

issue #125 — APR-JUN 2021

# The ALUMNUS

"D&I is more than just a checklist of programmes or policies. It involves the respectful and genuine embrace of people of different backgrounds and perspectives."

DR ANDREW TAY [MEDICINE '07], DIRECTOR & HEAD, HEALTH AND WELLBEING TEAM [OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT]

## KEEPING DOORS OPEN

MR DARIUS CHEUNG  
(ENGINEERING '04)

## WHY NEW PERSPECTIVES MATTER

MS AKSHITA NANDA  
(SCIENCE '00)

## FACING THE FACTS ON RACE

A DISCUSSION ON  
IDENTITY, XENOPHOBIA  
AND DISCRIMINATION



# STRIKING A BETTER BALANCE

WHAT IT TAKES TO MEET THE NEEDS OF A DIVERSE UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY  
AND MAKE NUS A SAFE AND INCLUSIVE PLACE FOR ALL

# MEXICAN FILM FESTIVAL IN SINGAPORE 2021

**30 June to 2 July**  
**Wednesday to Friday**  
**7.30pm**

Shaw Foundation Alumni House



alumnet.events/MFF21

Limited seats due to safe management measures.

Event Partner:

**AMEXCID**  
AGENCIA MEXICANA  
DE COOPERACIÓN INTERNACIONAL  
PARA EL DESARROLLO



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The AlumNUS clinched the  
following award at APEX 2020:

**AWARD OF EXCELLENCE**  
Magazines, Journals & Tabloids Print +32PP

For more information or to read The AlumNUS online,  
please visit [nus.edu.sg/alumnet/TheAlumNUS](https://nus.edu.sg/alumnet/TheAlumNUS).

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## PRESERVING OUR HERITAGE: NUS launches postgraduate programmes in architectural conservation

The aim is to elevate efforts to preserve the region's heritage.

**THE NEW MASTER OF ARTS IN ARCHITECTURAL CONSERVATION (MAArC) PROGRAMME KICKED OFF ON 8 JANUARY WITH AN ORIENTATION SESSION FOR ITS INAUGURAL COHORT.** Offered by the NUS School of Design and Environment's Department of Architecture, the MAArC offers a uniquely Asian perspective on architectural conservation education in Singapore and the region.

The orientation session was held at the NUS Baba House, a fitting venue as the 126-year-old building serves as a laboratory by facilitating hands-on training and research into architectural conservation. It is one of two unique resources available to the Department, the other being the Tun Tan Cheng Lock Centre for Asian Architectural and Urban Heritage in Melaka, Malaysia.

"We have been doing a lot of conservation work in Singapore since the

1970s and '80s, but we need a knowledge base," said Professor Ho Puay Peng, Head of NUS Architecture and UNESCO Chair Professor on Architectural Heritage Conservation and Management in Asia. "Hopefully, with this programme, we will train a body of outstanding conservationists and policymakers so that they can bring Singapore and the region's conservationism to another level."

The MAArC offers three streams that provide a holistic and comprehensive education in historic building conservation: policy and management; design in the historic urban context; and materials and technology. Students in the programme may choose one of the streams as a specialisation. Through this balanced approach, MAArC students can contribute to critical discourse, shaping the practice by providing thought leadership.

At the event, Ms Hwang Yu-Ning (Design and Environment '91), Chief Planner and Deputy Chief Executive Officer of the Urban Redevelopment Authority of Singapore, shared, "I appreciate the approach that the School is intending to take, that will balance not just the academic part but also the practitioner as well as the policy parts because all these need to come together to make a conservation programme work."

NUS Architecture undergraduate Ms Cardinia Gladys, who is part of this first cohort of MAArC students, wants to help kickstart an "ecosystem of conservation practitioners" that will help make conservation more accessible to the region. Her classmate, retired radiologist and NUS Medicine alumnus Dr Lee Peng Hui (Medicine '86), hopes to contribute to conserving Modernist architecture. He shared, "I think there have been a lot of people looking at the older buildings, such as the pre-Second World War buildings, and I think it's also important to maintain significant modern heritage."

The MAArC programme has two intakes every year, in January and August. It can be done full-time in a year or taken flexibly between two and four years. The January 2022 Intake application period for the MSc (Project Management), MSc (Integrated Sustainable Design), MA (Architectural Conservation) and Graduate Diploma in Architectural Conservation is from 15 July to 15 September 2021.



For more information on the MAArC, visit [www.sde.nus.edu.sg/education/graduate-programmes/graduate-programmes-by-coursework](http://www.sde.nus.edu.sg/education/graduate-programmes/graduate-programmes-by-coursework).



BSA Charity Run participants running at East Coast Park in Singapore.



Mr Andrew Lee, a Year 4 NUS Business student and a bursary recipient, at the run. Participants can choose their own routes as long as they hit the required distance.

## KEEPING UP THE GOOD WORK

Despite pandemic restrictions, NUS Business School hits a record high in a virtual charity run, with over half a million dollars raised.

**NUS BUSINESS' FLAGSHIP CHARITY RUN HAS RAISED A RECORD AMOUNT OF OVER \$525,000 AS OF 16 JANUARY FOR NEEDY STUDENTS AND FAMILIES.** In its 11<sup>th</sup> year, the *NUS Business School Alumni Association Charity Run* (BCR) attracted over 500 participants in its first-ever virtual event.

BCR 2021 is presented by the NUS Business School Alumni Association (NUSBSA) and supported by BIZAlum, the School's alumni office and the student-led NUS Bizad Club.

The amount raised, which will go towards student bursaries and the TOUCH Emergency Relief Fund by TOUCH Community Services, had smashed last year's \$475,000 record.

"It has been truly heart-warming to see the generous support from our donors, sponsors, participants and student leaders during these unprecedented times," said the Chairperson of BCR2021 Ms Jeannette Chan.

Mr Andrew Lee, a Year 4 NUS Business student, said, "The BSA Charity Run is a wonderful annual initiative to help raise funds for the needy in our community. As a recipient of the NUSBSA bursary, I am grateful for the kindness that has been extended to me and am glad to participate in this year's edition as a runner."

Due to the pandemic, the run was conducted virtually over two weeks, from 1 to 14 January. In a video, NUS Business School's Dean and Distinguished Professor Andrew Rose said, "I know our organisers and students really do miss being able to visit the TOUCH beneficiaries, while the die-hard runners are going to miss the challenging NUS route. Now, more than ever, we need to come together."

The virtual run has also attracted the support and participation of overseas alumni. For example, the NUS Business School Mandarin Alumni Association has set up a

few cash prizes totalling \$600 which will be donated on behalf of the winners.

Second-time BCR participant Ms Ada Chua said, "It's been a great way to start 2021 — keeping fit with friends while running for a good cause. I am glad that the BSA Charity Run has adapted its annual event. This is a great model and acts as encouragement for us to continue to find ways to do good and do better, regardless of our circumstances."

The event also saw Mr Desmond Lee (Law '01), Minister for National Development and Minister-in-charge of Social Services Integration, kicking off the run virtually on 1 January and NUS President Professor Tan Eng Chye (Science '85) giving a video speech in the closing ceremony on 16 January.

In his Instagram post, Prof Tan said that, "Our NUS family truly has a heart for the communities we serve. It is heartening to hear that more than \$525,000 has been raised to support low-income families affected by the pandemic."

Over the past 10 years, BCR has attracted 11,500 participants and raised over \$1.77 million in support of needy students and 13 social services agencies.



Those who wish to donate to BCR2021 can visit [www.bcr2021.com](http://www.bcr2021.com).



This article was first published on 20 January in NUS News at [news.nus.edu.sg/preserving-our-heritage-nus-launches-postgraduate-programmes-in-architectural-conservation](http://news.nus.edu.sg/preserving-our-heritage-nus-launches-postgraduate-programmes-in-architectural-conservation).

This article was first published on 20 January in NUS News at [news.nus.edu.sg/nus-business-hits-record-high-in-virtual-charity-run-with-over-half-a-million-raised](http://news.nus.edu.sg/nus-business-hits-record-high-in-virtual-charity-run-with-over-half-a-million-raised).

**PROFESSOR SAW SWEE HOCK (ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES '56, '61)**, a leading expert in statistics and renowned philanthropist, passed away on 16 February at the age of 89.

Prof Saw was the President's Honorary Professor of Statistics at NUS, and Professorial Fellow at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. He served as a member of the NUS Board of Trustees from 2004 to 2015. His generous donations include a landmark gift in 2011 that led to the establishment of the NUS Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health.

Prof Saw's contributions in the field of statistics and demography as well as his philanthropic work were recognised in 2015 when he was conferred an Honorary Doctor of Letters by NUS.

"Professor Saw Swee Hock was a close friend of NUS, and we are profoundly grateful for his contributions to the University in so many ways — as an academic, an educator, a benefactor,

and a member of our Board of Trustees. We are deeply saddened by his passing, and our hearts go out to his family in this difficult time," said NUS President Professor Tan Eng Chye (Science '85).

### A WORLD-RENOWNED EXPERT IN STATISTICS AND DEMOGRAPHY

Prof Saw received his Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts degrees from the University of Malaya in Singapore (the predecessor institution of NUS) in 1956 and 1961, and obtained his PhD in Statistics from the London School of Economics (LSE) in 1963.

His academic career included the University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur and the University of Hong Kong before serving as Professor of Statistics at NUS from 1975 to 1991. He also held visiting positions in top universities including Princeton, Stanford, Cambridge and LSE.

## IN MEMORIAM:

# PROFESSOR SAW SWEE HOCK, DISTINGUISHED ACADEMIC AND GENEROUS BENEFACTOR



**We will always be indebted to Professor Saw, whose gift enabled us to set up our School. The ongoing COVID-19 crisis is a stark reminder that the major public health issues confronting us are becoming increasingly complex and require multiple levels of intervention.**

*Professor Teo Yik Ying, Dean of the NUS Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health*

The international community tapped on Prof Saw's expertise in statistics and demography, as did the Singapore government. He served on the United Nations Committee on Salary Adjustments, the International Statistical Institute, and the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population. Prof Saw was also the first chairman of Singapore's National Statistical Commission — the predecessor of the Singapore Department of Statistics.

### PHILANTHROPIC WORK

Deeply committed to education, Prof Saw was a generous donor to NUS. He had been a regular donor, making gifts annually to support various programmes at the University.

In 2002, he supported the Saw Swee Hock Professorship in Statistics. He provided an endowment in 2004 to award bursaries annually to financially-needy final-year students across all faculties to allow them to focus on their studies without the need to work part-time. In celebration of NUS' 100<sup>th</sup> year anniversary in 2005, he supported the Saw Swee Hock Centennial Professorship in Law.

In 2011, Prof Saw made a landmark gift which was used to establish the NUS Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health. The School educates and trains public health professionals, and undertakes cutting-edge research on innovative models of public health and healthcare delivery systems.

"We will always be indebted to Professor Saw, whose gift enabled us to set up our School. The ongoing COVID-19 crisis is a stark reminder that the major public health

issues confronting us are becoming increasingly complex and require multiple levels of intervention. We are determined to carry on Professor Saw's legacy by continuing to play a transformative role in raising the standard of public health in Singapore and the surrounding region," said Professor Teo Yik Ying (Affiliate Alumnus '19), Dean of the NUS Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health.

Professor Chia Kee Seng (Medicine '81), the Founding Dean of the NUS Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health who served from 2011 to 2017, shared that he had the privilege of a very close relationship with Prof Saw.

"I recall vividly our monthly lunches where he repeatedly emphasised that the School should focus on making societal impact rather than just publishing academic papers. He was very glad when we had our first Singapore International Public Health Conference in 2012 where the School released its projection of the future burden of diabetes. This contributed to the launch of the War on Diabetes," said Prof Chia. He added that Prof Saw's generous donation has also resulted in a School that is currently helping to control the COVID-19 pandemic.

Prof Saw received the Distinguished Alumni Service Award in 2005 from NUS, as well as the Outstanding Service Award in 2007. On the national level, he was bestowed the Public Service Medal (PBM) at the 2013 National Day Awards. That year, he also received the President's Award for Philanthropy (Individual).



*The newly renovated Techno Edge canteen.*

## WELCOMING THE NEW TECHNO EDGE CANTEEN

**THE NEWLY-RENOVATED TECHNO EDGE CANTEEN** is now open to students and staff! The canteen had been closed for renovations since December 2018 and many of the students, especially those from the School of Engineering, are very excited about its re-opening. While some of the favourite stores and their amiable owners are no longer around, other popular choices such as the Western Fare, Vegetarian Food, Indian Cuisine, Mixed Vegetable Rice and Ramen & Fish Soup have returned. Offering a plethora of delicious options for its patrons with several new stores, there is something for everyone!

 This article was first published on 16 February in **NUS News** at [news.nus.edu.sg/in-memoriam-professor-saw-swee-hock-distinguished-academic-and-generous-benefactor](https://news.nus.edu.sg/in-memoriam-professor-saw-swee-hock-distinguished-academic-and-generous-benefactor).

# Chinese New Year Appreciation Dinner

A creative approach to ushering the Year of the Ox, in light of social distancing measures.

**UNDAUNTED BY THE RESTRICTIONS ON SOCIAL GATHERINGS BROUGHT ABOUT DUE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**, over 100 alumni leaders, volunteers, partners, colleagues and students tuned in virtually on 17 February to usher in the Year of the Ox. The successful event, hosted by NUS President and NUS Alumni Relations, was meant to thank the University's valued partners for their unwavering support and contributions towards engaging the alumni community. The theme this year was "New Beginnings" — represented by the Chinese character "chun" (春), or "Spring"; the evening of celebrations symbolised moving on to renewed hope for the future. Before the programme began, guests received a treasure trove of goodies which included the night's dinner, *lohei* and some small

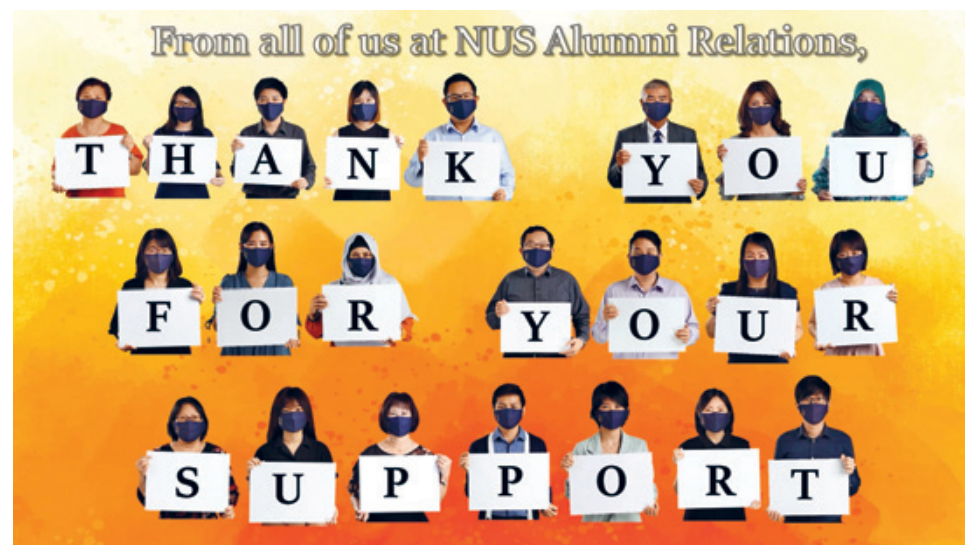


The Lion dance troupe in action.

gifts that were delivered to their doorsteps.

