people deal with colleagues, but children too. For healthcare workers wanting to learn how to placate children in medical settings, Dr Hu Shijia’s (Dentistry ‘08) course – “Handling Children In A Healthcare Setting” – offers proven techniques. Aimed at dental and medical students, and practitioners, the self-paced course, which began on November 2, discusses children’s development and behaviour through lectures and promotes experiential learning through scenario-based lessons. “One of the most difficult things to teach is behavioural management of young children,” said Dr Hu, an assistant professor at the Faculty of Dentistry, which jointly developed the MOOC with the Department of Paediatrics at Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine.

“Too many things can trigger them, like the machines [and medical equipment]. We show that it’s not threatening to build their confidence.”

BUILDING WITH DATA

Another interesting MOOC course is “Data Science for Construction, Architecture and Engineering”, conducted by Assistant Professor Clayton Miller (Design and Environment (MSc) ’12) from the School of Design and Environment’s Department of Building.

With more than 10 years of industry experience, he realised that large amounts of data were wasted after being used in design, construction, and operations – the lifecycle of a building. This data, he believes, could be further analysed and used for future projects through coding. For example, architects can extract this data and analyse them in ways that spreadsheets cannot.

They can also use coding software to create hundreds of design variations for clients. First launched in April, the course has attracted more than 11,000 participants. Among them is final-year Project and Facilities Management student Raymond Lim, who enrolled from early July to late August.

“The module will be highly applicable when I need to analyse the building data of the facility I am managing. This data will be able to generate actionable insights,” he said.

For participants like Raymond and Mr Lim, these MOOCs offer a broader as well as deeper set of skills that will boost well as their performance in the workplace.

Mr Lim

PLANS FOR NUSU

Su-Ann intends to tap on her legal background and experience to equip NUSU student representatives with the skills to respond more effectively to regulatory matters, improve NUSU’s adjudication and internal conflict management processes, and build a more robust system within the Union for the Personal Data Protection Act.

Su-Ann added that her team will also look into different ways of communicating with students, which could potentially include a YouTube channel about NUSU. After undergoing an election campaign filled with unexpected changes and last-minute adaptations due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the team also plans to reformat the exam pack, NUSU Receive and Give (RAG) Day, as well as the Freshmen Coordinators Central Committee (FOCC), in preparation for such crises in the future. There is also a NUSU merchandise store in the works.

Together with her team, Su-Ann aims to create a united and transformative Union by strengthening bonds with the Constituent Clubs and Associate Bodies, as well as the students themselves, innovating new formats for student life and welfare initiatives, and helping students adapt to the new learning conditions during and after the pandemic.

Ms Wee Su-Ann seeks to strengthen bonds with the Constituent Clubs, Associate Bodies, and the students themselves.

THE NUS STUDENTS’ UNION (NUSU) has elected its second female President, Ms Wee Su-Ann, a four-year Law-USP undergraduate and former varsity sharpshooter, was elected as President of the NUSSU 42nd Executive Committee. She began her one-year term on 1 October 2020. She succeeded Richard Wang (Arts and Social Sciences ’20), the outgoing 41st President.

In his farewell message, Richard welcomed Su-Ann as the second-ever female NUSU President, and the first in 14 years. Preceding Su-Ann as the first female NUSU President was Ms Tay E Teng (Business ’07), who held office from 2006 to 2007.

Su-Ann did not expect to become the second female President in NUSU’s history. “I feel honoured to be the role model for other female students to be inspired to step into leadership positions,” she said.

This article was first published on 1 October in NUS News at news.nus.edu.sg/news-students-unions-elects-second-female-president.
TRUE TO THEIR MISSION TO NURTURE STUDENTS WITH SUSTAINABILITY EDUCATION AND TO EMPOWER ACTION IN CONSERVATION, NUS Ridge View Residential College (RVRC) has been spearheading reforestation efforts at Chestnut Nature Park (CNP).

Today, their consistent conservation efforts with the community have made headway. Located next to the Central Catchment Nature Reserve, CNP is Singapore’s largest nature park spanning 81 hectares of land. It is home to native tree species that improve the ecological connectivity between green spaces. These expansive spaces allow animals to thrive, and the local community to enjoy a range of hiking and mountain biking trails through scenic woodlands.

Their labour of love started three years ago when the park opened. RVRC founded a community initiative called Friends of CNP, in partnership with the National Parks Board (NParks). Students from different disciplines were initiated into CNP’s reforestation efforts, with RVRC Director of Studies Mr N Sivasothi (Science ‘91) at the helm as Chairman, and RVRC Lecturer Dr Chua Siew Chin (Science ‘04) as forest ecologist advising on the restoration of degraded forests. They also formed an interest group, RV FoRestore, inspired by “forest” and “restoration”. Student leaders helped to organise various activities including weeding, monitoring the growth of planted trees, and growing forest seedlings, as well as host annual events such as wildlife recording, and tree planting during the NUS Day of Service. They also engaged their RVRC peers on the nature and wildlife around the college’s surrounding forests by conducting bird-watching sessions and nature walks, while documenting these activities on Facebook and Instagram.

Through different restoration strategies, data was gathered to improve future restoration work. Leveraging the flexible format of the Year 2 programme, Dr Chua designed a short course for students to collect information on the restoration plot at CNP, as well as to experiment with different nursery propagation techniques. “Our discoveries from this short course and the RV FoRestore activities were showcased at the Forest Restoration Workshop, co-organised with NParks,” said Dr Chua.

The Forest Restoration Workshop was opened to the public, targeting school teachers and students who were encouraged to join RV FoRestore’s activities at CNP. “We hope to expand the forest restoration work beyond NUS to other schools in Singapore, where interest groups such as RV FoRestore can also be started and sustained,” added Dr Chua. Had it not been for RVRC’s efforts, the restoration of CNP’s degraded forests, if left to nature, could otherwise take over a century.

This article was first published on 7 October in NUS News at news.nus.edu.sg/partnering-the-community-in-reforestation-efforts.
PERUVIAN FILM FESTIVAL 2020

A celebration of strong ties as the Latin American nation nears its 200th year of independence.

Due to the safe management measures implemented because of the COVID-19 pandemic, guests were spread out across the auditorium and had to keep a safe distance from one another. However, that did not prevent the audience from fully enjoying the cinematic experience as they watched the acclaimed film El Evangelio de la Carne (The Gospel of the Flesh), which was directed by Eduardo Mendoza de Echave. Not only was the audience treated to a tale that explored how being good is sometimes simply not an option, but they also were able to experience some of Peru’s sights, sounds, and colours, and learn more about its culture through the film.

To celebrate the success of the first Peruvian Film Festival and to end the night on a sweet note, the Embassy also arranged for guests to leave with some Peruvian finger food for their enjoyment at home.

CHINA FILM FESTIVAL 2020

A cultural showcase that coincided with the 30th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Singapore and China.

JOINTLY ORGANISED BY THE EMBASSY OF THE PEOPLE’S REPUBLIC OF CHINA IN THE REPUBLIC OF SINGAPORE, the Singapore China Friendship Association, and NUS Alumni Relations, the China Film Festival returned for the 9th consecutive year to bring the best of Chinese films to NUS alumni. The festival had to keep a safe distance from one another. However, that did not prevent the audience from fully enjoying the cinematic experience as they watched the acclaimed film Skiptrace, a production starring Jackie Chan, I Am Somebody, and The Great Wall.

Since the inception of the China Film Festival in 2012, the NUS community has had the opportunity to enjoy more than 30 acclaimed Chinese films at the Shaw Foundation Alumni House, albeit under strict safe management measures.

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In anticipation of the 9th China Film Festival, which took place on 29 October, was presented by the Embassy of the Republic of Peru in Singapore and NUS Alumni Relations, in celebration of 40 years of Peru-Singapore diplomatic relations, and to commemorate the bicentennial of Peru’s Independence in 2021.

The event was graced by His Excellency Carlos Raul Vasquez Corrales, Ambassador of the Republic of Peru to Singapore, as well as Mr Johnny Tan (Science ‘85), Co-Chairman of the NUS Alumni Advisory Board. During his opening address, Director of NUS Alumni Relations, Mr Bernard Toh (Architecture ‘84), highlighted the similarities between Peru and Singapore – both countries had significant historical events occurring in the same era (the arrival of Sir Stamford Raffles in 1819, and independence for Peru in 1821), and both have grown from humble beginnings to become vibrant economies today.

Although guests had to greet one another from a safe distance, attendees were excited to attend the in-person screening.
**OAR HIGHLIGHTS**

**FUTURE-READY WORKSHOPS**

**VIRTUAL NETWORKING: BUILDING BRIDGES TO OPPORTUNITIES**

At the latest session of Future-Ready Workshops on 13 October, Ms Camilla Tam of the NUS Centre for Future-ready Graduates stressed the importance of networking and making professional connections in unlocking hidden career opportunities. She took attendees through how to create a plan for networking, and various strategies for strengthening relationships with colleagues, even while working from home. Attendees left the online workshop armed with the knowledge of how to make a great impression on future employers by building a suitable online brand.

**HEALTH & WELLNESS**

**Dietary Practice and Your Gut – Keeping GI Symptoms Away**

The last Health & Wellness session for 2020 was held on 22 October and featured Dr Loh Poh Yen (Medicine ’07), a specialist in gastroenterology and internal medicine. Dr Loh answered questions about common gastrointestinal (GI) problems such as abdominal bloating, irritable bowel syndrome, and flatulence. He also shared tips on how to observe good dietary habits and making the right dietary changes to keep GI symptoms at bay.

