

# The ALUMNUS

issue #128 — JAN-MAR 2022

"We should think of family-friendly policies directed to helping not just women, but both men and women, to balance their roles in the workplace and as caregivers."

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR JESSICA PAN, NUS DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMICS

## LEVELLING THE PLAYING FIELD

MR PRANAMA MOORTHY  
(ENGINEERING '08)

## A CATALYST FOR CHANGE

DR SHEFALY SHOREY  
(NURSING (PHD) '13)

## WEAVING HERSTORY INTO HISTORY

ALUMNI DEBATE ON WHAT  
MORE NEEDS TO BE  
DONE TO ACHIEVE PARITY  
BETWEEN THE SEXES



# THE ROAD TO GENDER EQUALITY

WHAT THE  
WOMEN, AND  
MEN, OF NUS  
ARE DOING TO  
HELP BRIDGE  
THE GAP





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## FIRST WORD

### Dear alumni and friends,

2021 marked the year we took our first step towards endemic living with COVID-19. At times, it felt like we took one step forward and two steps back, almost as if we were trapped in an endless Cha-Cha dance with the pandemic.



I am optimistic that this year will see many of us coming together in person on more occasions as things are looking better and the path ahead is also clearing up.

Towards the end of last year, we recognised and celebrated the achievements of 40 alumni at NUS Alumni Awards 2021. It was the largest cohort of trailblazers honoured in a single year since the awards were introduced in 2005. Compliant with safe management measures, the award ceremonies were split into two sessions at the Shaw Foundation Alumni House and Town Plaza at University Town. I extend my heartiest congratulations to each and every recipient, for they have done the University proud. Our award recipients hail from diverse backgrounds and have distinguished themselves through significant and impactful contributions to Singapore and the larger community.

With 2021 designated the "Year of Celebrating SG Women", this issue's cover story encapsulates topics surrounding gender equality and wraps up the conversations on women which took place in NUS last year. We saw how faculties, schools and departments raised the bar on providing platforms to discuss women-related issues, implemented initiatives to shift mindsets, encouraged gender equality at the workplace, and celebrated the achievements of women in traditionally male-dominated industries. Taking a fresh approach in our Forum section, we picked the brains of our alumnae and alumni, as they shared their thoughts and experiences on gender equality in their everyday lives.

As we step into 2022, let us embrace the new year and the new normal with confidence. With the Lunar New Year just a month away, let me take this opportunity to wish everyone a Happy, Healthy and Roaring Year of the Tiger!

Finally, my colleagues and I look forward to saying hello to you in person at one or more of the many alumni events that we have in store in 2022.

Warmest wishes,

**Mr Bernard Toh**

(Architecture '84)

Director, Alumni Relations



## SUBMIT YOUR STORIES TO US!

Read The *AlumNUS* online at [nus.edu.sg/alumnet/TheAlumNUS](https://nus.edu.sg/alumnet/TheAlumNUS)!

If you have submissions for the following, let us know at [alumnihelpdesk@nus.edu.sg](mailto:alumnihelpdesk@nus.edu.sg):

- Lifelong Learners Highlight
- Book Corner



The *AlumNUS* clinched the following award at APEX 2021:

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— Custom Published

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# LARGEST COHORT OF OUTSTANDING ALUMNI HONoured AT NUS ALUMNI AWARDS 2021

Recipients were recognised for their impactful contributions to Singapore and the larger community.

## HELD IN TWO CEREMONIES ON 3 AND 5 NOVEMBER 2021, NUS Alumni Awards

this year honoured the achievements of 40 outstanding alumni – 32 individuals and four teams of two alumni – who have distinguished themselves through significant and impactful contributions to Singapore and the larger community. This is the largest cohort of trailblazers honoured in a single year since the awards were introduced in 2005.

## EMINENT ALUMNI AWARD

The University conferred the Eminent Alumni Award on three NUS alumni who have distinguished themselves nationally or globally for their exceptional and sustained contributions and achievements – Ambassador-at-Large Professor Chan Heng Chee (Arts '64), first-generation leader Mr Ong Pang Boon (Arts '53), and former top civil servant Mr Philip Yeo Liat Kok (Engineering '74 and Doctor of Letters '11).

Prof Chan Heng Chee, Ambassador-at-Large at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was the first woman to graduate with First Class Honours in Political Science from the then-University of Singapore in 1964. Prof Chan began her diplomatic career in 1989 as Singapore's first permanent representative to the United Nations. In 1996, she was appointed Singapore's, and East Asia's, first female ambassador to the United States. She also represented Singapore in Washington between 1996 and 2012, making her one of the country's longest-serving diplomats. She is currently a member of NUS Board of Trustees.

Former Minister Mr Ong Pang Boon is one of the pioneer generation of leaders who helped lay the foundations for a stable and successful Singapore. In a political career spanning 29 years, he served as Minister in the Home Affairs, Education, Labour and Environment ministries. For his sterling contributions to the government and the nation, Mr Ong was conferred the

Order of Nila Utama (First Class) in 1990.