In spite of the virtual format, guests were still treated to a jam-packed evening of pre-recorded performances while

savouring a sumptuous meal in the comfort of their homes. As they dived into their delicious bento boxes, which included Chinese dishes traditionally enjoyed during the festive season, guests were showered with blessings and good fortune with a pre-recorded lion dance performance. Guests also enjoyed a video presentation by NUS Alumni Relations titled "A Year in Reflection — 2020" and a pre-recorded performance by the Lorong Boys, formed by talented alumni from the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music. With Mr Jonathan Shin ('15) on keyboards, Mr Rit Xu ('15) on flute and Mr Joachim Lim ('14) on cajon and



Despite being held virtually, the event still afforded guests the opportunity to mingle and usher in the new year together.



The evening's meal, delivered to guests' homes.



Prof Tan Eng Chye sharing his auspicious wishes.

percussion, guests tuned into the band's melodic rendition of *Gong Xi Fa Cai* (恭喜发财), *Gong Xi Gong Xi* (恭喜恭喜) and *He Xin Nian* (贺新年).

Every Chinese New Year is marked by the tossing of *lohei*, and this year was no different. To replicate the festive cheer, the host for the evening, Mr Roystonn Loh (Arts and Social Sciences '13), guided guests through a virtual *lohei* where everyone enthusiastically proclaimed



Mr Roystonn Loh leading the way during the lohei segment.



The evening's musical entertainment was provided by the Lorong Boys.

auspicious phrases and tossed the prepacked *yusheng* to usher in good wealth and health. To round off the celebration, everyone joined hands for three rounds of toasting led by Director of NUS Alumni Relations, Mr Bernard Toh (Architecture '84) — to scale new heights, stay committed to their alma mater, and to good spirits in the year of the Metal Ox. 2020 might have "Zoom-ed" past, but as NUS President Professor Tan Eng Chye (Science '85) reassured in his Opening Address — "we will ride through the current pandemic together and emerge stronger than before". Happy *Niu Year*!

FUTURE-READY WORKSHOPS

# SUCCESSFULLY NAVIGATING THE WORLD OF NEGOTIATIONS



Mr Anuj Jagannathan,  
Chairperson of the  
NUS Alumni San  
Francisco Chapter and  
experienced trainer,  
coach and author.

THE FIRST ITERATION OF FUTURE-READY WORKSHOPS FOR 2021 on 12 January featured Mr Anuj Jagannathan (Business '16), Chairperson of the NUS Alumni San Francisco Chapter and experienced coach. Mr Jagannathan, who is the author of Amazon bestsellers on the topic of negotiation, and who has hosted webinars and training sessions on the subject around the world, provided attendees with insights into common negotiation strategies and how to apply them effectively. Attendees learned more about the various stages of negotiation and what they can do in order to ensure their success.

HEALTH & WELLNESS

# Smiling Your Way to Good Oral Health

ON 21 JANUARY, IN A SESSION ORGANISED IN PARTNERSHIP WITH National University Hospital (NUH) and National University Centre for Oral Health Singapore (NUCOHS), Health & Wellness welcomed Dental Consultant Dr Tay Chong Meng (Dentistry '03) and orthodontist Dr Wilson Lu (Dentistry '11). Dr Tay spoke on Taking Charge of Your Oral Health, imparting his knowledge on common oral diseases and preventive oral care to the audience. Dr Lu subsequently gave a short talk on Orthodontics – Aligning for Better Health, taking the audience through different treatments, preventable orthodontic problems and steps to mitigate them.



Dr Tay Chong Meng,  
Dental Consultant at  
the National University  
Health System  
Singapore.



Dr Wilson Lu,  
Orthodontist at the  
National University Centre  
for Oral Health Singapore  
and Assistant Professor  
at the NUS Faculty of  
Dentistry.



EMBASSY  
OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION  
IN THE REPUBLIC OF SINGAPORE



Office of Alumni Relations



A war drama set during the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, in which Soviet troops held on to a border stronghold for nine days.



**6 May 2021 (Thursday)**  
**7.30pm - 10.30pm**

Auditorium, Shaw Foundation Alumni House\*



Please register at  
[alumnet.events/FFmay21](http://alumnet.events/FFmay21)

\*Limited seats due to safe management measures



Runtime : 3 hours  
(In Russian with English subtitles)



# All You Need to Know About Strokes

STROKE, the fourth leading cause of death in Singapore, is also one of the top contributors of adult disability. With an increasingly ageing population, the danger and burden that strokes pose will continue to rise. Join Dr Chou Ning in this illuminating talk on the different types of strokes, risk factors and ways to prevent them.

**Dr Chou Ning**  
(Medicine '93)

Senior Consultant Neurosurgeon and Director,  
CHOU Neuroscience Clinic, Farrer Park Hospital



Office of  
Alumni Relations



**22 April 2021**  
**(Thursday)**  
**7.30pm - 9.00pm**  
via Zoom



» JOIN US ONLINE!

Register at [alumnet.events/HWapr21](http://alumnet.events/HWapr21)

## TECH TALK

## HELPING BUSINESSES TRANSFORM USING IT – THE TRANSFORMATION THAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN WITHIN



Dr Jenson Goh  
(Computing '97),  
Chief Information & Learning  
Officer, Monde Nissin

THE 16 FEBRUARY SESSION OF TECH TALK featured Dr Jenson Goh (Computing '97), Chief Information and Learning Officer at Monde Nissin, who brought alumni through an extensive presentation on the challenges faced in driving business transformation using IT, especially the importance of applying knowledge and skills acquired in class through practice. With his vast experience in strategising IT use and leading sustainability initiatives, Dr Goh patiently responded to questions from the chat, in particular pain points that leaders and teams often face in finding the right solutions to drive business transformation within the organisation.



➤ Catch up on all our webinars at [alumnet.events/webinars/](https://alumnet.events/webinars/)



Speakers:

### Dr Nicholas Ho (Engineering '13)

Lecturer and Consultant,  
Artificial Intelligence Practice,  
Institute of Systems Science, NUS



### Mr Ng Kok Leong (Computing '99)

Senior Lecturer and Consultant,  
Digital Strategy and Leadership Practice,  
Institute of Systems Science, NUS



18 May 2021 (Tuesday)  
7.30pm to 9.00pm

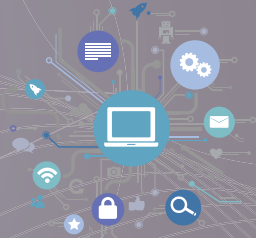


Register at [alumnet.events/TSmay21](https://alumnet.events/TSmay21)

## IoT & 5G Security for the Future

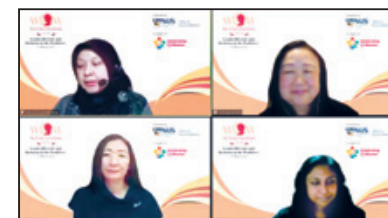
One of the biggest concerns with the Internet of Things (IoT) is ensuring that networks, data and devices are secure. The rise of 5G has also been projected as a catalyst in driving the adoption of Artificial Intelligence (AI), IoT and Robotics. Hear from our speakers who will share their insights on:

- Use cases of 5G in IoT technology and autonomous systems; and
- Security considerations to enhance IoT security.



## WOW: IN CONVERSATION [ONLINE]

# Promoting Gender Diversity and Inclusion in the Workforce



Minister Mrs Josephine Teo (above) kicked off the proceedings with an inspiring speech.

IN THE GLOBAL GENDER GAP REPORT 2020 COMPILED BY THE WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM, Singapore improved 13 notches to rank 54<sup>th</sup> out of 153 countries. Increasingly, companies in Singapore are realising the importance of gender diversity in the workplace, as more women are included on boards and in key leadership positions. While these are steps in the right direction, what more can employers or employees do to ensure that women are well-represented and included; that policies and workplace practices are conducive for women to be treated respectfully and equally?

These questions were answered at the second edition of *WoW: In Conversation* by a distinguished panel of alumnae – Guest-of-Honour, Mrs Josephine Teo (Arts and Social Sciences '90), Minister for Manpower & Second Minister for Home Affairs;

Ms Lyn Lee (Arts and Social Sciences '89), Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer of Royal Dutch Shell; Dr Vandana Ramachandran (Science (PhD) '03), Co-founder of Singapore Women in Science; and Ms Georgette Tan (Arts and Social Sciences '82), President of United Women Singapore. Moderated by Dr Intan Azura Mokhtar (Science '98, Public Policy '08), Member of the NUS Alumni Advisory Board, over 150 alumni, students and staff attended the virtual session held on 10 March.

Mrs Josephine Teo inaugurated the night's events with a speech that reminded attendees how everyone has a part to play in forging gender parity – that only with inclusive behaviours and tangible action will change happen. She commended educational institutions such as NUS that are actively contributing to the dialogue on gender equality, and encouraged more alumnae to step up and embrace opportunities to inspire others. With 2021 dedicated as the Year of Celebrating SG Women, *WoW: In Conversation* was well-timed to deep-dive into the multi-faceted issues faced by women in the workforce.

During the robust discussion, which centred on the importance of Gender Diversity and

Inclusion in the Workplace, panellists candidly shared their personal challenges to become successful in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) fields that were typically dominated by their male peers. "It's not about competence, it's about building [their] confidence", Ms Georgette Tan proclaimed. Ms Lyn Lee agreed, emphasising that women should not falter when labelled "too loud" or "too opinionated", but instead build an innate confidence and belief in their own abilities and skills. Dr Vandana also mentioned that, with good role models, they will be a morale-booster for younger ladies to aspire towards.

As the discussion veered to what more companies could do to promote inclusion in the workplace, panellists agreed that companies should come up with family-friendly policies that addressed not only the concerns of women, but also the considerations of men. Particularly, it was important to assuage the fears of men that their positions will not be replaced nor will they lose out to their peers if they choose to fulfil their parental duties.

As with the previous edition of *WoW*, the audience kept the panellists fully occupied, with them agreeing to take on more questions via e-mail. Stay tuned for more insights in the next issue of *The AlumNUS* magazine!

The session featured a distinguished panel of women alumni as well as faculty, including NUS President Prof Tan Eng Chye.



# NEWER HEIGHTS TO SCALE

Professor Susanna Leong (Law '89), NUS Vice Provost (Masters' Programmes & Lifelong Education) and Dean (School of Continuing & Lifelong Education – NUS SCALE), discusses the University's evolving approach to Lifelong Learning.

**The future may be mistier, yet it presents new opportunities for growth.** There is no telling when the COVID-19 pandemic will end, but we are certain that it has moved us to embrace a "new normal". Last year, we saw radical governmental policies, emerging expectations around remote working, accelerated technological adoption and the unusual consolidation of businesses within and across industries. Quite evidently, the gap between the conventional practices of yesterday and requirements of tomorrow is widening at warp speed. We must thus seize new possible opportunities for growth.

**Staying ahead of the game will involve new priorities and areas of focus.** Organisations find themselves operating in an environment that is in a constant flux. Traditional business models are disrupted, and often

superseded by emerging technological solutions. Teams therefore need to constantly innovate and create differentiating value, and this can be done by sharpening and sustaining competitive advantages.

**The only sustainable advantage is to learn faster than your competitors and stay ahead of the competition.** To do new things, and create value in response to constant shifts, we will need to be highly adaptive and quick-witted. Embracing agile set-ups, nurturing a strong culture of learning, and building the fitness for change will help us to remain nimble and competitive. We must be open to stepping out of our comfort zones, engage in a process of learning and unlearning, and be prepared to become a novice many times over, throughout our professional careers.

**NUS' commitment to Lifelong Learning support for our alumni and our wider communities is firm.** Accelerated investment in the upskilling and reskilling of workers could add at least \$6.5 trillion to global GDP, create 5.3 million (net) new jobs by 2030 and help develop more inclusive and sustainable economies worldwide. These are the key findings from a January 2021 World Economic Forum report. At NUS, we too recognise that, in certain disciplines, one's skills and knowledge have a much shorter shelf life today. A NUS education may begin with a first formal degree, but it does not end there. We are committed to ensuring that our graduates remain future-ready and an integral part of this involves supporting our alumni through Continuous Education and Training (CET) initiatives throughout their careers.

In June 2016, SCALE was established, as a formal commitment of the University to make CET an integral part of our education. NUS SCALE draws on the multidisciplinary expertise of all 16 of our Schools/Faculties and SCALE, and collaborates closely with the industries and government agencies such as SSG,



IMDA and WSG in offering high-quality full qualification programmes and short courses for working adults (our alumni and the general public) in Singapore and beyond.

**Responding with speed and innovation.** The University has been strategically proactive in workforce upskilling and reskilling. From introducing innovative multidisciplinary education to modernising online learning andragogy, we seek to offer our learners a high value-adding and engaging learning experience.

As you may be aware, the University has also put in place, very quickly, various initiatives to support our graduating cohorts, alumni and the workforce, such as the NUS Resilience and Growth (R&G) and the SGUnited Skills Programme, during this difficult time.

**Ensuring accessibility and inclusiveness.** We are also constantly mindful that we make learning possible for busy working adults. Other than offering classes in the evenings and weekends, we are offering Executive and Graduate Certificates for learners who would like to learn in a bite-sized, flexible manner, but may wish to stack their credentials into a postgraduate certificate. For learners who are looking at acquiring industry-relevant skills

for immediate application to their jobs, they could explore NUS Professional Certificate programmes. These certificate programmes, developed by NUS faculties, span in-demand areas such as Data Science, Artificial Intelligence, Digital Marketing and many more.