**SUCCESSFULLY NAVIGATING THE WORLD OF NEGOTIATIONS**

Negotiation is an essential life skill for everyone, that requires a deep understanding of concepts, strategies and techniques. Ever wondered how you can successfully navigate through all types of negotiations? In this session, we will discuss the science and art of negotiation – the key aspects of a structured negotiation process, along with the appropriate behaviours and influencing techniques. Join this workshop to learn how to formulate a proper approach in negotiations and go beyond intuitive methods.

**Speaker:**

**Mr Anuj Jagannathan** (Business ’16)

Chairperson, NUS Alumni San Francisco Chapter

Author of the Amazon bestsellers: Negotiation Quotient: Opening the Door to a Successful Deal and We Can Negotiate Too!

**DATE:** 12 January 2021, Tuesday

**TIME:** 7.30PM - 9.00PM

**PLATFORM:** Zoom

Join us online at: 
alumnet.events/FR-jan21

**Smiling Your Way to Good Oral Health**

Not only will good oral hygiene boost your overall health, a beautiful smile will leave a lasting impression on the people around you. Tune in to expert advice by specialists from the National University Centre for Oral Health Singapore.

**Taking Charge of Your Oral Health**

Dr Tay Chong Meng (Dentistry ’03)

Assistant Consultant, National University Centre for Oral Health Singapore

Assistant Professor, NUS Faculty of Dentistry

**Orthodontics - Aligning for Better Health**

Dr Wilson Lu (Dentistry ’11)

Assistant Consultant, Discipline of Orthodontic and Paediatric Dentistry, National University Centre for Oral Health Singapore

Assistant Professor, NUS Faculty of Dentistry

**DATE:** 21 January 2021

**TIME:** 7.30pm - 9.00pm

**PLATFORM:** Zoom

**JOIN US ONLINE!**

Register at alumnet.events/HW-jan21
OAR HIGHLIGHTS

THIS ENGAGING AND ANIMATED SESSION on 3 December featured Ms Elizabeth Ong (Arts and Social Sciences ’14), a Positive Psychology Consultant and Coach at The School of Positive Psychology, who shared practical advice and tips on how to keep a positive outlook. Attendees also had the chance to exchange their personal happiness hacks with one another and make new friends while playing interactive games.

THE 42ND EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE AND COUNCIL OF THE NUS STUDENTS’ UNION (NUSSU) AND 35TH EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE GRADUATE STUDENTS’ SOCIETY (GSS) met with representatives from NUS Alumni Relations on 4 November for an annual dialogue to discuss how the alumni community can better serve the needs of students in the coming year. During the dialogue, all three parties shared their plans for the coming year and enthusiastically exchanged ideas on possible collaboration opportunities for 2021.

Casual Conversations – Happiness Hacks – Ways to Enrich your Life with Joy

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ANNUAL DIALOGUE WITH NUSSU & GSS

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Helping Businesses Transform Using IT

This talk will deep dive into the challenges faced in driving business transformation using IT. Through ups and downs, Dr Goh has discovered that the secret of effective business transformation lies not just in the combination of knowledge and skills acquired in class and through practice. More importantly, it hinges on one’s mental model of what defines a meaningful and purposeful IT career. Join Dr Goh as he shares how he has found his calling through the practice of systems thinking and volunteerism.

Register at alumnet.events/TS-feb21
"Home is Where We Are" by Prof Wang Gungwu (Arts and Social Sciences ’53) and the late Mrs Margaret Wang (Arts and Social Sciences ’54)

*Does home have to be a country or a city... Or is home this house or that? We have been fortunate... We seemed always to have been home.*

Professor Wang Gungwu’s account of his university education in Singapore and the United Kingdom, and the early years of his career as an academic in Malaysia, capture the excitement, the ambition, and the choices of a generation that saw it their responsibility to build the new nations of Southeast Asia.

The exploration of the emotional and intellectual journey towards the formation of an identity, treasured by readers of Prof Wang’s ‘Home is Not Here’, extends in this volume into an appreciation of love, family life, and the life of the mind. We also see these years from Margaret’s perspective, her own fascinating family story, and her early impressions of this young bearded poet. Wise and moving, this is a fascinating reflection on identity and belonging, and on the ability of the individual to find a place amidst the historical currents that have shaped Asia.

BOOK CORNER

**LAYING THE FOUNDATION**

Mr Addison Bain (Engineering ’13), a technology consultant and the top MSc I4.0 student in the first cohort, on his decision to upskill and stay relevant in a rapidly-changing economy.

"Business and technological innovation are inextricably linked, and the demand for technology-enabled business transformation services is rapidly growing. I felt that enrolling in the NUS Master of Science in Industry 4.0 (MSc I4.0) programme would open up more doors to the fast-growing information and communications technology sector.

The multidisciplinary nature of the programme was the biggest pull factor. It allowed me to develop a broad understanding of the latest technology trends and keep pace with the changing nature of industries amidst the age of digital disruption. Moreover, the option to choose a graduate certificate and other electives gave me the flexibility to deep dive into specific technology-related areas that were best aligned to my personal interests and professional development goals.

The idea of lifelong employment, in a single role, with a single company, has disappeared as organisations today require workers to be dynamic and able to thrive in a constantly-changing environment. Therefore, lifelong learning is critical for us to build up professional resilience and remain competitive in a connected, globalised, and technologised world. It is not just about the acquisition of new knowledge and skills – more importantly, we need to have the right mindset and aptitude to learn, unlearn, and relearn at every stage of life. This will enable one to stay relevant and be well-positioned to seize new career opportunities as they come along.*

Mr Addison Bain (Engineering ’13), 31, technology consultant and the top MSc I4.0 student in the first cohort, on his decision to upskill and stay relevant in a rapidly-changing economy.

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JOINING THE DOTS

TEXT BY WANDA TAN

TO MAP OUT TOMORROW

Finding solutions to the defining challenges of our time seems nigh impossible. But with an interdisciplinary mindset, we are halfway there.

COVID-19 IS NOT A PURELY MEDICAL OR PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUE. It is also an economic one, as global GDP has fallen and countries have slipped into recession. It also has political repercussions, as simple acts like mask-wearing have become inexorably linked to one’s party affiliation in countries such as the United States. And it is a deep-seated social issue, as marginalised groups — who lack access to quality healthcare and tend to work in precarious, low-wage jobs — have borne the brunt of the fallout, exacerbating inequalities across the fault lines of race, gender, and class.

The pandemic may be the most urgent problem facing the world right now, but it is not the only one. Climate change, ageing populations, concerns about artificial intelligence (AI) — these are all big, complex, real-world problems of the 21st century, and each involves overlapping considerations. Addressing them in a satisfactory way requires experts from different fields to work together. Today’s workforce is therefore expected to embrace an interdisciplinary approach. This is also reflected in the higher education landscape, where a trend towards “interdisciplinarity” is occurring. This is a trend that NUS in particular is paying close attention to, and the University is already in the process of rolling out plans to support it.

BREAKING DOWN SILOS

Universities have traditionally been modelled around specialisation. Faculties and departments typically focused on specific subject domains. Students would select which major to pursue, and could go even deeper into their chosen area of study through a postgraduate education. It used to be that being schooled in one discipline — be it as a doctor, lawyer, accountant, scientist, or psychologist — could set us up for life.

However, things cannot be bracketed so neatly anymore. As NUS President Professor Tan Eng Chye (Science ’85) wrote in an opinion piece published in The Straits Times on 10 September 2020, “Our young adults will graduate into a world of ‘wicked problems’ — problems that are ill-defined, mutate all the time, defy single-discipline solutions, and even challenge established bodies of knowledge.” For students to make sense of the chaos and have a decent shot at solving it, he argued, universities need to “broaden the intellectual foundations of our students’ learning” by “integrating knowledge, skills, and insights from different disciplines.”

“Integrating” is the keyword here, and it is, according to the literature, what distinguishes a multidisciplinary curriculum from an interdisciplinary one. The former exposes students to two or more academic disciplines that each have bearing on a given topic, without explicitly integrating them. Think of a course where professors from different faculties take turns giving lectures, but do not bridge their considerations. Addressing them in a satisfactory way requires experts from different fields to work together. Today’s workforce is therefore expected to embrace an interdisciplinary approach. This is also reflected in the higher education landscape, where a trend towards “interdisciplinarity” is occurring. This is a trend that NUS in particular is paying close attention to, and the University is already in the process of rolling out plans to support it.

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Professor Tan Eng Chye, NUS President

Colleges, students from different disciplines live, play, and study together under specially-designed academic programmes such as the University Scholars Programme. An expanding slate of double majors, major-minor combinations, and double degree programmes gives students the flexibility to study more than one area of interest in greater depth.

The University laid down its biggest marker yet for this shift on 8 December 2020 with the official launch of the new College of Humanities and Sciences (CHS), which brings together the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASS) and the Faculty of Science (FoS), two of the largest and most established faculties in Singapore.

WHEN SCIENCE MEETS THE HUMANITIES

Starting from Academic Year 2021/2022, incoming freshmen to FASS and FoS will be admitted first to CHS and study a distinctive Common Curriculum that integrates the humanities and the sciences. It will impact intellectual breadth in the initial semesters, and includes five new integrated modules covering Asian Studies, Integrated Social Sciences, Integrated Humanities, and two modules on Scientific Inquiry.

Cross-disciplinary Degree Programmes (CDPs) are designed to integrate complementary disciplines and leverage their synergies. Some possible pairings include Economics and Data Science; Computing and Project Management; as well as Engineering and Business.

BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

Come August, NUS will introduce 10 new Cross-disciplinary Degree Programmes (CDPs) to give students the flexibility to pursue programmes across complementary disciplines — in the same amount of time as a four-year Bachelor with Honours degree. Unlike a traditional double degree or double major, where students acquire in-depth, specialist knowledge in two distinct disciplines, the CDPs are designed to integrate complementary disciplines and leverage their synergies. Colleges, students from different disciplines live, play, and study together under specially-designed academic programmes such as the University Scholars Programme.

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The curricular structure thus balances depth with breadth, and allows for greater flexibility and cross-pollination of disciplines across the humanities, social sciences, science, and mathematics. Problem-based pedagogies will also be widely adopted, with teaching focused on solving problems rather than the pure impartation of content. This will be reinforced with experiential learning via internships and project work.

Set to debut its inaugural cohort this August, the new CHS will take in more than 2,000 undergraduates every year. Both the FASS and FoS Deans will serve as co-Deans of the College. Professor Robbie Goh (Arts and Social Sciences ‘88), the current FASS Dean, calls it a “forward-looking” initiative. “The beauty of the CHS curriculum is that it is not ‘either-or’, but ‘both-and’,” Prof Goh tells The AlumNUS. “It marries breadth and interdisciplinary strength, with strength in the major.

At the same time, the new curriculum facilitates any combination of majors and minors offered by both Faculties.” For example, students can choose contrastive majors (and get a double degree) in Psychology and Life Sciences, or pursue a major-minor in History, Mathematics, and Language Studies.

Prof Goh notes that CHS goes much further in scaling up interdisciplinary courses which NUS has rolled out to date. “It opens up a new world of possibilities and pathways, giving our students unprecedented flexibility to chart their own learning journeys based on their interests, aptitudes, and career aspirations. Employers are leaning towards graduates with an integrated educational background, as they can draw on and connect knowledge from diverse disciplines for application,” he says.

In addition to opening up more job options, interdisciplinary learning will also help students make sense of, and proactively address, future disruptions that are bound to occur in the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Adds Prof Sun, “The new CHS is not just timely, but crucial. It provides the critical foundation that enables students to synthesise ideas and perspectives from different disciplines. It is this interdisciplinarity that will better prepare our students to become problem-solvers in an uncertain world beyond the pandemic.”

**A LIFELONG PURSUIT**

A similar transformation is happening in the field of lifelong learning, which at NUS is spearheaded by the School of Continuing and Lifelong Education (SCALE). In today’s fast-changing world, knowledge and skills are quickly becoming obsolete, and new occupations and roles are emerging every day. Specialisation, while still important, is no longer sufficient. “Many problems are now multifaceted, so people must be agile enough to manage the interface between disciplines,” says Professor Susanna Leong (Law ‘89), NUS’ Vice Provost (Masters’ Programmes & Lifelong Education) and Dean of SCALE.

For example, SCALE’s MSc in Industry 4.0 programme cuts across various disciplines including the Institute of Systems Science, the Faculty of Computing, Engineering, Science, and NUS Business School. On the non-credit-bearing side, SCALE offers a large catalogue of short courses for adult learners to reskill themselves and stay relevant in the modern workplace, covering areas such as change management, data analytics, and marketing. This same mix of broad-based knowledge and technical skills is provided by the NUS Lifelong Learners programme, which allows NUS graduates to take Continuing Education and Training courses for up to 20 years after their graduation.

In today’s fast-changing world, knowledge and skills are quickly becoming obsolete, and new occupations and roles are emerging every day. Specialisation, while still important, is no longer sufficient. “Many problems are now multifaceted, so people must be agile enough to manage the interface between disciplines,” says Professor Susanna Leong (Law ‘89), NUS’ Vice Provost (Masters’ Programmes & Lifelong Education) and Dean of SCALE.

As part of the R&G Initiative in April 2020, Graduates from the Classes of 2020, 2019, and 2018 were invited to form interdisciplinary teams to develop holistic solutions for a better post-COVID future. SCALE is also supporting fresh NUS graduates who are facing a weak job market amid the pandemic, through the University’s Resilience & Growth (R&G) Initiative launched in April 2020. Besides full-time jobs within NUS and paid traineeships, the R&G Initiative offers a specially-curated suite of lifelong learning courses ranging from hard digital skills like AI and machine learning to key soft skills such as communication and storytelling. As for mid-career placees, affected by the economic downturn, SCALE’s SGUnited Skills programme offers full-time traineeships in selected industries such as advanced manufacturing and fintech. Participants receive training in both broad interpersonal skills and the deep skills required for the particular industry, as well as in the increasingly important pillar of data and digital skills, to improve their employability. “COVID-19 has disrupted lives and careers. Hopefully, people will use the current situation as an opportunity to reframe their mindsets about lifelong learning,” Prof Leong muses. “Lifelong learning should not be a reactionary response to a crisis, but rather a way of helping us take a proactive role in our personal development and remain industry-relevant so that we can pivot even before the crisis happens. It is better to have multiple legs to stand on instead of just one.”

**TECHNOLOGY IN THE CLASSROOM**

Technology and digital literacy feature heavily in the new CHS curriculum and in SCALE’s offerings—and indeed, throughout the rest of the University as well. At the Faculty of Law, for instance, technology-ied upheavals in the practice of law are driving legal education reform. Not only do law students have to be well-versed in laws surrounding the regulation of new technologies such as AI and blockchain, they must also understand how technology is transforming the role of lawyers themselves. The automation of routine tasks such as document review and discovery, and the use of predictive analytics to find out how judges will decide on cases, are just two examples. “Lawyers of the future will still need the outstanding critical and analytical skills that we have always cultivated at the Faculty of Law, as well as the ability to communicate effectively and operate in teams. But those teams will, increasingly, rely on AI systems as well as men and women,” says the Faculty of Law Dean Professor Simon Chesterman. “That doesn’t mean all law students need to be expert coders or get a second degree in Computer Science. But it does mean that they need to be comfortable working with computers, and be able to take advantage of the efficiencies and opportunities that they offer.”

At the Faculty of Law, students undergo a one-day law and technology boot camp, and are encouraged to compete in legal technology competitions and hackathons. Speakers from the profession are regularly invited to brief students on the changing landscape. Students and faculty alike have presented at TechLaw.Fest, a local industry event that brings together law and technology professionals.

**ALWAYS LEARNING**

NUS will fund 115 projects across 3 categories:

- Make Our People Better
- Make Our Society Better
- Make the World Better

Each selected project will receive a grant of up to $50,000 for 6 months.

**TO SHAPE A BETTER FUTURE**

As part of the R&G Initiative, and to also mark the University’s 115th anniversary, NUS launched the R&G Innovation Challenge in 2020. Graduates from the Classes of 2020, 2019, and 2018 were invited to form interdisciplinary teams to develop holistic solutions for a better post-COVID future. SCALE is also supporting fresh NUS graduates who are facing a weak job market amid the pandemic, through the University’s Resilience & Growth (R&G) Initiative launched in April 2020. Besides full-time jobs within NUS and paid traineeships, the R&G Initiative offers a specially-curated suite of lifelong learning courses ranging from hard digital skills like AI and machine learning to key soft skills such as communication and storytelling. As for mid-career placees, affected by the economic downturn, SCALE’s SGUnited Skills programme offers full-time traineeships in selected industries such as advanced manufacturing and fintech. Participants receive training in both broad interpersonal skills and the deep skills required for the particular industry, as well as in the increasingly important pillar of data and digital skills, to improve their employability. “COVID-19 has disrupted lives and careers. Hopefully, people will use the current situation as an opportunity to reframe their mindsets about lifelong learning,” Prof Leong muses. “Lifelong learning should not be a reactionary response to a crisis, but rather a way of helping us take a proactive role in our personal development and remain industry-relevant so that we can pivot even before the crisis happens. It is better to have multiple legs to stand on instead of just one.”

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The idea is that [medical students] will still be doctors, but can work better with experts from other fields. Medicine is not just about knowing how to manage diseases,” he stresses. Even the way the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine conducts classes has changed in the wake of COVID-19. To ensure medical students could continue to hone their clinical skills while staying safe, educators piloted the use of an innovative virtual reality gaming system and an AI-enabled Virtual Integrated Patient platform to simulate an actual clinical setting. In fact, all Faculties and Schools turned to technology-enhanced learning tools as in-person classes came to an abrupt halt last year, so as not to disrupt students’ learning.

To be sure, tech-enhanced learning has existed at NUS for much of the last decade, albeit in rather piecemeal fashion. Before COVID-19 hit, some modules and programmes were already experimenting with blended learning (a mix of online and in-person sessions) and ‘flipped classrooms’ to help students learn at their own pace. The pandemic, however, has accelerated their adoption. “Major trends have emerged,” says Prof Kankanhalli. “We’re seeing more use of videoconferencing, smartphones, and custom communication functions or applications for delivering improved learning and teaching experiences,” he says. Professor Mohan Kankanhalli, Dean of the School of Computing. For example, it is now commonplace for students to participate in live polls via their mobile devices during lectures, which makes classes more interactive and engaging. Several faculty members have also developed platforms for more effective one-to-one and many-to-one communication with students, as well as improved peer-to-peer feedback for student team projects.

Soon, the School of Computing plans to launch a new EdTech Centre that will integrate all relevant educational technology solutions onto the same platform. "With better user interface, professors will then find it easier to teach online," says Prof Kankanhalli. "We firmly believe that the face-to-face campus learning experience is irreplaceable. However, if done right, technology can be an excellent complement that would significantly augment the on-campus experience and meaningfully sustain engagement beyond campus."