Mr Philip Yeo Liat Kok is well known for his transformative contributions to Singapore's military, economic and biomedical fields. After three decades of illustrious service in the Singapore Administrative Service from 1970 to 1999, Mr Yeo chaired a number of public and private sector organisations including the Singapore Economic Development Board, the National Computer Board (now Infocomm Media Development Authority), the Agency for Science, Technology and Research (A\*STAR), and the Standards, Productivity and Innovation Board (SPRING Singapore).

## DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI SERVICE AWARD

12 alumni were recognised with the Distinguished Alumni Service Award for their impact in their respective fields as well as excellent and sustained service rendered to NUS, its predecessor institutions, and the community. They are:

- **Mr Abdullah Bin Tarmugi (Arts '69)**, Permanent Council Member on the Presidential Council on Minority Rights, former Minister for Community Development, and former NUS Board of Trustees Member;
- **Ms Aw Kah Peng (Engineering '90)**, Chairman, Shell Companies in Singapore;
- **Ms Jocelyn Chng Yee Kwang (Arts and Social Sciences '89 and Business '12)**, Managing Director, Sin Hwa Dee, CEO and Co-Founder, JR Group, and former Member of NUS Alumni Advisory Board;
- **Mr S Chandra Das (Arts '65)**, Non-Resident High Commissioner to Sri Lanka, and former Member of Parliament;
- **Mr Barry Desker (Arts '70)**, Former Non-Resident Ambassador to the Holy See and the Kingdom of Spain;



NUS President Professor Tan Eng Chye with Mr Abdullah Bin Tarmugi, one of the recipients of the Distinguished Alumni Service Award.

- **Minister Desmond Lee Ti-Seng (Law '01)**, Minister for National Development;
- **Dr Lee Tzu Pheng (Arts '68)**, Award-winning poet and literary pioneer, and winner of the Cultural Medallion for Literature;
- **Professor Leo Yee Sin (Medicine '83, '89 and Public Health '13)**, Executive Director, National Centre for Infectious Diseases;
- **Mr Dilhan Pillay Sandrasegara (Law '88)**, CEO, Temasek Holdings (Private) Limited and CEO, Temasek International;
- **Mr Jack Sim Juek Wah (Public Policy '13)**, Founder, World Toilet Organisation;
- **Dr Tan Lai Yong (Medicine '85 and Public Policy '13)**, Associate Professor, College of Alice & Peter Tan, NUS; and
- **Mr Sonny Yuen Chee Choong (Business '85)**, Managing Director, JonDavidson Private Limited.

## OUTSTANDING YOUNG ALUMNI AWARD

17 young alumni also received awards for their achievements which have distinguished them in their chosen fields. They are:

- **Ms Annie An Dongmei (Computing '15)**, Solutions Architect, Amazon Web Services;
- **Mr Laurence Putra Franslay (Computing '13)**, Winner of the President's Volunteerism & Philanthropy Awards 2020;
- **Dr Sharon Heng Ling Zhi (Medicine '08)**, Ophthalmic surgeon at Moorfields Eye Hospital and Chairperson, NUS Alumni London Chapter;
- **Mr Lim Wei Jie (Arts and Social Sciences '17)**, Co-Founder and Director, Foreword Coffee Roasters;
- **Mr David Low Jia Wei (Systems Science '16)**, Co-Founder and Chief Data Scientist, Pand.ai;
- **Dr Mohammad Hossein Davood Abadi Farahani (Engineering '19)**, Founder, CEO and CTO, SEPPURE;
- **Mr Muhammad Ibnur Rashad Bin Zainal Abidin (Engineering + USP '11)**, Founder and Chief Innovation Officer, Ground-Up Innovation Labs for Development (GUILD);
- **Mr Ow Tai Zhi (Business '11)**, Co-Founder and Chief Investment Officer, AutoWealth Singapore, and Member of NUS Alumni Advisory Board;
- **Mr Rameez Ansar (Computing + USP '05)**, Co-Founder, Circles.Life;
- **Ms Carrie Tan Huimin (Arts and Social Sciences '04 and Public Policy '20)**, Member of Parliament and Founder, Daughters of Tomorrow;
- **Ms Audrey Joy Tan Yan Xi (Arts and Social Sciences '11)**, Chief Dreams Architect and Co-Founder, PlayMoolah;
- **Dr Andy Tay Kah Ping (Engineering '14)**, NUS Presidential Young Professor;
- **Mr Aseem Kumar Thakur (Engineering + USP '09)**, Co-Founder, GIVE.asia, and Founder and CEO, Aseemai;
- **Ms Tin Pei Ling (Arts and Social Sciences + USP '07)**, Member of Parliament and CEO, Business China;
- **Mr Wong Kah Chun (Music '11)**, Chief Conductor, Nuremberg Symphony Orchestra, Germany;
- **Ms Janice Wong Huixian (Arts and Social Sciences '06)**, Chef Artist, Janice Wong Singapore and Owner of 2am:dessertbar; and
- **Dr Zhou Lihan (Science + USP '07 and Medicine '13)**, Co-Founder and CEO, MiRXES.