**Expanding NUS CET offerings to our wider communities.** Working professionals who are motivated to earn their first undergraduate degree at NUS can now pursue their dream through the Advance@NUS programme, which prioritises career experiences in selecting applicants. For mid-career professionals, managers and executives who are looking to change industries, our Professional Conversion Programmes (PCPs) cater to this group, helping them to acquire the new skills needed to facilitate a career switch into sectors such as Nursing and Digital Sales.

**Lifelong Learning commitment to you, 20 years and beyond.** We are formulating more offerings for our alumni and envisioning them to lead to a bigger and more exciting realm of learning experiences. We want to partner you in shaping these initiatives, so they best suit your learning needs and aspirations. We will be reaching out soon to hear your views.

For more information about NUS' various CET initiatives, visit [scale.nus.edu.sg](https://scale.nus.edu.sg).



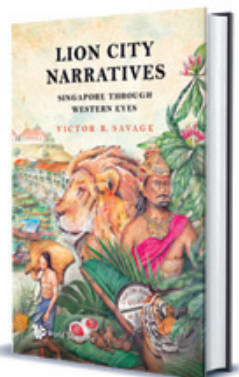
## LION CITY NARRATIVES: SINGAPORE THROUGH WESTERN EYES

Assoc Prof Victor R Savage  
(Arts and Social Sciences '72)

**In this study of subjective Western impressions of Singapore's 145 years of colonial history, from 1819 to 1963, Associate Professor Victor R Savage seeks to present a biography of Singapore's evolution as a city.**

**This book also provides cultural insights into Singapore's population – both Western residents and transient visitors, as well as locals – and opens a window into Singapore's development at a time when the UK and the West were at their cultural, economic and political zenith.**

**This work will appeal to Singaporeans who are interested in understanding the country's colonial past, as well as Westerners interested in the European/colonial cultural persona in the development of Singapore.**



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Prof Susanna Leong believes that Lifelong Learning should be an integral part of education.



# WHERE NO ONE FEELS LEFT OUT

"Diversity and inclusion" (D&I) has become a common catchphrase among governments, businesses and universities. At NUS, strong advocacy for D&I from various angles is getting the word out that our differences really are what make us stronger.

TEXT BY  
WANDA TAN

**A**ROUND THE WORLD, WE ARE IN THE MIDST OF A COLLECTIVE RECKONING OVER QUESTIONS OF DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION. Social movements like #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter have prompted a deep, and often uncomfortable, rethinking among organisations and individuals of their attitudes on sexual harassment and racial prejudice. The rise of younger, activist-minded millennials and Gen-Zers in the workplace is forcing companies and top executives to publicly stand up for such issues. The inequalities laid bare by the COVID-19 pandemic have only added grist to the mill, propelling the diversity and inclusion (D&I) agenda forward globally — including in universities.

Beyond being 'the right thing to do', D&I in higher education also serves a practical purpose. The wider a university casts its net during the admissions process — across the divides of race, religion, social class, gender, age, physical ability and more — the stronger is its student talent pool. This in turn enables students to interact with and understand different perspectives, thus enhancing their cultural intelligence, which is "a key predictor of performance when the work



## DID YOU KNOW? ↓

A December 2020 LinkedIn article by CEO and Chairman of Barnes & Noble Education, Mr Michael Huseby, predicted that the **growing digital divide** will become a focus of D&I for higher education institutions this year.

context is culturally diverse", according to an article by leading educational digital content provider eSchool Media.

How does NUS aspire to make a difference in the D&I space? What initiatives has the University developed or thrown its support behind to create a campus environment where all students, faculty and staff are celebrated and embraced? The *AlumNUS* speaks with passionate (and compassionate) members of the NUS community to find out.

## MAKING DEGREES MORE ACCESSIBLE

University places, in many parts of the world, have traditionally gone to the academically-inclined or those from well-to-do families. But things are changing. Together with other local universities, NUS has been moving away from strictly grade-based to aptitude-based admissions in recent years. Rather than selecting only straight-A students, the University is increasingly assessing prospective students' interest in the course they apply for, as well as their non-academic achievements in areas such as sports, the arts and community service.

This transition has continued even as COVID-19 forced admissions interviews and tests to be held online. Said Professor Bernard Tan (Science '89), Senior Vice Provost (Undergraduate Education) of NUS, to *The Straits Times* in May 2020: "While the method of assessment might have changed, it has not dented our commitment to identify students via aptitude-based

**While the method of assessment might have changed, it has not dented our commitment to identify students via aptitude-based admissions. In fact, the number of applicants considered under aptitude-based admissions has increased by more than 23 per cent [in 2020].**

Professor Bernard Tan, NUS Senior Vice Provost (Undergraduate Education)



admissions. In fact, the number of applicants considered under aptitude-based admissions has increased by more than 23 per cent this year."

In line with this shift, NUS has introduced several initiatives aimed at taking in students whose path to University is outside the conventional Junior College (JC) route. For example, a special scheme launched in time for Academic Year 2019/2020 encouraged Singapore's five polytechnics to each nominate up to 40 students with entrepreneurial abilities for admission to NUS. Selected candidates will get to benefit from NUS' active industry partnerships and experiential entrepreneurial education, including the NUS Overseas Colleges programme.

Those with an aptitude or passion for the law will now have more opportunities to enter the NUS Faculty of Law as well, thanks to a new pilot initiative. As part of a broader effort to transform legal education, the Faculty will increase the number of shortlisted applicants to be considered for admission to its Bachelor of Laws programme for Academic Year 2021/2022. The top five per cent of students across all JCs and Millennia Institute who are keen to study law will be eligible for shortlisting,

alongside the 800 or so whittled down each year through the regular admissions process.

Some 50 students — mostly from schools with lower representation in the Faculty of Law — are expected to be added to the shortlist annually this way, and will hopefully create a more diverse student body. "Inclusion and diversity in the student population does not only benefit those who earn a place in law school. It also benefits the entire cohort, by better reflecting the diversity of society as a whole and ensuring that diverse voices and perspectives are present in the classroom — as they are in life," said Faculty of Law Dean Professor Simon Chesterman upon the announcement of the scheme.

Aware that there are many working adults who may have previously missed out on a university education due to financial or other reasons, NUS is also actively courting this demographic. In March 2020, the University launched its inaugural admissions cycle for the *Advance@NUS* admissions pathway, under which adult learners who have rich professional experience but do not have a university degree can enter selected full-time undergraduate degree programmes at NUS. This pathway allows working adults to earn their first bachelor's degree in highly-relevant fields such as business and engineering, so that they can broaden their knowledge base and skills and improve their future career prospects.

NUS School of Continuing and Lifelong Education (SCALE), which administers *Advance@NUS*, believes that having adult learners take classes side-by-side



**3,441**  
BURSARIES  
and  
**1,954**  
SCHOLARSHIPS  
were awarded  
to NUS  
undergraduates  
in Academic Year  
2019/2020.



## AN UNINTENDED BOON

Citing Ministry of Education figures, *The Straits Times* reported that **17,500 STUDENTS** were enrolled in Singapore's six autonomous universities (including NUS) in 2020, roughly 1,000 more than planned due to the disruption caused by the ongoing pandemic. The additional places went to Singaporeans who had initially planned to study overseas, as well as polytechnic diploma holders who opted to study instead of joining a weak job market.

with younger undergraduates is advantageous for both groups. "We envisage a positive multiplier effect from *Advance@NUS* — adult learners can fulfil their personal aspirations of getting a degree, and the younger undergraduate students will have much to gain from our adult learners' rich industry experience, maturity and motivation," said Professor Susanna Leong (Law '89), NUS' Vice Provost (Masters' Programmes & Lifelong Education) and Dean of SCALE, in a press release.

## A MORE LEVEL PLAYING FIELD

An ideal education system is one that uplifts all — where no one lacks educational opportunities, and everyone gets a fair shake at acquiring knowledge and skills to improve the trajectory of their lives. An undergraduate degree remains a prerequisite for many jobs, and university graduates typically command higher starting salaries and enjoy better employment prospects than diploma holders. As such, no one should be shut out of higher education, least of all those from financially-disadvantaged backgrounds.

In Academic Year 2019/2020, NUS awarded 3,441 bursaries and 1,954 scholarships to deserving undergraduate students, enabling them to pursue their academic aspirations, realise their full potential and achieve social mobility. As last year was especially tough for families impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, the University provided extra financial support to students from these households in the form of the NUS Students Solidarity Fund. With donations from the NUS community, the Fund amounted to \$1.6

million as of 1 September 2020, which was disbursed as one-time grants to some 3,100 students.

To complement the NUS Students Solidarity Fund and widen the coverage of financially-needy students receiving assistance, the NUS Students' Union (NUSSU) also set up the NUSSU Unity Relief Fund in June 2020. This 'for students, by students' initiative, launched with \$200,000 from NUSSU's coffers and supplemented by student donations, offered a one-time payment of \$250 to students facing financial hardship amid the crisis.

"Both my parents are self-employed — one as a stall vendor in a primary school canteen, and the other in the renovation industry — so their incomes were significantly affected during and after the Circuit Breaker. We had to dip into our savings to fund our living expenses," recalls 22-year-old Ms Jocelyn Goh, a Year 3 student in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. "The financial aid from the NUSSU Unity Relief Fund meant that I could cover my personal expenses for close to a month, which relieved some of the pressure off my family."

**The financial aid from the NUSSU Unity Relief Fund meant that I could cover my personal expenses for close to a month, which relieved some of the pressure off my family.**

Ms Jocelyn Goh, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences student

## → BACK TO SCHOOL



More than 100 adult learners applied to NUS under the *Advance@NUS* admissions pathway in 2020, including Mr Eswaran S/O Manoharan, 26. The first-year Bachelor of Business Administration student tells *The AlumNUS* how the course has already helped him in his job as Managing Director of Kaizen Logistics.

"Pursuing a degree at NUS is one of the best decisions I have made for myself. The biggest advantage is that I am able to apply whatever I learn in school to my business in almost real time. For example, one module I took was on innovation strategy. I learnt that innovation does not have to be industry-shaking; it could be something small that solves a less serious problem but still be impactful in the long run. To improve Kaizen's operations and processes, I built a technology platform for our cross-border logistics services, which used to be handled via email.

I would like to think that I contribute something to my younger course mates as

well. While they read materials in lectures and tutorials, I can share my real-life experiences with them. I offer a different perspective on what it is like to be in the working world.

Having graduated from Nanyang Polytechnic with a Diploma in Business Enterprise IT in 2014, it was initially a bit of a challenge adjusting to formal learning again. I hit a few bumps trying to manage a business and school at the same time, but it helps that my team at Kaizen is able to work independently. This is a fantastic opportunity to acquire new knowledge and shape my business better. I'm glad I jumped at the chance the moment I saw it."



## NEW NAME, SAME AIM

Until recently, SAU was known as the Disability Support Office. Ms Yuen explains that the name change reflects a “more progressive stance” towards supporting students with disabilities.



## ENABLING PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Another underprivileged group all too often excluded from higher education are persons with disabilities — not because they struggle with the academic rigour, but because the system is not designed to accommodate their needs. One way NUS addresses this problem is through the Hannah's Blessings Bursary, which supports financially-needy undergraduates with special needs, particularly those with physical disabilities.

Admitting students with diverse backgrounds to university is one half of the D&I equation; the other half is making them feel included so they feel they belong there and what they say and do matters. To make its campus a safe and welcoming place for everybody, NUS has a network of offices and units dedicated to ensuring that the needs and

preferences of different student groups are met.

The NUS Student Accessibility Unit (SAU), within the Office of Student Affairs (OSA), is one of them. Together with University colleagues, SAU provides a comprehensive range of support services and resources for students

with disabilities and special education needs. Examples include helping students make alternative arrangements with course instructors before the start of modules; maintaining facilities with assistive technologies (such as PitStop @ Yusof Ishak House); providing wheelchair-accessible transport to ferry mobility-impaired students to and from classes; and finding suitable on-campus housing, co-curricular activities, as well as job and internship opportunities for them.

Lending a hand to this group are the student volunteers with NUS Enablers. Set up to champion disability inclusion, this student interest group offers buddy services to peers with special needs. “Alongside SAU, NUS Enablers promotes awareness for a more disability-inclusive campus culture and environment among the student community,” says Ms Agnes Yuen, Assistant Senior Manager at SAU. The Unit's annual Inclusive Fest also brings together the entire NUS community for a series of experiential activities and

**Students with special needs are generally very appreciative and grateful for the individualised support they receive to ensure that their specific needs are met.**

Ms Agnes Yuen, Assistant Senior Manager, NUS Student Accessibility Unit

sharing sessions by persons with disabilities, to help people understand how they can each do their part to build a more inclusive environment.

“Students with special needs are generally very appreciative and grateful for the individualised support they receive to ensure that their specific needs are met,” says Ms Yuen, adding that COVID-19 has not halted such support. “While students with physical disabilities appreciate not having to commute to and from school, those who thrive on interpersonal interactions may find it more daunting an adjustment to make.” For example, NUS Enablers introduced online bonding or game sessions between students with and without special needs. Some students had assistive devices delivered to their homes, while lecture captioning allows hearing-impaired students to follow the online course content.

## RESPECT AND CONSENT

Since Singapore had its own #MeToo moment in April 2019, when then-NUS undergraduate Ms Monica Baey (Arts and Social Sciences '19) came forward on social media with her story as a victim of voyeurism, the issue of sexual harassment or violence is being taken more seriously. A key indicator of this was the establishment of the NUS Victim Care Unit (VCU), the first of its kind in Singapore universities. It provides a central point of contact for students affected by sexual misconduct, and offers a private and safe place for them to seek support in confidence.

“NUS is committed to zero tolerance for sexual misconduct. VCU works alongside other University units to cultivate a safe campus environment — free from sexual and gender-based harassment — where students can live, study and enjoy the best of their educational years,” says Associate Professor Sandy Lim (Arts and Social Sciences '96) from NUS Business School, who directs the VCU. Trained professionals are available to accompany victims to the hospital, police, court and other appointments, as well as give emotional and practical support, including referral to counsellors.

VCU also conducts community engagement and outreach activities, such as talks at first-year orientation programmes and campus residences, seminars on respect and consent, and management training sessions to promote trauma-informed protocols. Currently, the Unit is expanding its services to assist staff as well as students affected by sexual misconduct, with a name change — to NUS Care Unit (NCU) — soon to come.