**RESEARCH ON ALL FRONTS**

Being a research-intensive university, NUS is also active in interdisciplinary research. COVID-19 has been top of mind for NUS researchers this past year, with many exploring different aspects of the crisis. Some work on rapid diagnostics and vaccine development, while others utilise information and communications technology (ICT) solutions to fight online falsehoods and inform public health policy. Meanwhile, Duke-NUS Medical School’s Centre for Ageing Research & Education (CARE) is involved in an ongoing project to model the effects of the pandemic on Singapore’s health system.

"Speaking on CARE is interviewing older adults to find out the reasons behind them delaying elective surgeries and not having their chronic conditions cared for during this time. "We know that 42 per cent of older adults did not go for normal appointments during and after the Circuit Breaker," says Associate Professor Angelique Chan, Executive Director of CARE. "Through this study, we hope to put in place ways for older adults to feel safer about accessing the healthcare system if another pandemic happens."

Assoc Prof Chan, who was trained in sociology, discloses that interdisciplinary research is central to CARE’s work. “Interdisciplinarity is needed because ageing encompasses physical, social, and cognitive or mental health issues. For example, dementia is clinically defined as cognitive decline in older persons. However, there are also issues around caregiving and caregiver burden; how different groups in society perceive dementia differently, which interferes with their care; and policymaking for dementia care and support,” she says. This necessitates collaborations across medical, social work, sociological, psychological, anthropological, and public health perspectives.

Interdisciplinarity is also crucial to the new Centre on AI Technology for Humankind (AITH), launched virtually last April by NUS Business School. “Our aim is to promote human-centric ways of using new technologies,” says AITH’s Founder and Director, Professor David De Cremer. “AI is used within social settings, so many of the tasks technology can be used for do not only pose technological challenges, but also social and humanitarian ones. So we strive to combine computer science with social sciences, psychology, and the humanities.”

At present, AITH’s research is focused on promoting a stronger interdisciplinary approach to AI fairness and AI ethics. That means getting engineers to overcome what Prof De Cremer terms the ‘innovation-only bias’, so that they are more aware of the impact that the technologies they develop can have on humanity. AITH is also looking into ways to encourage organisations to employ AI beyond narrow cost-cutting goals and use it for more socially significant work, such as humanitarian ones.

**RESEARCH ON ALL FRONTS**

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[Singaporean youths] will expect to graduate as well-rounded, informed humans who are able to take part in social-political life and assess big questions such as social justice, governance, and ideology. Interdisciplinarity can be a means for universities to achieve this.

Dr Adrian Kuah, Founding Director, NUS’ Futures Office

In service of job enrichment, so as to achieve a satisfying, trustworthy, and inspirational work setting. “The idea is not to create a world for machines, but a better world for humans by means of using advanced technologies,” says Prof De Cremer, who is also the Provost’s Chair Professor at NUS Business School.

“It is my personal belief that we need more ‘generalists’ than ever — people who can see the bigger picture and outline the challenges and responsibilities we need to take care of when it comes to technology and society.”

A NEW GENERATION OF GRADUATES

Dr Adrian Kuah, Founding Director of NUS’ Futures Office, highlights another pressing problem requiring a wide-angle, interdisciplinary lens: climate change.

“We often bring in technocrats such as scientists, engineers, and policy wonks, but leave out the human dimension,” says Dr Kuah, referencing the need for social scientists to understand and help shift the mindsets of those who distrust science or refuse to change their consumption habits. “We need to appreciate the broader social-political context of a problem, its history, and how it may be perceived differently by different groups of people. An interdisciplinary approach can bring out these different aspects of the human condition.”

This will not be easy, though. Some resistance is to be expected — from faculty members who are used to emphasising their own domains of expertise, and from society at large, which still prizes the specialist over the generalist. NUS President Prof Tan also suggested in his Straits Times commentary that the “kiasuism” prevalent in our society may result in a tendency to over-teach and impose excessive requirements for subject majors.

However, there is no doubt that universities have to radically rethink themselves, whether or not another pandemic strikes. “Incoming cohorts are going to approach higher education with a more critical eye,” says Dr Kuah. “Singaporean youths are no longer solely vexed by pragmatic concerns over their jobs and career aspirations, but also by broader social issues. They will expect to graduate as well-rounded, informed humans who are able to take part in social-political life and assess big questions such as social justice, governance, and ideology. Interdisciplinarity can be a means for universities to achieve this.”

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Biden and China: Friends or Foes?

In the aftermath of arguably the most divisive election in US history, a new White House Administration seeks to chart a new course in an era of change. But what does it spell for the relationship between the world’s two biggest powers — and the countries in our region? Professor Kishore Mahbubani (Arts and Social Sciences ’71) looks at the complexities.

Donald Trump will be remembered for many things. And one of the things he will be most strongly remembered for is the major geographical contest he launched against China during his Presidency. Initially, it began as a trade war, but it spread to other dimensions, and included some remarkably rude and insulting statements about China. Fanning the fire, Trump’s outgoing Vice-President Mike Pence, in a lengthy lecture on China on 24 October 2019, spelt out in great detail all the mistakes made by China. Here is an example of what he said: “All that Beijing is doing today — from the Party’s great firewall in cyberspace or to that great wall of sand in the South China Sea; from their distrust of Hong Kong’s autonomy, to their repression of people of faith — demonstrate that it’s the Chinese Communist Party that has been ‘de-coupling’ from the wider world for decades.”

He made it clear that Trump would stand up to China. So, what will happen to US-China relations when Joe Biden becomes President? The answer is paradoxical. On the one hand, everything will change. On the other, nothing will change. Both statements are true.

Why will everything change? For a start, the Biden Administration will stop insulting China. Even though Biden called President Xi Jinping a “thug” during the election campaign, the Chinese government will understand that this is part of the American election process. Many American Presidential candidates do not actually implement what they say in election campaigns. Just as Bill Clinton established good relations with China during his terms in office — even though he had said in his election campaign that he would not “code the butchers of Beijing” — Joe Biden will be courteous and civil when he meets his Chinese counterparts. Biden is a genuinely nice guy. He will not make policies through tantrums or tweets. Instead, there will be a certain predictability and stability in US-China relations. But while the tone will change significantly, the substance will not.

The Eternal Tussle

This, then, is the other limit of the paradox: the US-China contest will continue. This US-China contest is not driven by personalities but by structural forces in my book, Has China Won?, I spelt out at least three such structural forces. Firstly, for millennia, the number one power today, the US always tries to thwart the number two power (today, China) and prevent it from becoming number one. American behaviour in trying to block China’s rise as number one is normal geopolitical behaviour.

Sadly, American opposition to China’s rise is also driven by emotional forces. For centuries, the Western psyche has feared the “yellow peril”. This emotional dimension explains why President Trump called COVID-19 “Kung Flu” and “China virus”. The third structural force is a bipolar consensus in the US that China has let the US down by not becoming a democracy. Two senior Democrat officials, Kurt Campbell and Ely Ratner, documented this disappointment in a Foreign Affairs article. They wrote, “Ever since [rapprochement began under the Nixon Administration in the 1970s], the assumption that deepening commercial, diplomatic, and cultural ties would transform China’s internal development and external behaviour has been a bedrock of U.S. strategy.” These three structural forces are powerful forces. Hence, under Biden, the US-China contest will continue.

Making Our Position Known

What should the rest of the world, including ASEAN, do in response to this continuing contest under Biden? Remain passive? Or speak out loudly and clearly to convey their own fears and concerns? It would be fatal to remain passive. As I document in a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) on US-China relations [to be released by NUS and edx in January 2021], the whole world will be affected, indeed destabilised, if the US-China contest gains momentum. Hence, we should speak out.

But what should we in ASEAN say? We should make three points. The first point we should make is that both US and China should press the “pause button” on the contest. Why? The simple answer is that billions of people — including those in the US and China — are suffering from the massive economic recession caused by COVID-19. Global poverty is rising again. The only way to jumpstart the global economy is for the number one and number two economies to work together. Indeed, if Biden were to announce a simple suspension of the trade war against China and withdraw all of Trump’s erratic trade tariffs, the markets would react positively. The global economy would start growing again. Jobs would come back.

In short, the whole world faces both a major danger, and a major opportunity, with the Biden Administration coming into office.

The second point is that the most pressing challenge we face is global warming. Fortunately, Biden, unlike Trump, agrees with this assessment. He will make Climate a priority. Yet it is also true that the US cannot stop global warming alone. Nor can China. Both have to work together. This is why I say in the conclusion of my book, “Humans would look pityingly at two tribes of apes that continued fighting over territory while the forest around them was burning. But this is how America and China will appear to future generations if they continue to focus on their differences while the earth is facing an extended moment of great peril.”

The third point we should make is that the continuation of the US-China contest will not just disrupt American and Chinese lives. It will (as it already has) disrupt lives all across the world. Hence, the first thing the new Biden Administration should do is to send out “listening” envoys to the rest of the world to poll the attitudes of the rest of the world to this contest. In the process of “listening”, they will discover that the rest of the world, in all likelihood, does not want to choose sides between the US and China. Indeed, they want to have good relations with both. This is true of Asia too.

As Ambassador Chan Heng Chee observed recently, “The indications are that no country in Europe or Asia would like an exclusive relationship with the US or China… All want to be able to develop relations with both powers.”

In short, to close with another paradox, the whole world faces both a major danger, and a major opportunity, with the Biden Administration coming into office. It could face a major danger if the Biden Administration is driven by structural forces to accelerate the US-China geopolitical contest. Yet, it could also face a major opportunity if the six billion people living outside US and China speak out clearly and call on the world’s leading powers and economies to cooperate and deal first with pressing global challenges we face, like COVID-19 and global warming. ASEAN, including Singapore, should send these clear messages to Beijing and Washington DC.