Grounded in the belief that “it takes students to keep students safe”, Ms Carissa Cheow and three others formed *Students for a Safer NUS*



## PUT ON YOUR JEANS!

**Take part in DENIM DAY this April! Spearheaded by the VCU, this event is held in honour of Sexual Assault Awareness Month, which aims to raise awareness about the misconceptions surrounding sexual assault and provide a visible demonstration of support for survivors of sexual harassment and assault.**

(*safeNUS*) as a strategic partner to the VCU in October 2019. It is Singapore's first fully-student-led organisation dedicated to this cause. Co-Founding Co-President Ms Cheow asserts that they are committed to “ensuring sexual violence remains consistently on our institution's and community's agenda and not merely a hot topic that will fade away once media cycles move on from it”.

In the short time that *safeNUS* has been around, its 60-plus members have already initiated numerous ground-up projects. Some of these are a Warm Line and Support Group, a Sexual Assault First Responder Training course for NUS students, and a Sexual Climate Survey jointly conducted with the VCU to understand the prevalence of sexual misconduct at NUS. *safeNUS* is also collaborating with the Association of Women for Action and Research (AWARE), Singapore's leading gender equality advocacy group, to develop a resource to tackle image-based sexual violence.

“Sexual violence in all its forms remains an unacceptably prevalent problem throughout our campuses, workplaces, and communities,” says Ms Cheow, a survivor herself. She is pursuing a Concurrent Degree Programme in Bachelor of Social Sciences (Honours) and Master in Public Policy at NUS. “It is a systemic problem that affects all of society and originates squarely in deeply-unjust power structures that have enabled it to

**To address sexual violence, we need systemic change. When we reconfigure the power dynamic, we allow more equal relationships built on mutual respect to emerge.**

Ms Carissa Cheow, Co-Founding Co-President, *Students for a Safer NUS*



Ms Cheow (second from left) with her fellow co-founders of *Students for a Safer NUS*.



**[D&I] involves the respectful and genuine embrace of people of different backgrounds and perspectives, thereby fostering an environment where innovation, resilience and respect – the very values of NUS – are unleashed. In this trajectory, it naturally includes people on varying phases of their mental health journey.**

Dr Andrew Tay, Director & Head, Health and Wellbeing Team (Office of the President)

happen. To address sexual violence, we need systemic change. When we reconfigure the power dynamic, we allow more equal relationships built on mutual respect to emerge."

### IN THE FIGHT AGAINST MENTAL HEALTH STIGMA

With the COVID-19 pandemic still raging, mental health – in addition to obvious physical health worries – has been pushed to the fore. Increasingly, people report feeling stressed, anxious, lonely, or depressed. To see how NUS employees were coping, a Senior Management-commissioned staff well-being survey was carried out in July 2020. The results were analysed by a newly-created Mental Well-being Taskforce, who then came up with recommendations to address employees' psychological and emotional needs.

"From the survey, we found that the majority of our employees were doing well, but close to 10 per cent reported severe or extremely severe symptoms of depression, anxiety or stress. Some groups were found to be more affected, including our younger staff, newer staff and foreign ethnicities," says Ms Zheng Kaiwen (Business '07), Senior Associate Director at the Office of Human Resources, who heads the Taskforce. She is one of nine members from the five different NUS bodies who form the Taskforce: the Office of Human Resources; the Department of Psychology; the Office of Safety, Health and Environment; the University Health Centre; and the Organisational Excellence Transformation Unit.

The Taskforce's recommendations – which ranged from encouraging self-care to enhancing support programmes and improving awareness – were subsequently taken up and implemented by a new Health & Wellbeing Team (HWB). Led by Dr Andrew Tay (Medicine '07), HWB sits under

the Office of the President to drive the University's health and wellbeing strategy. It signals the University's commitment to protect the mental wellness of the NUS community.

As Dr Tay explains, "D&I is more than just a checklist of programmes or policies. It involves the respectful and genuine embrace of people of different backgrounds and perspectives, thereby fostering an environment where innovation, resilience and respect – the very values of NUS – are unleashed. In this trajectory, it naturally includes people on varying phases of their mental health journey."

One initiative unveiled by the HWB this year is #AreuOK, a six-month campaign aimed at "driving resource awareness, addressing stigma on mental health, and setting a positive tone of psychological safety and empathy on campus – the hallmark of inclusivity", says Dr Tay. He adds that staff are encouraged to utilise the Employee Assistance Programme for counselling and other support, while efforts are underway to train managers to overcome their discomfort in holding conversations on mental health with staff, among other wellness programmes.

### ADVANCING THE D&I CONVERSATION

The latest proof of the growing awareness around D&I came in February, when NUS revealed plans to revise its General Education (GE) curriculum. Set to launch in Academic Year 2021/2022, the enhanced GE curriculum will give incoming undergraduates a more holistic learning experience with the introduction of a new pillar, *Communities and Engagement*.

Under this pillar, NUS students will take part in community service projects (or design their own) to address issues of global and local importance, such as integrating marginalised groups into society, improving access to healthcare and education, caring for an ageing population, and destigmatising mental illness. As NUS' Senior Deputy President and Provost



SINGAPORE AND D&I:

### LESS THAN STELLAR

The inaugural Kantar Inclusion Index (2019) ranked Singapore as the **second-lowest** globally for workplace D&I. Among the Singapore workers polled:

24% **had been bullied** in the workplace in the past year

32% **were made to "feel uncomfortable"** by their employers

44% **were affected by "stress and anxiety"** at work

**Only 2 Singapore companies** – Singapore Airlines (31<sup>st</sup>) and Singtel (35<sup>th</sup>) – made it to the Refinitiv 2020 D&I Index, which ranks the top 100 most diverse and inclusive organisations globally.

**Women represented 16.2% of board members** in the top 100 primary-listed companies on the Singapore Exchange as of end-2019, lagging behind other international markets which had more than 25% women on boards.



Professor Ho Teck Hua (Engineering '85) said in February, the enhanced GE curriculum will "grow social consciousness in our young leaders" so that they can "lead positive changes in society".

In co-curricular endeavours as well, more and more undergraduates are joining student organisations centred on reaching out to the wider community and helping the less-privileged. Two such groups are the Developer Student Club NUS and the NUS Students' Community Service Club, which spent last December developing an online platform to galvanise in-kind donations and painting the rental flats of low-income elderly households, respectively. Students keen on initiating a project to enhance the appreciation of marginalised communities and foster an inclusive culture can also seek funding through the OSA-administered Diversity and Inclusion Grant.

Elsewhere in the NUS community, alumni-led initiatives allow people to engage in honest, informed discussions on D&I-related matters, and force them to rethink their prejudices. *WoW: In Conversation*, for instance, is a women's empowerment platform where distinguished female alumni are celebrated and can inspire others. Its founder, NUS Alumni Advisory Board member Dr Intan Azura Mokhtar (Science '98), believes the platform has elevated the "visibility" of women. However, she qualifies, "Although we may have progressed as a society, we are still quite patriarchal. There is still some way for women to play a more significant and dominant role in strategic decision-making and charting the course for our society."

### GETTING TO EQUAL

Unfortunately, Singapore's envied reputation as a top global financial hub does not extend to the D&I sphere. A 2019 poll of 18,000 employees in 14 developed countries by Kantar, a leading data, insights and consulting company, found that Singapore was the



**Addressing matters of inequality and marginality will ultimately benefit all of us, not just the 'have-nots'.**

Dr Mathew Mathews, social scientist

second-worst performing country in terms of workplace D&I practices. Other similar findings show that in the case of D&I, much remains to be done (see "*Singapore and D&I: Less Than Stellar*").

Dr Mathew Mathews (Arts and Social Sciences '99), Head of Social Lab and Principal Research Fellow at NUS' Institute of Policy Studies, reiterates this point: "Quite a bit of the research that I have been involved in has sought to highlight the existing divides in Singapore along various fault lines – whether religious, racial, or based on immigration status and income levels. On the surface, Singapore society looks like it has arrived on every front of inclusion, but the reality is that there is room for further progress."

At a time when COVID-19 has made Singaporeans much more attuned to the needs and challenges faced by the migrant worker community, Dr Mathews is hopeful that it will spark greater empathy and momentum for D&I, even after the pandemic ends. "Addressing matters of inequality and marginality will ultimately benefit all of us, not just the 'have-nots'," he observes. "It is only when we learn to include people in our workplaces, neighbourhoods and friendship groups – even those who are very different from us – that we can tap onto our collective energies to make the world a better place." **A**



PitStop is an inclusive space where students can relax, recharge and reconnect.

**HWB is also focused on the mental health and wellbeing of NUS students, not just staff. To help students struggling with academic-related stress and other mental health issues, a variety of avenues are open to them:**

➤ **PitStop**, opened by OSA, is a dedicated space for students to unwind and engage in relaxing activities such as arts and crafts, games, or even a nap. There is also an assistive technology room for students with special needs. Besides Yusof Ishak House, a second PitStop space at the Faculty of Science is being built.

➤ Started in 2020, the annual **Wellness Festival** is a campus-wide collaboration by OSA and the Faculties. Through workshops ranging from yoga to tote bag painting, students are encouraged to prioritise their mental health and self-care.

## → A HAVEN FOR STUDENTS

➤ At the **University Health Centre** (UHC), free counselling is available for students facing issues such as relationship problems, academic difficulties and low self-esteem. UHC also organises wellness talks and other outreach activities, including a 'Workout from Home' video series during the Circuit Breaker period.

➤ The **Office of Student Affairs** (OSA), through its Student Wellness unit, has a team of dedicated staff who help students adjust to University life and deal with their myriad concerns. Students can also turn to Peer Student Supporters, who are trained in basic mental health literacy, for a listening ear.



# THE JIGSAW PUZZLE OF SOCIAL INCLUSION

It is said that the road to hell is paved with good intentions. Thus, efforts to create a society that promotes diversity need to be carefully thought out — or may end up doing more harm than good, argues **Dr Justin Lee (Arts and Social Sciences '99)**.

**I**NCLUSION' HAS BECOME A BUZZWORD THAT LENDS A SEMBLANCE OF LEGITIMACY TO ALL SORTS OF SOCIAL INITIATIVES. Playgrounds, gyms and supermarkets have sometimes described themselves as inclusive, and usually this means that the infrastructure has been designed to be accessible to people with disabilities. At the workplace itself, companies with a 'diversity and inclusion' strategy commit themselves to making and implementing policies to ensure fair employment and the career development of minority groups. At a broader level, policymakers have touted 'inclusive growth' as an ideal for ensuring that low-income families and workers are not left behind because of economic forces.

However, what counts as proper or adequate inclusion? How can we tell whether we are doing inclusion right? Only when we can clearly articulate what counts as desired inclusion can our efforts be meaningfully guided. When such an ideal is ill-defined or

absent, any effort can claim to be inclusive — or worse, we may not realise that our inclusion efforts have led to unexpected and even negative consequences despite good intentions.

## ARE WE DOING INCLUSION RIGHT?

It is easy to take a position of universal inclusion — that we should include as many groups as possible (women, people with disabilities, ethnic minorities, etc.), under as many circumstances and contexts (education, employment, and so on) whenever possible. For example, we proudly proclaim adherence to the principles of Universal Design — which advocates that products, buildings and environments should be made accessible and usable to the greatest extent possible by all people regardless of their age, ability or other factors — even when we actually harbour private doubts about their feasibility. Such a vision is certainly laudable, but the reality is that trade-offs often must be made, and often without proper consideration. Even within a specific domain, universal inclusion already faces real challenges. A person with disability once told me that a toilet cubicle made larger for a wheelchair user's convenience may be more disorienting for a visually-impaired person, who will need to feel around a larger space for where the fixtures are.

Research has shown that policies or services that claim to be inclusive can be patronising or even oppressive. Scholars of disability issues like Paul Milner and Berni Kelly have explained how inclusion can be potentially oppressive in ways that may not be obvious to the non-disabled. For example, chaperoning people with disabilities to highly public spaces acts as simplistic

**If we were to say that more inclusion is better under all conditions, then we are removing our ability to exercise discretion, discernment and good judgment.**

evidence of community participation — as it may come at the expense of their comfort or choice. People with disabilities may feel that they are being put under the spotlight when they may prefer to avoid unwanted attention. Employers may hire not because they value the person with a disability, but use them as a marketing tool or to demonstrate how socially responsible their companies are.

Those at the 'receiving end' of inclusion efforts may also hold unrealistic ideals of what inclusion should be. Some argue that inclusion should occur as early as possible, wherever it is possible. For example, some think that the lack of integration of children in special schools with the mainstream leads to continual segregation later on in adult life and difficulty gaining employment in the future. The argument is for as much 'mainstreaming' as possible because any form of enclave is considered to be a kind of segregation. Exclusive settings or enclaves are only grudgingly accepted when the persons with disability have very severe needs. These arguments seem to have adopted an 'inclusion-at-all-costs' approach that focuses on a single-minded determination to get people with disabilities to be treated equally with everyone else.

While much more can be done to accommodate people with disabilities, a sensibly inclusive social system is not one that simply seeks to include as much as possible, along all dimensions, across multiple contexts. In fact, inclusion — and on the flip side, exclusion — is part of the larger social mechanism of classifying, sorting and understanding people. If we were to say that more inclusion is better under all conditions, then we are simply removing our ability to exercise discretion, discernment and good judgment.

Having specialised services and space for people with disabilities can offer protection and security, although that protection can also entail the curbing of individual freedom or choice. Enclaves are problematic when

they constrain the mobility of people in and out of them. However, if they allow people with disabilities to enter and leave, but also the non-disabled to do so, they can be a productive mode of inclusion. We should explore multiple models of inclusion to understand their viability and strengths.

## SOMETHING'S GOT TO GIVE

Inclusive initiatives, even if they do not make this explicit, always have some reference group that is the target of their efforts. Like it or not, policymakers will always be able to prioritise what group they would like to focus their inclusion on. This creates some discomfort for all involved. If we introduce quota hiring or anti-discrimination legislation, how do we decide on the protected groups that these laws will cover — women, people with disabilities, people facing mental health issues, people with alternative sexual orientations? All of the above, or some of the above, and why? Furthermore, the more inclusive we try to be, the more challenging it is to achieve social cohesion.