Source: South China Morning Post, 9 September 2020

The US goods and services trade with China totalled an estimated US$634.8 billion (S$849.4 billion) in 2019.

Source: The Office of the US Trade Representative (USTR)

321 NGOs from around the world called upon the United Nations in September 2020 to investigate possible human rights violations by China.

Source: South China Morning Post

Named as one of the top 50 world thinkers for 2014 by British current affairs magazine Prospect, Professor Kishore Mahbubani is a Distinguished Fellow at the Asia Research Institute at NUS, and was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 2018. He previously served as 33 years in Singapore’s diplomatic service and is regarded as an expert on Asian and world affairs.
**Smiling Your Way to Good Oral Health**

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  - Dr Tay Cheong Meng
  - Dentistry ’03, Consultant, Discipline of Advanced General Practice, National University Centre for Oral Health Singapore
  - Assistant Professor, NUS Faculty of Dentistry

Orthodontics - Aligning for Better Health
- Dr Wilson Lu
  - Dentistry ’11, Associate Consultant, Discipline of Orthodontic and Paediatric Dentistry, National University Centre for Oral Health Singapore
  - Assistant Professor, NUS Faculty of Dentistry

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**21 JAN**
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- Register: Join us at alumnet.events/HW-jan21
- Contact: Ms Tan Li Hui
  - lhtan@nus.edu.sg

**Helping Businesses Transform Using IT – The Transformation that Needs to Happen Within**

**Tech Talk [Online]**

**Speaker:**
- Dr Jenson Goh
  - Computing ’97, Chief Information & Learning Officer, Monde Nissin

Join Dr Jenson Goh as he deep dives into driving business transformation using IT and shares how he found his calling through the practice of systems thinking and volunteerism.

**10 FEB**
- Tue, 7.30pm - 9.00pm
- Register: Join us at alumnet.events/TS-feb21
- Contact: Ms Althea Tan
  - althea.t@nus.edu.sg

**Gender Diversity and Inclusion in the Workforce**

What can female employers or employees do to ensure that women are well-represented and included? What types of policies or practices should be put in place for women to be respected and treated equal in the workplace?

Join our panelists – Ms Lyn Lee (Arts and Social Sciences ’89), Dr Vandana Ramachandran (Science (PhD) ’03), and Ms Georgette Tan (Arts and Social Sciences ’82) – for a panel discussion, moderated by Dr Intan Azura Mohd Anuar (Science ’98, Public Policy ’08), as we discuss Gender Diversity and Inclusion in the Workplace.

**16 MAR**
- Thu, 7.30pm - 9.30pm
- Register: Join us at alumnet.events/WoW-mar21
- Contact: Ms Julene Kee
  - julenek@nus.edu.sg

**Indian Film Festival**

**Lunch Dialogues [Online]**

**Speaker:**
- Ms Priscilla Shunmugam
  - Law ’06, Founder & Designer, Ong Shunmugam

Join Ms Priscilla Shunmugam as she shares anecdotes of her journey – from quitting corporate life to becoming the creator of a renowned made-in-Singapore fashion label. Hear more about her motivation to success, how she overcame the difficulties, including overcoming all odds and launching her 10th anniversary cheongsam collection.

**12 MAR**
- Fri, 12.00pm - 1.00pm
- Register: Join us at alumnet.events/LD-mar21
- Contact: Ms Julene Kee
  - julenek@nus.edu.sg
IN SICKNESS AND IN HEALTH

Catastrophes bring out both the best, and the worst, in people — and often, those nearest and dearest to them will be the ones to witness this. The pandemic and its associated hardships have taken a toll on many marriages worldwide, but have also brought couples closer in other cases. Our alumni talk about the implications of their newly-intertwined personal and professional spheres on their married life.

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Absence makes the heart grow fonder — or does it? Four alumni couples share the stresses and silver linings the current pandemic has presented to their respective relationships.


dr sean kuan thye (arts and social sciences ’91), jr director of a logistics company

KUAN THYE: My problem was work-life separation, as I generally don’t know when to stop. After dinner, I would continue my work where I had left off, and ended up missing a few of my regular evening walks with Kim Fee. We have always been busy, even before the pandemic, and that 45-minute after-dinner walk was our couple time. But I’ve found that most people have gotten closer in the midst of combining forces to face this external threat of COVID-19.

ATUL: Our work-from-home arrangement has been a bit of an evolution — in the beginning when we shared the same space, we were literally stepping on each other’s toes. But we did come to realise the importance of personal space.

One alumni couple share their experiences:

MS WONG LAI PING (BUSINESS ‘85), GROUP CONTROLLER OF A SOLAR TECHNOLOGY COMPANY

LAI PING: I am in the recruitment line, so there has been more work loss, and I suffer a bit of income loss. However, I have also taken on work conducting training on personal data protection. It took adjustments – such as overcoming the difficulties of speaking for eight hours before a group. Lai Pingt also took on a new job just before the Circuit Breaker began and that added to the household income. But I felt that she passed the stresses of dealing with a new job to the household income. But I felt that she passed the stresses of dealing with a new job to the...
MARRIAGES were confirmed between January and July 2020. This represents a 23% drop compared to the same period in the previous year.

A National Population and Talent Division survey conducted in June and July 2020 polled 4,100 Singaporeans aged between 21 and 45.

ABOUT 80% of those who were married indicated that they planned to delay having children for up to two years. Their concerns included shaky economic and employment prospects, and worries about the safety of healthcare facilities.

I took on the lion’s share of the child-minding – from putting them to bed and getting them to focus on their online learning modules to playing chauffeur after the Circuit Breaker. - Mr Ittam Choudhury

How has your lifestyle changed thus far?

ATUL: I used to travel a lot in the region for work, but now I get to spend a lot more time with my family.

JOCELYNE: We used to have a life with colleagues and friends, which was separate from our family, and that helped to set some boundaries – but these boundaries have disappeared. But we have also learnt to be tolerant of each other’s space. We also dipped into our savings after I quit my job, but we knew it was a temporary state. COVID-19 did curtail our spending – the restrictions force you to spend more time at home, and not being able to go on holidays overseas all became enforced savings.

LAI PING: We couldn’t let anybody into the house during the Circuit Breaker, so we had to do everything by ourselves and split our household chores.

SONNY: Yes. I really don’t do toilets, so we agreed that she would wash the toilet and I would mop the floor – but I would delay the cleaning as much as I could! However, I do much of the cooking. We also started to go for morning walks and swims.

NEHA: While we used to have ‘couple time’ on weekends, we decided after the Circuit Breaker that we’ve had enough of each other during the week. Now we meet our friends on the weekends instead, and our outings as a couple have reduced. As a family, our time used to be packed with a lot of playdates and classes for the kids, and so on. Going through the Circuit Breaker made us realise that it is okay to not have jam-packed days, and just sit down together and do nothing. I think it has worked better for us as a couple too.

Have the new norms made you discover something new about you and your partner?

NEHA: I discovered that Atul is actually a fussy eater! But it also pushed me to be a lot more involved in meal planning, researching recipes, and learning more about healthy eating. Even my mother is surprised at how healthy I have become.

What do you think is the silver lining in this pandemic?

ATUL: We used to wonder how life will be when we are 60 years old and facing each other at home all the time. Seeing as we didn’t kill each other during the Circuit Breaker, we realised that we will be fine as a couple in the long term. It was also a lot of an awakening because while our jobs weren’t impacted, the wider climate made us realise the need to do financial planning.

SONNY: I never knew Lai Ping was into gardening! The little plot we have used to be all mine but now we fight each other for space – and if any plant dies, it is ‘my fault’! I also realised that my wife can do a lot of shopping online – there’s always somebody at the door delivering everything from beer to seafood to ice cream, which I have been eating so much of just to clear the stock!

KIM FEE: We had thought about retirement prior to the pandemic, and what we weren’t working. The pandemic has pushed us to think even deeper about that.

JOCELYNE: We have learnt to ask Kim Fee and the children about their day rather than start the conversation with my problems. Instead of feeding the dinner conversation with a lot of talking, I now listen more.

KUAN THYE: I used to have to travel about $10,000 to join the NUS Campus Couples Alumni Group by emailing Ms Julene Kee at julenek@nus.edu.sg.

If you’d like to join our Forum panel, do write to us at alumni-web@nus.edu.sg to express your interest.

If you and your spouse are an NUS Campus Couple, we invite you to join the NUS Campus Couples Alumni Group by contacting Ms Julene Kee at julenek@nus.edu.sg.

If you and your spouse are an NUS Campus Couple, we invite you to join the NUS Campus Couples Alumni Group by emailing Ms Julene Kee at julenek@nus.edu.sg.

I have learnt to ask Kim Fee and the children about their day rather than start the conversation with my problems. - Dr Sean Kuan Thye
A Voice for the Silenced

A gap year during her undergraduate days equipped Ms Charmaine Yap (Law ’18) with the confidence in her own ability to make a difference to the lives of migrant workers here.

MS YAP HAS RACKED UP AN IMPRESSIVE STRING OF INTERNSHIPS:

- Justice Without Borders
  - Coordinated pro bono legal services for disadvantaged migrant workers
- National Environment Agency
  - Supported the legal department in their civil and prosecutorial work
- EarthRights International
  - Researched how Singapore’s transboundary haze legislation could be adapted to solve other pressing cross-border environmental issues
- ACRES
  - Interviewed migrant workers to understand the grievances they face

Ms Yap has been helping migrant workers since her first year at the Faculty of Law. During that year’s term break, she took up an internship with Transient Workers Count Too (TWC2), an experience that would transform her worldview.

“I’m interested in the migrant worker cause was piqued by my lecturer, former NUS Faculty of Law Senior Lecturer Sheila Hayne,” she tells The AlumNUS. “Then, during the TWC2 internship, I saw for myself how appalling their situations were.”

During interviews with migrant workers, she learnt of the exploitative conditions they faced themselves in “Agent fees, illegal kickbacks, unjustified salary deductions… these were things that any Singaporean would ral against if it happened to him or her. But because it was happening to another group, we were willing to ‘close one eye.’” The most unsettling discovery was realising that most of these workers had come to terms with, and accepted, the injustices as necessary sacrifices in their quest for a better life. “I was very disturbed by that,” she recalls.

**FINDING HERSELF**

The experience had a profound impact on Ms Yap. When she returned to school, she started seriously questioning her choice to study law and reflecting on how her education could bring value to others. “I realised that I had not actually figured out what I really wanted to do, and I don’t know what I really wanted.”

Realising she needed to think things through, Ms Yap opted for the unconventional step of taking a gap year after her second year of law school. “It wasn’t something I decided on lightly. My parents had some reservations about the idea but it helped me contribute to the community.”

Her experiences and the acquaintances made during these internships would shape her future.

**IF ENOUGH OF US RAISE OUR VOICES AND HOLD OUR FELLOW CITIZENS, POLICYMAKERS, AND STAKEHOLDERS TO ACCOUNT TO ACCOMPANY, THERE WILL BE A SHIFT AND THINGS WILL GET BETTER. THAT’S THE SINGAPORE THAT I WANT TO BE A PART OF: A COMPASSIONATE SOCIETY THAT EXPECTS THE SAME STANDARDS FOR OTHERS AS WE DO FOR OURSELVES.**
GETTING IT WRITE

For poet, educator, and current director of the Singapore Writers Festival, Ms Pooja Nansi (Arts and Social Sciences ’04), a successful festival space invites the coming together of all people, no matter their backgrounds.

WHEN POET AND EDUCATOR MS POOJA NANSI WAS APPROACHED TO BE THE DIRECTOR of the annual Singapore Writers Festival (SWF) by the National Arts Council and its former festival director Mr Yeow Kai Chai, she was in two minds. “It felt then like a giant undertaking; I was intimidated,” Ms Nansi, 39, confesses to The AlumNUS. She knew, however, that it was an opportunity not to let slip. “Nobody has ever made a difference by closing the door when they are given the chance to shake things up. Thankfully, a lot of the work I had done leading up to the festival — in education and in independent literary spaces — prepared me for this job.”

Having helmed the festival for two years, Ms Nansi — a first-generation Singaporean whose parents grew up in Mumbai and came to Singapore in 1982, when she was just one — has certainly helped to create a greater buzz surrounding the festival, largely by writing renowned and popular writers such as Roxane Gay in SWF 2019 and Zadie Smith in its most recent run, which was held entirely virtually due to the pandemic. “My parents are both closely involved in the arts and so I grew up in a household where music, dance, reading, and writing were the norm. I am who I am because of my family and they are at the centre of everything I do,” says Ms Nansi, who double majored in English Literature and Philosophy during her time at NUS. Plans for SWF 2021 are already in the works, but the AlumNUS managed to catch the busy new mother — just a month after giving birth to her first child, a daughter — for thoughts on the festival and her experience of it so far.

Since taking on the festival directorship, you’ve been clear in your direction, in wanting it to be as accessible as possible. Why has this been one of your top priorities?

“Who She Is”

The Director of the Singapore Writers Festival, Ms Pooja Nansi often explores the themes of ethnicity, identity, and feminism in her own work. She has published two collections of poetry. Love Is An Empty Barstool (2013) and Stiletto Scars (2007). The recipient of the 2014 Young Arts Award, Ms Nansi was also Singapore’s first Youth Poet Ambassador.

for all, regardless of who we are. Ideally, the festival should feel like a physical and emotional space that everyone can feel comfortable in, and feel a sense of ownership over.

You’ve included writers who have gotten a lot of people excited as part of the festival’s programme. What is your selection or curatorial process like?

The team and I tend to spend some time thinking deeply about who is making work that addresses and unpacks the year’s theme — that’s generally a good starting point. We also brainstorm and share what we are reading and bring up names we think are discussing salient issues of the day so that the conversations at the festival feel urgent and relevant.

You’ve also maintained a good balance, putting the spotlight on both renowned international writers and local ones. Has this been a difficult process?

Not at all. There’s no real distinction in my mind between the groups. In my curatorial process, I try to include as many perspectives as possible so that address what the festival is trying to explore. And I am deeply aware that we are the Singapore Writers Festival, and so we must have perspectives of our own front and centre in conversation with global and regional voices.

What have you learnt about running the festival so far?

I’ve learnt that there are many, many moving parts to a festival and numerous aspects that work together to create a seamless experience for audiences. Everyone matters, from our dedicated volunteers to our marketing team and the tireless operations team. By the time the festival rolls around, I am so exhausted — and have looked at the details for so long — that I get taken aback when someone says he/she is deeply moved by a programme or conversation that we’ve conducted. But this is always an important reminder of why a space like SWF matters.

What has been your biggest challenge?

To be honest, I don’t think I’m managing the expectations of different communities and stakeholders who all have their priorities and notions of what the festival should accomplish. While I try my best to make the space diverse, accessible, and inclusive — and that’s all anyone can do — the truth is, there is just no way to please everybody. All I can do is to listen, understand, and learn from the feedback.

What makes a festival successful to you?

My top three must-haves for a successful writers festival are that the conversations must be current and relevant; the space must feel welcoming and inspiring; and finally, good food, drinks, and music! A festival is not a conference! Without giving too much away, for the next festival, we hope to expand the conversation around what constitutes literature even further.

What was it like rolling out a festival during an ongoing pandemic?

We wanted to continue bringing together people in their shared love for stories, which is why SWF 2020 went digital. Rather than attempting to replicate our physical festival, we instead tried to create new experiences that set SWF 2020 apart by collaborating with our partners to create engaging and interactive experiences for festival-goers. If anything, going digital was a boon for us. We were excited to have more opportunities to reach international audiences and introduce them to authors and presenters who work with Singapore’s official languages. Festival-goers were able to log in from wherever they were and join in our celebration of literature.

What do you remember most about your time at NUS?

What I remember most starkly are the friends I made there, some of whom I am still very close to. I must confess: I skipped some lectures to hang out at Sentosa or to nurse a hangover, but I also loved my classes and access to the library. I also remember my thesis supervisor Dr Susan Ang, her ever-welcoming office and the wonderful conversations she afforded me. My time in NUS allowed me the freedom to explore, be curious, and experience life lessons both in and out of the classroom, and that set the tone for who I was as a teacher and now, a festival director.

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Do you think people are reading or writing more during the pandemic?

I think my reading habits shifted during the pandemic. I can’t speak for anyone else, but personally, I found it hard to read in the same focused way during the Circuit Breaker. My attention span just wasn’t there. I did find myself reading more non-fiction as opposed to fiction, and leaning harder into poetry.

We are sure you have a long list of favourite writers. Who are some of them?

You’re right; I have a very long list, but I owe my imagination to Enid Blyton. I am the poet I am because of Anne Sexton. I want to write prose like Marlon James and non-fiction like Joel Tan. You’ve also maintained a good balance, putting the spotlight on both renowned international writers and local ones. Has this been a difficult process?

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Putting Purpose Above Profit

Ms Charmain Tan (Science ’12) founded her first company while in Sweden on an NUS Overseas College stint. Today, she is a young entrepreneur who believes in making a positive social impact while also sticking to her principles.

As a participant of the NUS Overseas Colleges (NOC) programme, she spent her third year in Sweden interning at a listed medical tech company called Episurf. Ms Tan explains that she chose “hot favourite” Silicon Valley for Stockholm because she was attracted to the hardware focus in Sweden, as herself did not have a software development background. It was there that she met her boss who would become her role model: Ms Nina Bake, the CEO of Episurf, who was just 29 at the time. The team was very small, just four people, including Ms Tan. Episurf customises implants for cartilage defects, so that instead of going for a total knee replacement, a patient can have their defect measured and have a customised implant. It provides a real-life solution to the real-life problem of osteoporosis: you could see that it had potential to impact lives. What made it even more inspiring was that Ms Bake did not have a medical background; she was trained in industrial systems engineering. “Working with Episurf allowed me to understand what it means to make the impossible possible,” explains Ms Tan. “My boss was what I desired to be: she had passion to do something of impact and value, and was also fun-loving.”

IF THE GLOVE FITS...

The year she turned 21, Ms Tan decided to kickstart her first company — in Sweden, no less. “I figured I was far away so it was all right. But eventually I had two businesses under her belt, and only just turned 31 at the time of this interview.”

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IF THE GLOVE FITS...

The year she turned 21, Ms Tan decided to kickstart her first company — in Sweden, no less. “I figured I was far away so my parents couldn’t stop me!” She had learned from all her years at NUS that a business needs to solve a problem. “My problem was I needed to use my iPad and iPhone [in chilly Sweden] without taking off my gloves. So I bought some gloves from Taobao that had conductive tips — these could be used but they were not warm enough. I couldn’t find a solution so I decided to make one.”

She entered ISGloves into a European business plan competition and it was shortlisted. Together with fellow entrepreneurs from NUS, Stockholm, Ms Tan launched the business after receiving a grant from SPRING Singapore and was later backed by Red Dot Investments. But being new to the industry — and without any background in manufacturing — Ms Tan found her learning curve was steeper, and her competitors faster, than she hoped. ISGloves’ eventual failure taught her an important lesson: mastering sales is paramount in a business like hers and it is what every entrepreneur needs. “I asked myself: what is a problem that I feel for and I want to solve that can help a lot of other people as well? It was the ability to do sales. There are many other things you learn in school, like marketing and product development, but nobody teaches sales strategies,” Ms Tan explains.