Emile Durkheim, one of the founding fathers of academic sociology, describes the solidarity emerging out of small communities which have shared values and life experiences. This creates a strong bond born out of sameness, which he calls 'mechanical solidarity'. It is much harder to achieve 'organic solidarity', which is born out of difference and interdependence, where communities acknowledge and respect the value of diverse behaviours and beliefs.

However, the solidarity born out of diversity cannot occur without making space for conflict. For instance, in a study by the Singapore Children's Society on how families communicate when fathers are imprisoned, social workers found that families tend to use visitations as opportunities for play or bonding instead of serious talk for working through conflict or interpersonal issues, which require more frequent and extensive dialogue. Visiting families find the allocated time too short, and so some decide to just use the visits for a more light-hearted encounter and focus on family bonding to keep visits enjoyable. However, this merely defers the problem and jeopardises the ability of families to work through their issues. Complex and fragile relationships must be successfully rebuilt, and resolving conflicts of the past and negotiating the future are important matters for the family to address.

## OF PRIORITIES AND PACE

Given that the inclusion of various minority groups may sometimes threaten the existing social cohesion of the larger community, what should the sequence and pace of inclusion be? Some groups have made headway while others have not. Women's issues — whatever one's own assessment of their significance — have become a socially legitimate cause. The social inclusion of people with disabilities and mental health issues, however, has only more recently become regarded as deserving of national attention. But there are minorities such as the LGBTQ community whose inclusion is still hotly contested, much less the highly-marginalised minorities within already marginalised groups, like transsexual sex workers.

If we worry about 'tearing apart the social fabric', we will tend to move carefully and in small steps. Possibly, the sequence of such a strategy would mean focusing on the 'obvious' minorities first and moving to more 'challenging' groups later on. It seems understandable that a society might choose to build inclusion from the inside out, from the centre to the periphery. But the trade-off of such an approach is of course the pace of inclusion. Members of minority groups tell me that such a 'sensible' approach means that we might still be talking about the same issues 30 years down the road. For the mainstream, there is no urgency, but for those who are suffering because of social exclusion, the pace is never quick enough.

We tend to think of our lives as a race, where you compete with others to win. This metaphor fits well into the logic of organisational life and the market economy, and has insidious effects on what we value and how we behave. However, there are other ways to think and behave, by drawing from the logic of community. For example, if we think of life as a puzzle, then we would want to put all the pieces together. Social inclusion is like putting together a jigsaw puzzle whose parts are not prefabricated to fit one another. We will not feel that our social lives are complete until every piece fits into an overall picture. We need to commit ourselves to the idea that every group, however marginalised, would fit in somewhere. **A**



A Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies, Dr Justin Lee is interested in issues related to disability, community development and social services. He is the creator of *wiki.socialcollab.sg*, a platform that allows citizen mapping of social needs, and co-founder of *serve.sg*, a volunteer matching platform. Dr Lee also chairs ArtsWok Collaborative, a non-profit organisation engaged in arts-based community development.

# CALENDAR OF ALUMNI EVENTS

APR. MAY. JUN

[nus.edu.sg/alumnet/events](https://nus.edu.sg/alumnet/events)

APRIL



## Advancing Your Career in the Digital Era

### Future-ready Workshops [Online]

Speakers:  
Mr Victor Zhu (Science '20),  
Founder & CEO  
of Hatch.sg



Ms Charmain Tan  
(Science '12), Founder  
& CEO of QuickDesk



Learn how you  
can jumpstart a  
successful and fulfilling  
career, and how  
digital transformation can be  
achieved from both top-down  
and bottom-up.

**13** APR Tue,  
7.30pm - 9.00pm

Register: [alumnet.events/FRapr21](https://alumnet.events/FRapr21)  
Contact: Mr Kenneth Phang  
[kphang@nus.edu.sg](mailto:kphang@nus.edu.sg)



## All You Need to Know About Strokes

### Health & Wellness [Online]

Speaker:  
Dr Chou Ning (Medicine '93),  
Senior Consultant  
Neurosurgeon and Director,  
CHOU Neuroscience Clinic,  
Farrer Park Hospital



Join Dr Chou Ning in this  
illuminating talk on the  
different types of strokes,  
risk factors and ways  
to prevent them.

**22** APR

Thu,  
7.30pm - 9.00pm

Register: [alumnet.events/HWapr21](https://alumnet.events/HWapr21)  
Contact: Ms Tan Li Hui  
[lhtan@nus.edu.sg](mailto:lhtan@nus.edu.sg)

MAY



## The Brest Fortress (PG13)

### Feature Films (Russian)



A war drama set  
during the Nazi  
invasion of the  
Soviet Union in June  
1941, in which Soviet troops  
held on to a border stronghold  
for nine days.

Movie will be screened in  
Russian with English subtitles

**6** MAY

Shaw Foundation  
Alumni House, Thu,  
7.30pm - 10.00pm

Register:  
[alumnet.events/FFmay21](https://alumnet.events/FFmay21)  
Contact: Ms Tan Li Hui  
[lhtan@nus.edu.sg](mailto:lhtan@nus.edu.sg)



## IoT and 5G Security for the Future

### Tech Talk [Online]

Speakers:  
Dr Nicholas Ho,  
Lecturer and  
Consultant, Artificial  
Intelligence Practice,  
Institute of Systems Science, NUS



Mr Ng Kok Leong, Senior  
Lecturer & Consultant,  
Digital Strategy &  
Leadership Practice,  
Institute of Systems  
Science, NUS



One of the biggest  
concerns with the  
Internet of Things (IoT)  
is ensuring that  
networks, data and devices are  
secure. With the rise of 5G that is  
projected as a catalyst in driving  
the adoption of Artificial  
Intelligence, IoT and Robotics,  
what are the steps that we should  
take to enable a secure IoT  
environment?

**18** MAY

Tue,  
7.30pm - 9.00pm

Register: [alumnet.events/TSmay21](https://alumnet.events/TSmay21)  
Contact: Mr Kenneth Phang  
[kphang@nus.edu.sg](mailto:kphang@nus.edu.sg)



JUNE



## Change-making and Community

### Lunch Dialogues [Online]

Speaker:  
Ms Carrie Tan (Arts & Social  
Sciences '04), Founder &  
Strategic Advisor, Daughters  
of Tomorrow, Member of  
Parliament for Nee Soon GRC



Join Ms Carrie Tan as  
she shares why she gave  
up her corporate life  
at 30 years old before  
starting Daughters of Tomorrow,  
becoming an advocate for  
underprivileged women, and her



commitment towards narrowing  
inequality. With her latest portfolio  
in Singapore's Parliament, hear  
how she extends her community-  
building work, her current efforts  
in change-making to include  
mental wellness, and the roles  
young professionals can play to  
make a difference in society.

**18** JUN

Fri,  
12.00pm - 1.00pm

Register: [alumnet.events/LDjun21](https://alumnet.events/LDjun21)  
Contact: Ms Julene Kee  
[julenek@nus.edu.sg](mailto:julenek@nus.edu.sg)



# MEXICAN FILM FESTIVAL 2021

Jointly presented by the Embassy of Mexico  
in Singapore and NUS Alumni Relations, the  
*Mexican Film Festival 2021* brings to you  
the very best of Mexican Films.  
(Film titles to be announced)



**30 Jun - 2 Jul**  
(Wed - Fri)

Shaw Foundation Alumni House,  
7.30pm - 9.30pm

Register: [alumnet.events/MFF21](https://alumnet.events/MFF21)  
Contact: Mr Roystonn Loh  
[lohjwr@nus.edu.sg](mailto:lohjwr@nus.edu.sg)

In adherence  
to Safety  
Management  
Measures,  
seating within  
the premises  
will be limited  
to 50 people for  
each night.

## ➔ ONE UNITED PEOPLE?

While Singapore is often held up as an example of racial and religious harmony, what do these terms translate to in practice? Also, a number of talking points in recent years — migration, xenophobia, 'Chinese privilege' and incidents of racial insensitivity — have challenged this narrative, and opened up a debate on how far we have actually come, and where indeed we wish to head to as a society. Our alumni share their thoughts.

### OUR PANEL



MS SUI CHIN  
HAN-MCKEAND  
(LAW '76), RETIRED LAWYER



MS JENNIFER  
ANNE CHAMPION  
(ARTS AND SOCIAL  
SCIENCES '13), POET  
AND EDUCATOR



MR ADRIAN  
PURNAMA PHOEN  
(ARTS AND SOCIAL  
SCIENCES '17),  
FINANCIAL PLANNER



MR NAVIN LOBO  
(LAW '03), LAWYER



MRS ANGELINE LOBO  
(ARTS AND SOCIAL  
SCIENCES '04), CIVIL  
SERVANT, WORKING  
IN INTERNATIONAL  
RELATIONS

**The Chinese-Malay-Indian-Others (CMIO) framework is unique to Singapore, and a powerful public policy tool. Do you think this model is still relevant today, given how Singaporean society has evolved to include more mixed-race individuals, and new citizens of different ethnicities?**

**JENNIFER:** There is a difference between being relevant and being accurate. For somebody like me, whose father was born into two cultures and myself into four, it was never accurate — and it wouldn't be for an increasing number of mixed-race Singaporeans. My identity card says that I am Ceylonese-Tamil, but I don't really have any connection with my Tamil roots and am much closer to my Chinese and Malay heritage.

**NAVIN:** I hear Jennifer's point on accuracy. As parents of mixed-race children, [Angeline and I] see the limitations of the CMIO system first-hand. What matters, too, are the policies that the framework translates into, such as mother tongue education and housing quotas.

**SUI CHIN:** I have lived in the United Kingdom and Japan, and have been out of Singapore for more than 35 years. At Narita Airport in Tokyo, you see the categorisation of 'Japanese', 'European people',

and 'aliens'. Am I an alien? Similarly, I have issues with the term 'Others' — which seems very excluded and non-definable. It is almost like being marginalised. Yet in today's context, the margin is slowly becoming a full page, because if we were to trace our ancestry, few of us would be of one pure heritage. For example, I have 25 per cent Dayak blood: so am I Chinese? Why not just call ourselves Singaporeans? It doesn't matter what race you are, but allow the national identity to dominate.

**ADRIAN:** In Indonesia, where my family was from, there isn't a CMIO system, but you still see differences between Indonesian Chinese and Indonesian Malays — and the differences become a barrier to interaction. It's not a matter of frameworks or systems, but a matter of a willingness to connect with others of different backgrounds. This interaction is what the world needs.

**Should we do away with the framework altogether? Or can it be effective in promoting integration, such as through ensuring mixed-race environments in schools and public housing estates?**

**ADRIAN:** Growing up, I didn't really see much sharing between the different races. Racial Harmony Day in school was just a day for dressing up, rather than actually learning anything about the different cultures. There was a general lack of initiative from the kids to make

**Integration is something that cannot be forced upon people: it has to start from the ground-up, rather than come from top-down directives. It is for the people themselves to examine why it is important to have cross-cultural interaction.** — MRS ANGELINE LOBO

friends outside of their racial group, or to learn about other races. Now that I am in the workforce, I have also encountered clients who prefer to be serviced by those of their same race, as they feel that there might be a better common understanding. So while I did not feel any negative impact from the CMIO framework — being of the majority group — I did not observe how the model promoted integration.

**JENNIFER:** As a person who would benefit from the CMIO model being thrown out, I actually think it is still relevant. I am willing to forgo the accuracy for the relevancy for others, because we can't truly be race-blind. If we were to find a way to be accurate about who I am as a person, we would be going into finer and finer gradations — at some point it

would be madness. But for those who fit into the categories squarely, the model offers a concreteness of their identity and the community that they belong to. Thus I see relevance for them, and I think that is important, which is why even though the model is problematic, it cannot completely disappear.

**SUI CHIN:** It is a useful measure and has its purpose of promoting racial integration, which the government put effort into after the race riots in 1964. Minister for Home Affairs and Minister for Law, Mr K Shanmugam (Law '84) once mentioned how Singapore has been successful in promoting ethnic integration in our public housing estates, schools, and via National Service. The CMIO model has its purpose and value but it can also be abused — we just have to be aware of how we use it. So while the cultural integration it creates is artificial, I do see its efficacy.

**ANGELINE:** I see myself more as a Singaporean than a Chinese person. I see greater differences between myself and a Chinese person born in China, than with a Singaporean of another race. The common experiences we share — be it through the public education system or just growing up in the same environment — build a stronger national identity than a racial identity for me. That said, it is difficult to have true cohesion. We have housing and education policies that try to promote racial and cultural integration based on the CMIO model. But as society progresses and becomes more complex, a lot of policies will not be accepted so simply by the people. Integration is something that cannot be forced upon people: it has to start from the ground-up, rather than come from top-down directives. It is for the people themselves to examine why it is important to have cross-cultural interaction.

**Have you personally experienced or observed racial prejudice? Do you observe racial prejudice as getting better or worse within the country?**

**JENNIFER:** As a Primary 1 student, I was very confused about what traditional costume to wear. My teacher very thoughtfully suggested that since I am 'Eurasian' — though I am not — I could wear Dutch Eurasian clogs. I didn't quite understand — and brought a clock to school instead! That was just a funny episode, but it goes to illustrate that things like traditional costumes and food are only superficial cultural markers, rather than a person's identity or what shapes them. And as Angeline said, true integration starts at home, in places where the government cannot reach. How willing are we to have this conversation among ourselves?

**NAVIN:** Personally, I am often spoken to in Tamil, even though I do not speak any Indian language at all. While it doesn't bother me, I have friends who would get upset over this. The reality is, how people react is

# REGARDING 'REGARDLESS OF RACE'

How do we build a truly integrated, multiracial and multicultural society? Should ethnicity even matter in Singapore society? Are our differences a cause for celebration or division? Our alumni tackle these questions and more.





**While an acceptance of cultural differences is what we work towards, we are only at the stage of tolerance. What we can strive towards – at least on an institutional level, and in the media – is to make sure that sensitivities are not offended.**

– MR NAVIN LOBO

a product of their life experiences. If you get upset over an act done without malice, you might also reflect on why you react this way. That said, I still hear people cracking turban jokes whenever they see a Sikh man. Such behaviour is silly and hurtful, yet it is pretty impossible to have a utopia without race or religious issues. While an acceptance of cultural differences is what we work towards, we are only at the stage of tolerance. What we can strive towards – at least on an institutional level, and in the media – is to make sure that sensitivities are not offended. This doesn't mean taking away the cultural aspect of society altogether: if we do that, are we not going to celebrate Chinese New Year? Are we not going to have Deepavali? Racial and religious inclusiveness is something Singapore takes pride in, but it takes just one misstep to undo years of work. **ANGELINE:** I do observe that the younger generation are more open about mixing with children of different racial backgrounds. My daughter just started Primary 1 and her closest friends are a Malay girl and a classmate from China. At their age, they don't see others as conforming to stereotypes – a lot of times it is we as a society who pile our own prejudgements on them and influence their worldviews.