BEING QUICK ON THE MARK

Bouncing back from her early failure, and armed with invaluable lessons from that experience, Ms Tan started Pear Comms in 2014 with the aim of helping small enterprises handle sales by providing them with QuickDesk, a one-stop online sales platform and sales education resources. Her true passion is in the training end of QuickDesk’s services. But in 2014, the market was not yet ready for such a training programme. Instead, that was when the Bi-National Registry was set up, and many companies found themselves limited in their sales reach. Ms Tan grabbed that opportunity to launch the first Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software with an integrated Do Not Call list screening agent.

QuickDesk equips sales teams with digital tools and solutions to help them close sales more effectively. It enables the automation of sales and marketing processes so the human effort can be directed to looking after the customer experience instead of back-end work. Where there used to be a need for a large sales team, QuickDesk enables a lean team to do more. As more firms embrace such possibilities, Ms Tan has found a new demand for training — more entrepreneurs and their sales teams want to know how to maximise their sales leads and successful transactions. “One of the greatest things about education is seeing lives transformed,” shares Ms Tan. “Our training is supported by the government, while SGTech (previously STF) and NUS are our partners. We talk to everyone — from students with sales and marketing backgrounds, to companies like Pico and Salt Media and those in other industries.”

UPPING THEIR GAME

To date, QuickDesk has empowered over 800 SMEs with digital tools and skills for maximum revenue growth through its CRM software and integrated services which include sales appointment generation.

I asked myself: what is a problem that I feel for and I want to solve that can help a lot of other people as well? It was the ability to do sales. There are many other things you learn in school, but nobody teaches sales strategies.
A MAN OF MANY TALENTS

Appointed in July 2020 as Director of NUS Centre for Quantum Technologies, Professor José Ignacio Latorre hails from the University of Barcelona, where he is a full professor of theoretical physics. Also appointed Provost’s Chair Professor in the NUS Department of Physics, he has published more than 120 research papers on quantum information and particle physics. The founder of the Centro de Ciencias de Benasque Pedro Pascual, Prof Latorre has produced two documentaries and is also an amateur winemaker.

LIGHT SPEED AHEAD!

The new Director of the NUS Centre for Quantum Technologies looks to strengthen its position in cutting-edge research that has huge implications for the future.

PRODIGIOUS LEVELS OF ACCURACY

Quantum computing has been in the news in recent years, especially after Google made its “quantum supremacy” claim (whereby a programmable quantum computer can solve a problem that no classical computer can in a feasible amount of time). Despite all the public attention, quantum technology is more than just about quantum computing. For example, manipulating ions is useful for more than making qubits. Prof Latorre tells us that ions are at the heart of CQT’s ultra-precise atomic clock. This lithium ion-based optical clock will be accurate to 18 decimal places. That means if this clock were running from the moment of the Big Bang, it would still be accurate to the second right now, some 13.8 billion years later! To offer some context, even the most accurate quartz timers today may gain or lose a second every year.

But what might we need such prodigious levels of accuracy for? Prof Latorre says that though we may not have an immediate practical application, the future is built on the instruments developed today. When Albert Einstein presented general relativity in 1905, he could have argued that there was no practical use for it. Yet today, GPS satellites — indeed all other satellites — with atomic clocks require both general and special relativity. In 1905, you could have argued that there was no practical use for them. Today, GPS satellites are used to determine the location of anything on Earth. The second of time is accurate to 1/1000th of the width of an atom. This incredible measurement was made possible by an ultra-precise clock.

BEYOND THE THEORY

A theoretical physicist, Prof Latorre is a passionate advocate for the pursuit of curiosity-driven science. “Basic research is one of the major endeavours of humanity. What many people don’t understand is there is sometimes a gap in time between what you discover and what has a practical application,” he says. CQT certainly has a tradition of encouraging commercial applications. There are already five quantum startups in Singapore associated with CQT. Some are spin-offs that have directly licensed technology developed in CQT, while others were founded by alumni. These companies employ over 30 people working on technologies for secure communication, for sensing, and for developing software for quantum computers. In 2019, CQT initiated a partnership with SGInnovate to build partnerships between scientists and entrepreneurs. SGInnovate is a government-owned entity that focuses on adding value to Singapore’s deep tech startup ecosystem.

KNOWLEDGE FOR ITS OWN SAKE

Besides nurturing good ideas, and urging them to the attention of commercial forces, CQT is also engaged in major projects that are good for everyone. Prof Latorre points to the recent (November 2020) news of a significant quantum key distribution (QKD) test in Singapore. This test was not limited to the grounds of CQT, but actually utilised a significant quantum key distribution (QKD) test in Singapore. This test was not limited to the grounds of CQT, but actually utilised a significant quantum key distribution (QKD) test in Singapore. This test was not limited to the grounds of CQT, but actually utilised significant quantum key distribution (QKD) test in Singapore. This test was not limited to the grounds of CQT, but actually utilised 10km of the country’s network of commercial fibre-optics. “This is a testbed to make the island ready for quantum communication. We are using photons to generate random numbers, which are important for finance. We can set keys that cannot be broken by quantum computers, because they are based on quantum cryptography,” says Prof Latorre.

The team thinks the fibres may even be able to carry quantum signals and classical internet data traffic at the same time, because the two types of communication can use different wavelengths of light. The NUS-SingNet Cyber Security Research & Development Laboratory is a university-industry partnership set up in 2016 that is supported by the National Research Foundation. All this bodes well for Prof Latorre, who may be described as a true optimist but declares that he is an experimentalist at heart. He is certainly a passionate communicator and educator, including on the topic of quantum computing. “Communicating scientific ideas is essential,” he says. For students, he sees university as an opportunity to engage with big ideas. “University is a place where you educate your brain in depth; not just learn a trade,” he says. He also encourages students and society to value the seemingly “uselessness” of some scientific ideas. He retells the story of the invention of magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), now an important tool in healthcare. To detect structures in our bodies, these machines tap the underlying physics of atoms’ energy levels. “Scientific work on the two-level system won four Nobel prizes,” notes Prof Latorre. “It has given us MRI, but in the 1940s they never saw this coming.” One of the Nobel winners, the late Professor Isidor Isaac Rabi, said as much himself when he received his Nobel more than 40 years after his prize.

CQT BY THE NUMBERS

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<td>PhD students trained</td>
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<td>Quantum spin-offs and startups</td>
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Number of staff and students: 100

PhD students trained: 65

Quantum spin-offs and startups: 5

TEXT BY ASHOK SOMAN

38 • THE ALUMNUS

JAN–MAR 2021 • 37
Climate change may be the biggest existential threat facing the planet — but it doesn’t always feel that way. The latest U@live session explored why this is so.

The session began with a sobering observation by Mr Sadasivan: “Today, we discuss climate change, which is a topic that’s very critical, on all counts. But somehow, it has failed to become enough of a priority. Is it a question of ignorance, denial, or downright lack of accountability?” Agreeing with his assessment of the situation, Mr Jha noted that many parts of the world — from Bangladesh to the Bahamas — are already feeling the adverse impacts of climate change. “These catastrophic impacts we are talking about; they are not happening in the future, they are already here,” he said.

The panelists agreed that climate change denial remains a significant challenge. Mr Sadasivan pointed out the economic havoc it wreaked understandably shifted the world’s attention away from climate change. This shift is emblematic of the wicked problem facing the world, which must seemingly choose between dealing with tomorrow’s needs and today’s realities — a choice that inspired the latest U@live session, which was held virtually on 30 October.

Some 150 alumni tuned in to the session, which was moderated by Mr Viswa Sadasivan (Arts and Social Sciences ‘83) and featured Ms Grace Fu (Business ‘85), Minister for Sustainability and the Environment; Mr Abhas Jha, Practice Manager of Urban and Disaster Risk Management at the World Bank; and Associate Professor Leong Ching (Arts and Social Sciences ’92), Dean of Students at NUS. The panel also featured U@live essay competition winner Ms Feng Yuan (see sidebar).

Somehow, [climate change] has failed to become enough of a priority. Is it a question of ignorance, denial, or downright lack of accountability?

Mr Viswas Sadasivan, U@Live Chairman

DID YOU KNOW?
The Singapore Government is seeking to build a more circular economy, according to Ms Fu. To do this, it is exploring ways to encourage sustainable production and consumption, such as the Extended Producer Responsibility model. To be introduced to tackle e-waste by 2021, this model will use producers bearing responsibility for the collection and treatment of their products when they reach end-of-life.

The Singapore Environment Agency has partnered petrochemical giant Shell to look into the feasibility of a pyrolysis plant in Singapore, which could recycle old plastics. “Singapore’s nimbleness and the responsiveness of its policymakers will allow it to take advantage of technological trends like these,” she explained, adding that the Government would bring people along on this journey to sustainability. Assoc Prof Leong welcomed this, explaining that by building sustainability into the ethos of its people, Singapore could go a long way towards becoming a greener and sustainable nation.
Au Revoir, Hon Sui Sen Memorial Library!

The NUS Business School community bid L2 & L3 a tearful goodbye as the library prepares to undergo a major facelift to make space for new seminar rooms for future generations of BizADers. To commemorate the occasion, the Hon Sui Sen Memorial Library was decorated with balloons and the Latin music playlist in the background softened the atmosphere for the happening afternoon ahead.

Attendees were delighted at the opportunity to network with NUS BIZ alumni and to meet with the Dean and other professors.