**Do you think there are cases where members of the minority groups are being overly sensitive?**

**JENNIFER:** There are some minorities who feel sensitive because these microaggressions do

accumulate. Once, I was taking an Uber Pool home and the driver looked at my name and deduced that I "must be Eurasian", and he and the other male passenger – who was a complete stranger to me – decided that I must be very pretty and that they needed to turn on the lights to see my face. It wasn't just an incident of racist and sexist typecasting. But at that point I was focused solely on getting home safely, rather than speaking out. It is one thing to say that one should be courageous and brave, but you might not feel safe to do so. And there isn't a lot of education on how to express what's hurting you, or empowering minority groups with the fortitude and mental support to speak up for themselves. That said, there are groups out there that facilitate this, such as Minority Voices ([www.instagram.com/minorityvoices](http://www.instagram.com/minorityvoices)), which crowd-sources stories from those of minority backgrounds. It's a good resource for people to find ways to express what they are feeling. I like that young people are stepping up and speaking out.

**NAVIN:** I recently offered to handle a pro bono case, where the clients were discriminated against because of their race: they were looking for a rental property and were turned down the moment the landlord learnt their racial background. We claim to be a tolerant multiracial society, but there are lots of things that we need to be better at solving, that we have to be empowered to speak about, because things can change. When there are so many microaggressions happening for so long and



## SO SAY THE PEOPLE

According to the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS)-OnePeople.sg survey on racial and religious harmony in July 2019

ALMOST  
**60%**  
OF MALAYS  
AND  
**56%**  
OF INDIANS  
in Singapore  
perceived  
discriminatory  
treatment at work.  
.....

In an IPS Working Paper published in October 2019 that surveyed 4,000 respondents,

Almost  
**THREE**  
**OUT OF FOUR**  
respondents  
agreed to varying  
degrees that they  
like meeting and  
getting to know  
people who have  
recently migrated to  
Singapore.

However,  
more than  
**70%**  
also felt, to varying  
degrees, that  
immigrants are  
not doing enough  
to integrate into  
Singapore.

**Welcoming foreigners into our country also gives us a very cosmopolitan society with a wide cross-section of people of different backgrounds: it puts us in the best position to understand the world. I believe Singapore represents what the ideal world should be.** –MS SUI CHIN HAN-MCKEAND

so often, some might think: "I am not going to talk about it, because nothing will change." Yet such situations do need to be addressed. Change is a process. We might not be progressing as fast as we should, but I do feel that we are moving in the right direction.

**SUI CHIN:** Racial typecasting happens all around the world: I am often identified as the maid to my Eurasian-looking children, at my very own doorstep no less. While I was working as a bank lawyer, I would often find myself the only woman in a roomful of Caucasian men – and my peers would often be surprised when I expressed my opinion. Having lived that kind of 'dismissed identity' – even within my immediate English family – I have learnt to use humour to temper the negativity. Once you are proud and secure of your own identity, nothing can touch you. And the huge, humbling process of living abroad strengthened and made me proud of my identity, particularly as a Singaporean.

**On that: do you think a strong nationalistic identity could prevent our acceptance of new citizens, and the influx of foreigners?**

**JENNIFER:** In 2017, I was at the airport waiting for my partner when a Singaporean man beside me started shouting at a Filipino family, first saying that "This is Singapore" and that they were not allowed to hug, and then telling them to go back to their home country. I stood up to him and told him that I am Singaporean and did not approve of what he did, and wrote my thoughts on the encounter (with regards to racism, class privilege, and bigotry) and shared them on Facebook ([www.facebook.com/notes/10157410346331822](https://www.facebook.com/notes/10157410346331822)). The post went viral and was even picked up by the local media. The best part of it was that the family found a way to contact me through the news article. They reached out saying that they were okay, and happy that their first impression of Singapore was of people who would stand up for them.

**ADRIAN:** We do hear a lot of Singaporeans complaining about expats, but it doesn't have so much to do with cultural differences than the competition for jobs and housing. I think a big part of it also depends on the new citizens' willingness to be integrated into our society. Some come over in their late 30s and 40s, with very different backgrounds, memories and expectations that were born out of their life experiences, and might be unwilling to adapt. **NAVIN:** If you look at what has happened in the last five years, it is quite clear that the huge influx of expats has caused some frustration and discomfort on the ground. But is it because we are xenophobic? I sense a lot of frustration is due to the fact that the development of our infrastructure hasn't caught up with our already-dense population – so you have young couples having to queue for housing, graduates finding it hard to find a job, etc. And when you are frustrated, you look for something or somebody to blame, so expats became an easy target.

**SUI CHIN:** I see a lot of people who use Singapore as a springboard or stepping stone. But Singapore has always played the global role of an entrepot, and I feel we can continue to welcome foreigners in this manner: as a place to raise children, to start a business, to progress in life before you move on to some other place. To me, that is good enough because we have played our role in the world. It gives them an experience of Singapore as a place of opportunity that has benefitted them. If we give them opportunities that they will never forget, when we eventually do business with them, these memories will inspire the same kind of gratitude. Welcoming foreigners into our country also gives us a very cosmopolitan society with a wide cross-section of people of different backgrounds: it puts us in the best position to understand the world. I believe Singapore represents what the ideal world should be. **A**

▶ If you'd like to join our Forum panel, do write to us at [alumnihelpdesk@nus.edu.sg](mailto:alumnihelpdesk@nus.edu.sg) to express your interest.

➔ WHO SHE IS

Ms Guadalupe Lazaro is the co-founder of Ease, a startup that aims to tackle the difficulties in accessing sensitive health services — among them reproductive and sexual health matters. She is a recent graduate of Yale-NUS College, where she was the president of a student group that promotes diversity and inclusivity.



**T**O THE CASUAL OBSERVER, ACCESSING REPRODUCTIVE AND SEXUAL HEALTH SERVICES IN SINGAPORE MIGHT SEEM

AS EASY AS SEEING A DOCTOR FOR A FLU JAB. But Ms Guadalupe Lazaro knows otherwise — since starting her digital health platform Ease, she has heard from countless women about the challenges they face when trying to access services such as birth control and emergency contraceptives. “Some patients were deeply uncomfortable about discussing their sexual health with a male doctor, while others felt judged by clinic staff for seeking birth control options,” shares the 23-year-old. “There’s still a great deal of stigma around reproductive and sexual health.”

# Putting Patients at Ease

How **Ms Guadalupe Lazaro (Yale-NUS '20)** is using the Internet to widen access to reproductive and sexual health services.

Ms Lazaro has experienced this stigma herself — as a young woman trying to access such services, she has had to put up with unsolicited advice about her sexual health, as well as the inconvenience of long queues and waits at clinics. “Situations like these are especially difficult for people who may not be able to get time off from work to visit a clinic, but who desperately need this kind of care,” she reflects. “These experiences may also turn people off from talking about sexually-transmitted infections (STIs) and getting tested for them.”

Realising that a digital health platform would be a way of tackling some of these issues, Ms Lazaro decided to start Ease with a business partner last May. The health startup offers discreet and affordable sexual and reproductive services online, allowing its 9,000 users to teleconsult experienced doctors and refill prescriptions — all from the comfort and privacy of their homes. At-home test kits for STIs are also available. Furthermore, costs are kept low as the digital nature of Ease lowers its operating cost. These savings are passed on to users, adds Ms Lazaro. “This way, we put our users at ease and make it easier than ever for them to meet their healthcare needs,” she explains. “And because they’re at ease, we can truly walk this journey with them. From experience, we know that deeply personal matters like STI testing and contraception are best handled when the patient-doctor relationship is built on trust and comfort. These are not transactional matters and should not be handled that way.”

## A DREAM COME TRUE

Being a socially-focused entrepreneur has always been an ambition for Ms Lazaro, as The AlumNUS discovered. “I have often thought about businesses that I want to start to solve society’s problems. But I never imagined doing it right after graduation; I always expected my career to start in the non-governmental organisation sector and then possibly the private sector. Only after these stints did I expect myself to start my own venture.” She says that her time in university helped her realise that she had the potential to make a difference to countless other young people in Singapore. “At Yale-NUS, I was the president of a student group that conducted workshops and dialogues on sexual and reproductive health. We were making a difference already and I wanted to continue doing that.”

## FAST FACTS



**9,100  
PEOPLE**

have joined Ease’s platform as members since May 2020



These users have enjoyed over

**22,000  
MINUTES**

of teleconsultation with experienced doctors



The service enjoys a **5\* RATING** on Google, making it the highest-rated digital health platform in Singapore

Judging by Ease’s growth, it has done just that: in under a year, it has grown to hire nine staff members who oversee its business development, product management, marketing, and day-to-day operations. Ms Lazaro knew she was on the right track when she started hearing feedback from Ease’s users. “They were so grateful for the service we are providing and their words of encouragement have kept me motivated.” She adds that reception to Ease has been largely positive and that she has not faced any backlash. “That’s fortunate, given that some of the services we offer can be considered taboo by some.” When asked about her plans for its next stage of growth, Ms Lazaro does not miss a beat. “We want to continue building on our foundations, raise awareness of Ease, and take the user experience to the next level.”

## BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS

Starting Ease is the latest milestone in Ms Lazaro’s life, which began in Argentina. She was born and raised in a town two hours outside of Buenos Aires. A trip to the United States when she was 15 seeded in her a desire to study abroad and she began hunting for the ideal university for her. She eventually decided on Yale-NUS after the Experience Yale-NUS Weekend in 2015. “The school had a vibrant scene, and both the faculty and student body were so passionate about what they were doing ... it was the perfect match.”

At university, she majored in Anthropology and did a minor in Global Affairs. The experience opened her eyes to the importance of dismantling social constructs. “We were encouraged to rethink concepts that many of us have just taken as fact — that’s actually how the idea for Ease came about: when we started to question what ‘accessible healthcare’ means. After all, on the surface, healthcare is very accessible in Singapore. But dig a little deeper and you’ll find the barriers that Ease is helping to bring down.” **A**

**From experience, we know that deeply personal matters like STI testing and contraception are best handled when the patient-doctor relationship is built on trust and comfort. These are not transactional matters and should not be handled that way.**



# Why New Perspectives Matter

Diversity and the authenticity of representation are especially important for the growth of Singapore's literary scene, says 2020 Singapore Literature Prize-winning author **Ms Akshita Nanda (Science '00)**.

**W**HEN AUTHOR MS AKSHITA NANDA DECIDED TO TAKE A SABBATICAL FROM HER JOB AS A JOURNALIST for *The Straits Times* to pursue writing full-time, she never imagined that her debut novel, *Nimita's Place* (see box story), would eventually be named co-winner of the 2020 Singapore Literature Prize. That said, the 42-year-old, who moved to Singapore from India after taking up a scholarship in 1995, has always loved writing. "Everybody in my family reads or writes in one way or another," says Ms Nanda, who is now a Singapore Citizen. "My grandparents are published authors and my father was the first student librarian of his school and used to get into trouble cycling home with a book open on his handlebar."

Prior to becoming a journalist, Ms Nanda worked for a publishing company, armed with a degree in Molecular Biology from NUS, from which she graduated in December 2000. In 2019, she joined the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy to pursue a Master in International Affairs. Now in her final semester of the two-year programme, Ms Nanda has published her second book, *Beauty Queens of Bishan*, and is working on her third novel. She talks to *The AlumNUS* about her inspirations, passions and outlook on Singapore's literary scene.

Photo by Joyce Fang

**I come from an expressive family; everyone sings and dances. Make-believe is one of the most interesting ways to spend one's time, in my opinion.**

**How does it feel to have made an impact on our literary landscape on your first try?**

I can't speak for Mr Ng Yi-Sheng, my co-winner (for his novel, *Lion City*), but I certainly was not expecting it. *Nimita's Place* — which was deliberately written from the perspective of an immigrant — is not a novel that fits into the general trend of Singapore literature. Reading it may require some getting used to for the majority of Singapore readers, who are not from the same background as the character in the novel. So I was delighted about the book's appeal despite everything going against it, in a way.

**Do you think diversity is lacking in the literature that we're generally exposed to?**

Many factors in the publishing industry are shaped by market forces. It doesn't just involve the authors, it's also about whether people are ready to receive, sell, stock and buy the books. And everybody has preferences, which are shaped by their background and the people they've been exposed to. Diversity and the authenticity of representation are therefore especially crucial in Singapore literature, as it continues to grow and evolve.

The truth is, we all have certain things in common. We all like savouring a nice meal, living a good life, and creating a better world for ourselves and the people who come after us. Most of the time, however, these ideas and ambitions are clothed in ethnicity, culture, and where we come from. Sometimes these 'outer garments' can hinder people's efforts in getting to know one another and getting to recognise their shared similarities.

**What inspired the storyline in *Nimita's Place*?**

Marriage has always been a very fraught term to me. When one grows up as a woman in Asian culture — more specifically Indian

culture — regardless of what your parents support, the general society wants you to settle down and get married. You're not an adult until you get a life partner and prove that you're a full-fledged member of the society by having a wedding, and later, bearing some children.

There's also this idea that if you're a woman, you become somebody else when you get married. Sometimes you have to change your name and move to a different house — you have to be dislocated and make major adjustments to the life that you're used to, very much like an immigrant. And so I wanted to write a story about this dislocation of time and space.

**What's your writing process like?**

I usually start with writing by hand. Sometimes the pen just tells you where your story needs to go. Once the first draft is written, I'll type it in the computer, and that's actually the first edit because in transferring the words, I get to think a bit about how the story is framed. Terry Pratchett, the famous English author, once said that the first draft is you telling the story to yourself; the second draft is you telling the story to the readers — I agree.

Once the book is done, I pass it to friends whom I really trust and they give me their honest feedback, usually over a home-cooked dinner. I can't stress enough the importance of people around you when you're writing. Many people have the misconception that creative work is a solo effort. But nothing we do is done by ourselves. I would be nothing if it wasn't for the people — family and friends — supporting me.

**Do you think your time at NUS has contributed to your development as a writer?**

Absolutely. The wonderful thing about university is that it should teach you how to be a better human being — the ability to get back up from defeat, connect with people, and manage your time and mental health. I learnt a lot about collaboration — how it took a lot of people to come together to do things. Most importantly, it exposed me to new ideas and people who are different from me. My time at NUS provided a safe space to have difficult, nuanced conversations, which I believe only institutes of higher learning can provide.

**What else do you enjoy doing besides writing?**

Many things! I volunteer as a tutor twice a week to students of varying abilities. I sometimes also conduct workshops for the Ministry of Education. I read a lot of *manga* (Japanese term for comics), watch a lot of *anime*, and actually learnt Japanese just for these. That's been one of the most interesting things I have done in my life because when you learn a different language, you learn a different way of thinking.

I come from an expressive family; everyone sings and dances. I have several relatives in theatre or in traditional Indian arts. Make-believe is one of the most interesting ways to spend one's time, in my opinion. Sometimes, my daydreams turn into writing but it's always fun when you can do things with other people, so I recently got into *Dungeons and Dragons*. My friends and I also enjoy solving puzzles through real escape games or board games such as *Cluedo*, *Pictionary* and *Cranium*.

**What or who are you reading right now, or have loved reading?**

Unfortunately, because I'm writing my third book, I find it very difficult to read English fiction. I have been reading a lot about history and also Japanese novels and *manga*. There are a few authors who have been instrumental in helping me understand how I want to shape stories. Terry Pratchett, for example, taught me that comedy is an excellent way to get people to start thinking about things of great importance. I also like Lois McMaster Bujold, who questions the meaning of ethics and morality in an often grey space. I'm also intrigued right now by authors from non-Western backgrounds such as Moni Mohsin, who is an awesome and inspiring Pakistani writer. **A**

## A TALE OF TWO NIMITAS

Published by Epigram Books, *Nimita's Place* follows the lives of two women, both named Nimita, born two generations apart and seeking paths in two different countries — India and Singapore. The novel was the co-winner of the Singapore Literature Prize 2020 in the English Fiction category and was also shortlisted for the 2019 Singapore Book Awards.

## ➔ WHO HE IS

Mr Darius Cheung is one of the local business scene's most famous faces and is the man behind successful ventures like property portal 99.co and mobile security company tenCube. His business acumen and social impact have won him a slew of awards, among them the Singapore Youth Award (2011) and the Entrepreneur of the Year title at the 2015 IT Leader Awards. He was also listed as one of Asia's best entrepreneurs by BusinessWeek.

# Keeping Doors Open

Entrepreneur **Mr Darius Cheung (Engineering '04)** has always wanted to make a difference — whether in the tech space or when it comes to fighting discrimination in the housing market. And he has done just that.



**T**HE LEAD-UP TO THE BIRTH OF ONE'S FIRST CHILD SHOULD BE A JOYOUS TIME BUT FOR MR DARIUS CHEUNG AND HIS WIFE, it was anything but. "My wife was heavily pregnant and we were moving into our new rental apartment closer to the office. Everything was fine till the landlord found out that Roshni (his wife) was Indian," recalls Mr Cheung, 39. "At that moment, his attitude changed completely and he told us that he could not rent the apartment to us. It was a mad scramble to find another place and fortunately, we did."

Although this regrettable series of events took place some five years ago, the injustice stings, says Mr Cheung. "We realised at that moment that this is not the world we want our daughter to live in. So we decided to try and make a difference in whatever way we could." He knew that his entrepreneurial endeavours could be one way to make that difference —



## AN IMPASSIONED PLEA

An excerpt from Mr Cheung's 2016 blog post, *"Your wife is Indian, landlord won't rent to you"*.

In the end, my wife and I paid a good 15 per cent more than what we should have because we could only settle on one place we liked that welcomed us (in addition to the fact that we had little negotiation power at that point). "Should we drop my last name from Shan's (our daughter's) IC? It might just be easier for her in the future," Roshni asked me one night, with a hint of defeat and injury that she was trying to hide; my heart broke into a thousand pieces. We wanted our daughter to keep both our last names and to be proud of her heritage, equally. That night, I decided I could not let my daughter grow up in a society where she has to hide her identity just because "it will be easier". Not here, as a citizen, in the country of her birth.



Read the full post here: [www.99.co/blog/singapore/99co-stop-rental-racial-discrimination/](http://www.99.co/blog/singapore/99co-stop-rental-racial-discrimination/)

after all, the job combines his two loves: creating solutions and making an impact. "Plus, being an entrepreneur in the tech space means that your impact is very scalable."

## DRIVING EVOLUTION THROUGH ENTERPRISE

Mr Cheung's interest in tech started during his pre-university days, when he first used the AltaVista and Yahoo search engines to connect with the then-nascent Internet. "It opened my eyes to a whole new universe and I wanted Singapore to be a part of that success." Looking back, it is easy to see that he has succeeded: while still at NUS, he partnered two other schoolmates to start tenCube, a mobile security firm. Just five years later, it was acquired by software giant McAfee for a whopping \$25 million.

Mr Cheung's next venture, 99.co, a property portal which he started in 2014, received global attention and attracted funds from the likes of Brazilian angel investor and Facebook co-founder Eduardo Saverin. When he started it, he realised that the process of finding a place to live was — back then, at least — far more tedious than it should have been. "Most property portals at that point were not user-centric at all and their user experience was quite painful," he observes. "Agents were also quite frustrated because there was a lack of trust in the property market. Over the years, the industry had been plagued by bad actors and a lack of transparency. I wanted to resolve that with 99.co."

By working closely with agents and users, 99.co has since managed to set itself apart as a modern way of buying, selling and renting property. Informative articles help first-time buyers and sellers make sense of the sometimes protracted process, and nifty features like a home-to-work distance calculator have won over millennials. This ready embrace of technology has come in handy amid COVID-19, as 99.co was among the first to offer video viewings.

**As I've gotten older, I've lost some of my naïve notions that I can change everything in this world. There are problems that can't be solved in just one day.**

And as Mr Cheung has realised, technology could also help the portal fight discrimination in the rental market.

## REGARDLESS OF RACE

In 2016, 99.co's quest to champion diversity and equality began. Energised by his bad experience when trying to rent a property, Mr Cheung launched the *Regardless of Race* campaign to curb ethnic exclusion in the local rental market. The first thing he did was recount his harrowing experience in a blog post titled "Your wife is Indian, landlord won't rent to you". Its no-holds-barred description of their ordeal was a hit online and quickly went viral.

But translating digital attention into concrete change proved trickier. For that, Mr Cheung decided to tap on technology: he created a "Diversity Friendly" listing option on 99.co, giving landlords who did not discriminate against tenants based on their race, religion, gender or sexual orientation, a leg-up on the portal. "They are ranked better and we have also taken the step to blacklist all listings that have discriminatory leanings," he shares. However, he understands that there is no silver bullet for solving a complex societal issue. "There are those who clamour for more change but they don't realise that discrimination is not often explicit. It happens only after the potential tenant makes the first move."

Some may wonder why Mr Cheung does not just let the authorities step in to curb such practices. To this, he says that he hopes they will — and soon. But in the meantime, people should try to make a difference in whatever way they can. "I believe in doing good while doing well. And it has worked to some extent, as we have improved our overall user experience. Yes, the diversity tag only affects some five per cent of our user base, but they are an important and underserved base that we are helping — and they have responded very positively."

However, he admits that there are landlords who remain discriminatory and have no desire to change. Is he disheartened by this? "No, no. As I've gotten older, I've lost some of my naïve notions that I can change everything in this world. There are problems that can't be solved in just one day." Still, he is confident that he is building a better world for the next generation and believes that change will come. "You can see it for yourself — antiquated ways of thinking about race and identity will gradually give way over time. So there is hope." **A**

## THE CYBER CONNECTOR

Professor Tulika Mitra, Provost's Chair Professor of Computer Science, is Vice Provost (Academic Affairs) at NUS. Prof Mitra is a leading expert on embedded computing systems in the Internet of Things (IoT) and has authored more than 175 articles in peer-reviewed conferences and journals. She holds multiple US patents and enjoys collaborating with industry research partners (e.g., ARM, CSR, Facebook, Huawei, Xilinx) for real-world impact.

**T**HE INTERNET HAS AN EDGE, AND THERE ARE INTERESTING THINGS AFOOT THERE. To be clear, this is not like the bleeding edge of science, but a literal edge that marks the boundary between the physical and cyber worlds. For Professor Tulika Mitra, Provost's Chair Professor of Computer Science, and Vice Provost (Academic Affairs) at NUS, the edge of the Internet is where the action is. Besides being a leading expert in the embedded computing systems that provide the foundation for the Internet of Things (IoT), Prof Mitra is a prominent figure in a number of different areas, but the IoT area requires a bit of a primer. Broadly speaking, IoT is a network of objects — sensors and devices — equipped with software to collect data and share the same with other objects and systems in the network. It is so pervasive today that it does not make the news in the way that artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning do. Today, we perhaps feel this more than ever, in the era of the TraceTogether token (a small battery-powered Bluetooth device intended to support contact-tracing efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic in Singapore).

Working with small devices with limited power, including smartwatches but also other wearables such as fitness trackers, is one of Prof Mitra's specialties, which is one of those

interesting stories taking place on the edge of the Internet. "My focus is on the device, or rather the computing system in the device. At present these are somewhat limited, in terms of the computing capability, and require access to the Internet 24/7," says Prof Mitra. The problem here, she continues, is this can be costly, especially when you think of cameras connected to the Internet, which are sending a constant stream of footage across the system. Of course, this involves a lot of bandwidth and is not a particularly efficient way of getting things done.

This is where Prof Mitra's work at the NUS School of Computing gets into interesting territory, because she is championing a better solution that can do most of the processing within the device itself. While that might seem at odds with the premise of IoT and the way it works with both Cloud computing and AI systems, Prof Mitra has a plan. Basically, it involves increasing the computing efficiency of devices, such that they do not need to rely on the cloud to do most of the analytics, while remaining low-powered. "You need to bring the power of a server to the tiny device using a small battery," says Prof Mitra. "We want to make data analysis directly on the device rather than doing everything over the Internet. Believe it or not, it takes more energy to send data over the Internet for analysis than to do it on the device itself."

### HARDWARE DEFINED BY SOFTWARE

In her High-performance Embedded Architecture and Compilation (HiPEAC) 2021 keynote address, Prof Mitra noted that smartphones — a ubiquitous presence in most societies today — in particular play into the idea of bringing the power of a server to a small device. This is especially so, considering the



### NO LIMITS

#### ON SUCCEEDING IN COMPUTER SCIENCE AS A WOMAN

Although I work in one of the most male-dominated fields in academia, I have to say I never let it bother me. I got used to being the only woman in all meetings and committees. But we should do better for the next generation.

There has been increasing awareness about diversity in my research communities in recent years and I am privileged to have the opportunity to actively participate in the initiatives supporting women colleagues.

#### ON DIVERSITY AND MERITOCRACY

I don't think there is a conflict between having diversity and being meritocratic. The quality of scholarship will always be judged by the same yardstick; that's the cornerstone of academic life. Supporting diversity is about ensuring equity and inclusion by identifying and addressing any systemic barriers to individuals in the community in reaching their full potential.

#### ON LEVELING THE PLAYING FIELD

In NUS and Singapore, we are very fortunate that women are not treated differently; the system is very fair. But, across the world, being small in number, women academics do not have access to the same social network as their male counterparts. These connections help you grow and make you aware of different opportunities. Apart from that, mothers with young children face unique challenges. Finally, women are not good at self-promotion — many of us experience impostor syndrome at different points in our lives. It is important not to forget about people who do not put themselves forward.

#### ON REPRESENTATION IN ACADEMIA

The more successful women we have in academia, the easier it will be to attract women students and faculty members. The academia needs the role models. I am very fortunate because out of the five PhD candidates I recruited recently, three are women; I'm very excited to have this gender balance in my research group.



Prof Tulika Mitra (right) with PhD student Manupa Karunaratne.

well-publicised fact that today's typical smartphone has more processing power than the Apollo missions to the moon had on-board the shuttles.

With regard to the smartwatch, another device whose rate of adoption has soared in recent years, Prof Mitra asserts that the ideal scenario would be one where the watch could do much more work independently of the smartphone. For example, when it comes to analysing data from a fitness app, the watch would process all the data itself, rather than sending it to the phone to crunch all the numbers. Of course, in very small devices like this, the limitations are in both the chip and the power supply.

Prof Mitra thinks that one way forward for such devices is software-defined-hardware (SDH), or software that enables the reconfigurability of hardware. This forms part of her team's work with the National Research Foundation (NRF) Competitive Research Programme on next-generation IoT edge computing. Edge computing here refers to "a distributed computing topology in which information processing is located close to the edge — where things and people produce or consume that information," according to one definition of the term, by research firm Gartner. Basically, to continue with our analogy here, the smartwatch fits this definition to a tee.

Obviously, despite the label 'edge computing', this is hardly a fringe area, with plenty of interest, both public and private. In the United States, the Department of Defense is studying SDH, in particular, under the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), famous for being Internet and virtual reality pioneers. One of the chief benefits of SDH is its efficiency and adaptability. To elaborate a little, SDH will enable any given device to adapt to resolve new problems with existing algorithms, or use new algorithms to work on existing problems. Prof Mitra also notes that SDH has the potential to lower costs, while improving performance in terms of how many operations the device can perform per watt of power.

**We want to make data analysis on the device rather than doing everything over the Internet. Believe it or not, it takes more energy to send data over the Internet for analysis than to do it on the device itself.**

### SEEKING SOLUTIONS THAT MATTER

What is particularly interesting with the Competitive Research Programme is that it involves partners who have real-world problems to solve. One example of this is a project Prof Mitra is collaborating on with A\*STAR's Institute of Infocomm Research (I<sup>2</sup>R) alongside the Institute of Microelectronics (IME). A compelling real-world scenario is to enable security officers to make dynamic sweeps of events, when looking for suspicious activity or persons. The original toolkit involved a cumbersome device in a backpack that only had a battery life of one hour, among other things. Prof Mitra and her team are working on a solution in a smartglass form-factor that will last for about three hours using tiny batteries. "To succeed in terms of the performance per watt here, we will need to be 20 times over where the technology is right now. So this is an end-to-end system that we are very excited about," says Prof Mitra.