The event included ‘Back to School’ learning about AI, where Professor David De Cremer gave an engaging talk on “Leadership by Algorithm: Who leads and Who follows in the AI era?”. Professor Duan Jin-Chuan also delivered an enlightening talk titled “Am I Digitally Literate?”. Attendees had fun leaving handprints on the wall, and the event was filled with enjoyable conversations over coffee, curry puffs, and Kit-Kats – observing safe distancing measures, of course!

Kent Ridge Hall’s Alumni Relations Unit (ARU) recently held an Alumni Mentorship Programme where 6 former Kent Ridgeans were invited to conduct sharing sessions for the current hall residents. These sessions were conducted over the course of 2.5 weeks from 10 to 28 October 2020, and took place online.

The purpose of the mentorship programme was to provide residents with invaluable insights into various industries such as law, business, technology and start-ups, and the public sector. Through several meetings over Zoom, the alumni mentors shared their relevant experiences, ranging from practical skills on topics such as “Excelling in Your Interviews” to providing guidance on what students can expect within each industry.

ARU Chairperson, Mr Reynard Lee (Year 2, School of Design and Environment), hopes that these initiatives can aid the growth of fellow Kent Ridgeans. The insightful sharing sessions definitely brought greater clarity to graduating Kent Ridgeans who are planning their next phase of life amidst the uncertainty brought on by the pandemic.

Kent Ridge Hall’s ARU would also like to express its heartfelt thanks to the alumni mentors who volunteered their time and effort to making the programme a success.

13 NUS Business School alumni from all over the world attended the NUS Class Ambassadors Investiture 2020, organised by NUS BizAlum. The event was organised online, in line with current safe distancing measures due to COVID-19.

Class Ambassadors are formally appointed by the University and are key connectors to ensure the continual engagement of the class with the Faculty, School, Hall or Residential, and alma mater after graduation. Class Ambassadors receive exclusive invitations to attend signature NUS alumni events and enjoy a rewarding network of friends. This was a good opportunity for the Class Ambassadors to be introduced to one another and to hear how everyone is doing after graduation.

bizalum.nus.edu.sg
www.linkedin.com/groups/952707/
**NUS Alumni Xiamen Chapter’s Mid-Autumn Day Trip to Dehua**

Between 17 and 18 October 2020, the NUS Alumni Xiamen Chapter, the Xiamen Overseas Singaporeans Returning to Fujian Association, and the Consul-General of the Singapore Consulate in Xiamen, Mr Nelson Ng, jointly visited Dehua, a county located in Quanzhou, Fujian Province, and celebrated Mid-Autumn Day together. Dehua is the world’s first “Ceramics Capital” where the Chinese ceramic culture originated.

On 17 October, upon arriving at the Luzerne Ceramic Hotel, a delegation of NUS alumni and their family members were given a guided tour of the modern and automated, large-scale ceramics factory, the porcelain exhibition hall, and the Lu Cheng Museum, where the condensed history of the company’s development is displayed. Impressed by the fine porcelain and the exquisite skills, the visitors admired the potters’ entrepreneurial wisdom and their craftsmanship in striving for excellence and perfection. The tour revealed the persistent efforts in the arduous journey taken by the Lu Cheng Museum. At the conclusion of the tour, attendees had the opportunity to design their own ceramic mugs.

The next day, the alumni visited the Dehua Museum of Ceramics and a traditional brick kiln, where they were introduced to the finest ceramics made at different times in history. The most treasured feature of Dehua porcelain is its “China White” colour, which fascinates its viewers for being “white as snow, smooth as jade, and fine as silk”.

While this cultural trip to Dehua may have lasted a mere two days, it was full of genuine appreciation and generous sharing of thoughts among alumni.

**Zoom-ing With Confidence 2020**

On 10 October 2020, a Zoom with Confidence workshop was held to equip NUS Senior Alumni with the necessary skills to navigate the world of digitalisation: how to set up and use the video conferencing platform, Zoom, on laptop PCs and mobile devices. The physical workshop was conducted in a small group with safe management measures in place. The workshop was facilitated by members of the NUS Computing Alumni Association, led by Chairperson Ms Jeannel Mah (Computing ’14).

The participants found the workshop helpful and were most appreciative of the time and effort that was spent in organising it.

senioralumni@u.nus.edu

Mr Anuj Jagannathan (Business ’16).

The session highlighted topics such as structured versus unstructured data, data scientists versus data artists, and how to tell a story with data.

This webinar was one of its kind; it was open to multiple NUS Alumni Chapters and had attendees from around the world. Mr Jagannathan hopes that this will start a trend where NUS Alumni Chapters organise events that are open to alumni across different regions.

senioralumni@u.nus.edu
Each year, many students could be denied full access to the myriad of life-transforming opportunities at NUS. Just the average cost of living, excluding accommodation, can amount up to $6,000 annually.

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"It frees up my mental capacity. It gives me more time to be able to focus on things that I love and things that I can contribute more thoroughly to society."

"Receiving the Scholarship has relieved me of my worries and lightened the financial burden on my parents who are also supporting my three other siblings’ tertiary education."

A well-loved teacher at the Singapore Chinese Girls’ School until her retirement, the late Miss Siong Siew Woon was a strong believer in education. It was this belief that prompted her to make a legacy gift to the Yale-NUS College to establish the Siong Keng Hoon Study Award in honour of her father, Mr Siong Keng Hoon.

The late Mr Siong journeyed from China to Singapore in search of a better life at the age of 18. Deprived of an opportunity to pursue a tertiary education when he was young, Mr Siong saw the value of education and ensured that all his children were educated.

Ms Rosie Wee (Arts ’86), the niece of the late Miss Siong and granddaughter of the late Mr Siong, shared how Miss Siong had held her father in high esteem and imbued his values with regards to education, in addition to his entrepreneurial, preserving, and giving spirit.

"My aunt valued and believed in the power of education as a window to a better life, job opportunities and upward mobility. She hoped that students who required financial assistance would benefit from this gift and in turn, pay it forward when they graduate from university,” said Ms Wee, who is also the executors of Miss Siong’s will. The Siong Keng Hoon Study Award will help students with demonstrated financial need to defray their tuition and residential fees.

In recognition of Miss Siong’s generous gift, the Estate of Siong Siew Woon has been named a Founding Benefactor of Yale-NUS. In addition, the College has also named a classroom after the late Mr Siong.

This story was first published on the Yale-NUS College website.

"My aunt valued and believed in the power of education as a window to a better life, job opportunities and upward mobility.”
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BREAKING STEREOTYPES

BY MIN EE MAO

Many people around the world have taken to producing their own video content via a slew of social platforms, such as TikTok and Instagram, to occupy their time. Recent Yale-NUS College graduate Mr Aditya Talwar’s YouTube content, however, manages to easily stand out from the crowd, given that he is a young Indian man who speaks fluent Mandarin. The 23-year-old, who goes by Adi, also had a headstart, having started video-blogging, or vlogging, about a year and a half ago.

Mr Aditya Talwar (Yale-NUS ’20) picked up conversational Mandarin while in university — and has since gone on to create a series of hit videos in the language.

Since the start of the pandemic, many people around the world have taken to producing their own video content via a slew of social platforms, such as TikTok and Instagram, to occupy their time. Recent Yale-NUS College graduate Mr Aditya Talwar’s YouTube content, however, manages to easily stand out from the crowd, given that he is a young Indian man who speaks fluent Mandarin. The 23-year-old, who goes by Adi, also had a headstart, having started video-blogging, or vlogging, about a year and a half ago.

Adi says he was motivated to create videos, which are mostly in Mandarin, while on a university exchange programme in Taiwan. “I realised that the locals were friendlier when I had said I’m from Singapore, than if I were to say I was originally from India. So clearly the latter came with certain stereotypes,” Adi explains. “But still, it was obvious to me that they were accepting, kind, and curious, so I figured what better way to showcase my culture to them than through videos and debunk some of those stereotypes.”

Many of Adi’s videos feature his adventures in India when on vacation, and also his experience as a Yale-NUS College undergrad. “I’m also keen on producing videos on topics such as sports and tech,” says the Philosophy, Politics and Economics (PPE) major, who lived in India and Australia before moving to Singapore for university. His grasp of Mandarin did not happen overnight. “It took me about three years of taking up Chinese modules while in university,” he says. “I decided to commit to learning it while on a volleyball trip to Taiwan in my first year. That’s when I fell in love with the place, as well as its food and culture.”

The goal, now that he has graduated, is to travel the world and create more videos of his adventures as soon as COVID-19 stops being a global health crisis. “I also hope to live in a predominantly Chinese-speaking environment to really gain mastery of the language,” says Adi, whose video production skills are self-taught. “I do believe everyone has the capacity to do what I do with videos — the barriers to entry are low and there are great teachers on the internet,” he says. “Humans are also natural storytellers.”

Mr Aditya Talwar, Yale-NUS College graduate, travel vlogger, and content creator

Mr Aditya Talwar (Yale-NUS ’20) picked up conversational Mandarin while in university — and has since gone on to create a series of hit videos in the language.

Some people create structural change in society by analysing data. I am on the other side of the spectrum. I want to change the world by connecting with people [through videos] and change their perceptions of other countries and other people.

Adi doing a show-and-tell video on the streets of Taichung City, Taiwan.

Adi’s YouTube channel, Indian Prince Adi, has more than 93,000 subscribers. Many of his videos have garnered over 200,000 views per video.

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Adi picking up a Structural Break in the path less travelled

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Mr Aditya Talwar

India Prince Adi

Adi doing a show-and-tell video on the streets of Taichung City, Taiwan.
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