Succeeding in addressing real-world problems is something Prof Mitra has experience with, given that her research has been supported by both public and industry funding. "I've been fortunate to have public funding that has been complemented by industry funding. While the money is important, the biggest benefit for me is that industry partners can tell you upfront that the assumptions you have are wrong! I mean, I can have a beautiful solution in mind but would anyone care? It can be great curiosity-driven academic research, but it might not solve any real problems," says Prof Mitra.

Having said all that, solving real problems is something Prof Mitra has to do on a daily basis because she is incredibly busy. Aside from teaching, research and administrative duties, Prof Mitra also organises numerous conferences, including most recently when she served as the General Chair of ESWEK (Embedded Systems Week) 2020 and the Program Chair of ICCAD (International Conference on Computer-Aided Design) 2021, the premier events in embedded systems and design automation, respectively. She also holds various editorial positions in leading computer science journals, making time a precious commodity for her. Prof Mitra confesses that a typical day for her "looks bad and is very long". **A**

# LIVING ON THE EDGE

Some of the most exciting developments in information technology are taking place in the smallest devices. NUS School of Computing explores this realm under the leadership of **Professor Tulika Mitra**.



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**HILE THE YEAR THAT PASSED IS UNLIKELY TO BE RECALLED FONDLY BY MANY**, it did show the mettle of the graduating classes of 2018, 2019 and 2020. Dealing with what

COVID-19 threw at them — specifically in the way of potentially long-term economic uncertainty — encouraged the graduates to participate in the first-ever NUS Resilience and Growth Innovation Challenge. This has resulted in some innovative and sometimes completely unexpected solutions to daunting problems.

Held in part to commemorate the University's 115<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the Challenge — which ran from 1 June to 31 December 2020 — received 88 submissions. Out of these, 54 projects were evaluated and selected as the winners of the 2020 contest, which was broken down into three segments: Make Our People Better; Make Our Society Better; and Make the World Better (see sidebar). There were 22 winners in the "People" category; 16 in the "Society" category; and 16 in the "World" category. The winning projects will go on to be funded by NUS to the tune of \$50,000 for six months. This grant can be used to pay a stipend of up to \$1,200 per month per project member for the duration of the project. A full list of the winners is available here: [nus.edu.sg/cfg/rg/InnovChallenge/winners](https://nus.edu.sg/cfg/rg/InnovChallenge/winners)

For Professor Simon Chesterman, Dean, NUS Faculty of Law and Co-Chair of the Better People category, the Challenge proved both surprising and personally rewarding. "I don't think I could have possibly predicted all the ways in which our recent graduates decided that they could help our people," he said. "From urban farming to taekwondo for wayward youth; from science kits for underprivileged children to supporting persons with disabilities entering the gig economy — using every medium from music to posters to dedicated apps — it was a pleasure to play a tiny role in giving them a start. This was very much a hand-up, rather than a hand-out."

## CHALLENGE ACCEPTED

Fifty-four winning projects emerge from the NUS Resilience and Growth Innovation Challenge.



It looks like the pandemic and its effects did not stop NUS students from conceptualising and developing an array of valuable proposals, with a helping hand from the Challenge. In fact, the current crisis seems to have galvanised graduates to be more creative and innovative in developing solutions to the problems they identified in their chosen challenge categories. "Many of the applications were of a very high quality," commented Professor Robbie Goh (Arts and Social Sciences '88), Dean, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, and Professor of Literature in the Department of English Language and Literature. "There was a range in terms of focus, relevance and feasibility in the applications, and we did have to reject some that did not clear the bar. But the good applications were really of a high standard."

### A BETTER WAY FORWARD

Besides spurring the students on, it is possible that the upheaval in Singapore's economy and society due to the pandemic may have led them to believe that now is the right time to make some positive changes — essentially, to Make Things Better, which was the thread that ran through the three challenge categories. According to the challenge website, the judging committee hoped to be presented 'thoughtful and innovative projects that will have a clear impact for the social good, particularly in identifying and addressing issues, concerns and groups that have not received sufficient attention to date.'

In this respect, the teams did not disappoint. "The Innovation Challenge brought out what I always find most admirable in our graduates and alumni: creativity, enthusiasm and a passion for making a difference," commented Prof Chesterman. "We consciously encouraged a diverse range of ideas — some will work, some will fall flat, but all will learn from and be encouraged by this experience. The proposals ranged from fully thought-through ventures to idealistic longshots. Our panel took the view that even those whom we did not fund should benefit from the experience of pitching to a panel of sympathetic but critical judges."

Adding his thoughts, Co-Chair of the Better Society theme Prof Goh pointed out how many of the projects tackled a very pertinent problem in society. "I was personally



### THE CATEGORIES EXPLAINED

➤ **MAKE OUR PEOPLE BETTER** – How can we improve the quality of life for our people? This includes improving home-based learning, strengthening mental well-being, and finding ways to maximise human potential.

➤ **MAKE OUR SOCIETY BETTER** – How can we make our society more cohesive and purposeful? This includes fostering togetherness, reducing inequality, improving happiness, and giving society greater meaning and purpose.

➤ **MAKE THE WORLD BETTER** – How can we make the world better? This includes mitigating the effects of climate change, enhancing food security, and ensuring post-COVID-19 safety. The panel prioritised projects that address challenges that are of great relevance to Singapore and the world.

very pleased to see a number of projects that showed concern for the elderly. The elderly are a particularly vulnerable segment of our population, especially because of COVID-19, which has only exacerbated their isolation and made them prey to scams and dependent on others for things like food delivery and companionship."

Co-Chair of the Better World theme, Professor Tulika Mitra, complimented the teams for developing clever solutions despite the restrictions on physical movement due to the pandemic. She cited the "Mangrove Living Shorelines", "LOTA: Locally Optimised Toilet for All" and "Equity Lab" projects for their out-of-the-box approaches to their identified problems. "I am proud and inspired by the creativity, enterprising nature and perseverance of the NUS graduates and their passion to make the world better through cross-border, collaborative efforts. Our future is in good hands," said Prof Mitra, who is the Provost's Chair Professor of Computer Science and Vice Provost (Academic Affairs) at NUS. **A**

**The Innovation Challenge brought out what I always find most admirable in our graduates and alumni: creativity, enthusiasm and a passion for making a difference.**

Professor Simon Chesterman, Dean, NUS Faculty of Law



## Networking in Qingdao - NUS Alumni and Friends



On 27 February, alumni and Qingdao Ambassador, Mr David Lye (Business '95), jointly organised a networking dinner with friends from the Singapore Chamber of Commerce and Industry in China (SingCham in China), Mr Russell Tan and Mr Tony Leu, who are living in Qingdao City, China. Members of the Qingdao International Business Association were also invited to the dinner, which provided a great opportunity for NUS Alumni to interact with fellow Singaporeans working in the beautiful coastal city of Qingdao. To celebrate Chinese New Year with a Singaporean flavour, guests tossed *lohei* (yusheng) to round off the hearty evening with great festive cheer.



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## LKYSPP Alumni and Students volunteer for A Better Tomorrow



### Festival of Lights 2020 – A Better Tomorrow

was held in Singapore from 18 December 2020 to 3 January 2021, in support of the President's Challenge 2020 and its 72 benefitting charitable organisations. It was also held to foster better community bonds and stronger social cohesion among Singaporeans by acknowledging the unity, determination and resilience of citizens in the ongoing battle against COVID-19, and to inspire hope for the future. The chairman of the organising committee of the Festival was Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy (LKYSPP) alumnus Mr Lim Huan Chiang ('19).

Singapore President and NUS Chancellor Halimah Yacob (Law '78) lit up the lantern display at the opening ceremony. The School's alumni from LKYSPP Alumni Singapore Chapter (Mandarin Sub-Group), together with some of the MPAM (Master in Public Administration and Management) and MPA (Master in Public Administration) students, volunteered at the Festival from 31 December 2020 to 3 January 2021 by conducting fundraising activities and ensuring that visitors observed social distancing guidelines. Their volunteerism efforts were also part of the *NUS Day of Service 2020*.

## NUS BIZAlum – Zumba Fiesta



Mr George Heng (Computing '93), Director, NUS BIZAlum and Mr Ankur Mehan (MBA-C '22) posing for the camera.

### NUS BIZAlum kick-started the new year with the NUS BIZAlum Zumba Fiesta 2021!

On 30 January, alumni came to keep fit and healthy, with the Dean of NUS Business School, Professor Andy Rose, and his wife, Miriam, leading the way! Everyone had a good time exercising and sweating it out while maintaining a safe distance from one another.



Dean Prof Andy Rose's wife, Miriam (far right), and NUS BIZAlumni getting ready for the workout.



Left to right: Mr Sumesh Balakrishnan, Ms Patricia Reed and Mr Amit Patil.



Mr Marco Zucchet and wife, Sabine, at Yip Yew Chong's first solo art exhibition *Something, Somewhere, Somewhen*.



Mr Marco Zucchet posing with a mural at Everton Park.

✉ bizalum.nus.edu.sg  
✉ lindagouw@nus.edu.sg

## The NUS BIZAlum Executive MBA Networking Event – Rambling in Everton Park

### On 20 February, the NUS BIZAlum Executive MBA held a networking event at Everton Park, hosted by Dr Suanny Gouw (Business '07).

Ms Patricia Reed (Business '13), Mr Amit Patil (EMBA-C '22), Mr Marco Zucchet (EMBA-C '21) and wife, Sabine; Mr Alok Singh (EMBA-C '21) and Mr Sumesh Balakrishnan (EMBA-C '21) visited Beano, a soya bean enterprise and met the founder and ex-banker, Mr Alan Yoon.

To end the day, alumni took the opportunity to pose with murals around the area and also visited the Art Porters Gallery, where Yip Yew Chong held his first solo art exhibition themed *Something, Somewhere, Somewhen*, from 12 January to 14 March.

## NUS Alumni Melbourne Chapter Celebrates Australia's Favourite Day



NUS Alumni Melbourne Chapter Committee - Secretary, Mr Roland Tan (Engineering '00); Chairperson, Dr Edna Yeo (Science '93); Vice-Chairperson/Treasurer, Ms Audrey Sim (Arts and Social Sciences '96); and Senior Advisor, Dr Ang Woo Sin (Dentistry '68).

**The NUS Alumni Melbourne Chapter celebrated Australia Day on 26 January.** Thanks to the support of NUS Office of Alumni Relations and Singapore Global Networks, over 50 alumni, their family members and guests attended the event. The venue was decorated with Australia Day-themed balloons, flags and tablecloths.

This was the first event of 2021, after a challenging 2020 when most of the members in Victoria had been staying at home and had not seen friends and family. The event organisers were careful to observe Victoria's COVID-19 restrictions, and ensured that everyone had masks and access to hand sanitisers.

The main meal attraction was a Chicken and Lamb Gyros spit-roasted over a charcoal grill for five hours, and barbecue sausages, complemented with pita bread, salad, potatoes and grilled corn. There was also a touch of nostalgia with *kueh lapis*, brownies and watermelon for dessert! The experience was appreciated by all who were present.

## NUS Alumni in Melbourne's Lunar New Year "Metal Ox" Celebration 2021

**The NUS Alumni Melbourne Chapter celebrated Chinese New Year** with a grand dinner on 20 February at the MaBrown restaurant in Balwyn, which is located in an eastern suburb of Melbourne. This year's celebration saw a gathering of 60 alumni and their spouses.

This year's *lohei* was unique as guests used a mobile application with pre-recorded toasts (in Hokkien and Mandarin) to e-toast across six tables! An impromptu singing showcase by alumni in different languages brought great fun and cheer to the celebration. Demonstrating NUS' diversity, Associate Professor Arul Earnest (Arts and Social Sciences '92) belted out 爱拼才会赢 in Hokkien, Dr Raymond Wong (Architecture '81) sang his rendition of *Munnaeru Vaalibaa* in Tamil and Mr Peter Koh (Science '87) sang *Delilah* in English.



Photo courtesy of Mr Roland Tan (Engineering '00)

Both events were held in accordance with COVID-19 measures in Melbourne, Victoria.

facebook.com/groups/NUSAlumniMelbourne  
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The AlumNUS thanks all contributors for the articles and photos in Alumni Happenings, showcasing our vibrant alumni community. For the full stories, please go to [nus.edu.sg/alumnet/TheAlumNUS/issue-125/community/alumni-happenings](https://nus.edu.sg/alumnet/TheAlumNUS/issue-125/community/alumni-happenings).



## A BEQUEST FROM A MEDICAL ALUMNA TO HER ALMA MATER



A gift from the estate of the late **Dr Freda Paul Malliamalar**, a respected paediatrician at the Singapore General Hospital and Associate Professor of Paediatrics at the then Faculty of Medicine, University of Singapore, will enable NUS Medicine to establish a bursary for needy female undergraduate medical students as well as a prize that will be awarded to female undergraduate medical students.

"Dr Freda Paul's legacy as a renowned paediatrician and her desire to support female medical students throughout their journey of learning will be ensured through this generous bequest, which sees the establishment of the Freda Paul Bursary Fund, Freda Paul Professorship and student prizes," said the Dean of the NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, Professor Chong Yap Seng.



The gift will also fund a Professorship that will support an entire spectrum of translational research in the areas of paediatrics such as cancer, genetics, immunology, metabolic diseases and cardiac health, as well as studies on disease trends, health outcomes and neurocognitive development problems.

NUS President Professor Tan Eng Chye said, "WE ARE DEEPLY APPRECIATIVE OF THIS GENEROUS GIFT FROM THE LATE DR FREDA PAUL, WHICH WILL GO A LONG WAY TOWARDS NURTURING THE NEXT GENERATION OF FEMALE MEDICAL LEADERS AS WELL AS ADVANCING THE FIELD OF PAEDIATRICS. I HOPE THIS GIFT WILL ALSO INSPIRE MORE NUS ALUMNI TO IMPACT SOCIETY BY SUPPORTING PROGRAMMES AT THE UNIVERSITY, EITHER THROUGH LIFETIME GIFTS OR A BEQUEST AS EXEMPLIFIED BY THE LATE DR PAUL."

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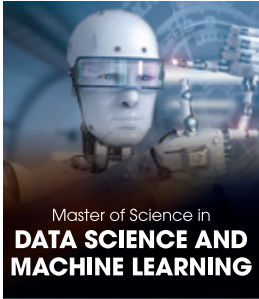
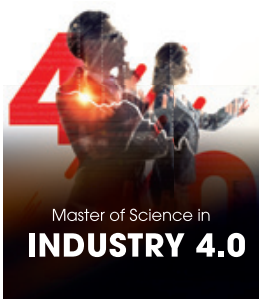


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