## TEAM [ALUMNI] AWARD

The accolade was accorded to four two-member alumni teams who have collectively distinguished themselves in their chosen fields:

As we celebrate the remarkable contributions of our alumni, NUS remains committed to creating the best environment for exceptional and inspiring individuals to do the best work and unlock their true potential.

Professor Tan Eng Chye, NUS President

- **Mr Nicholas Ooi Hsien Loong (Computing '18)** and **Ms Janelle Lee Jiaxin (Arts and Social Sciences '17)**, Co-Founders, bantu;
- **Dr Shi Jiahai (Science '09)** and **Dr Le Thi Nguyet Minh (Science '05)**, Co-Founders, Carmine Therapeutics;
- **Mr Stefen Chow (Engineering '03)** and **Ms Lin Huiyi (Arts and Social Sciences + USP '03)**, Co-Founders, Chow and Lin; and
- **Mr Henry Chan Hian Yi (Engineering '11)** and **Mr Joel Leong Yong Siang (Arts and Social Sciences '12)**, Co-Founders, ShopBack.

NUS President Professor Tan Eng Chye (Science '85) said, "NUS is delighted to honour 40 outstanding alumni and teams – the biggest cohort of recipients since the inception of the awards is testament to the high calibre of alumni who come from diverse backgrounds – from healthcare, civil service and finance to the arts. Their life experiences, trailblazing work and achievements inspire us to continue nurturing generations of changemakers who exemplify the NUS values of innovation, resilience, excellence, respect and integrity."

"It is their unending spirit of determination, commitment and dedication to improving the lives of communities locally and beyond, that makes us immensely proud to call them NUS alumni. As we celebrate the remarkable contributions of our alumni, NUS remains committed to creating the best environment for exceptional and inspiring individuals to do the best work and unlock their true potential."

Now in its ninth edition, the biennial NUS Alumni Awards was established on the occasion of NUS Centennial Celebrations in 2005 to honour alumni who have distinguished themselves through significant and impactful contributions to their alma mater, society and the world.



The Eminent Alumni Award was conferred on (from left) Ambassador Chan Heng Chee, Mr Ong Pang Boon and Mr Philip Yeo Liat Kok.

This article was first published on 3 November 2021 on NUS News at [news.nus.edu.sg/largest-cohort-of-outstanding-alumni-honoured-at-nus-alumni-awards-2021](https://news.nus.edu.sg/largest-cohort-of-outstanding-alumni-honoured-at-nus-alumni-awards-2021).



# TIME TO RECHARGE TOGETHER

NUS steps up mental health care with Well-Being Day.



**FOR STUDENTS, ADJUSTING TO CAMPUS LIFE IN A TOP UNIVERSITY AND NAVIGATING THE TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD CAN BE STRESSFUL.** For staff, heavy workloads and tight teaching schedules can be hard to cope with. Add the COVID-19 pandemic into the mix and the pressure intensifies, as boundaries between professional and personal lives are blurred. With remote work or classes, and online collaborations proving difficult, a sense of isolation increases due to social gathering restrictions, and mounting fears of uncertainty.

Recognising the growing stress levels, NUS has been stepping up its efforts to promote mental and emotional well-being in both its staff and students. The latest initiative: NUS Well-Being Day. On 5 November, NUS shut down to recharge as a community. Held a day after the Deepavali public holiday, it provided staff and students with a long weekend to reconnect with

family and enjoy time away from school and work. "Amid the challenges brought on not least by COVID-19, I am proud to see the NUS community come together to make the best of our circumstances with grit and courage. We have done very well in the way we adapted to significant changes in the way we live, study, work and play, and I truly appreciate how each of you have stepped up to the plate in order to keep our campus safe and healthy," said NUS President Professor Tan Eng Chye (Science '85).

## #WELLNUS: ENSURING NO ONE IS OVERLOOKED

NUS Well-Being Day builds on the university's slew of initiatives, including the Health and Wellbeing (HWB) Team that was set up last year. Helmed by Dr Andrew Epaphroditus Tay (Medicine '07), the team designs programmes that enhance resilience. It also consolidates the

strengths of other NUS units supporting mental health, including the University Health Centre, University Counselling Services, Office of Student Affairs, and Office of Human Resources.

The goal, he shared, is to make a greater impact through collaboration while ensuring a coherent message. But tackling mental health issues is complex, as many are still afraid to seek help, and among those who do, there are a wide range of concerns that need to be addressed differently. "The perennial challenge is how can we proactively identify students and staff who are struggling and who have clammed up," said Dr Tay. This is particularly difficult due to the large NUS community comprising over 50,000 staff and students.

Hence, the team takes a structured approach, shared Ms Katherine Koh, Consultant (Organisational Psychologist) on the HWB team. The team developed an in-house #WellNUS framework that systematically identifies potential gaps in NUS' well-being support services. The framework aims to support staff and students every step of the way, as there are different stages of a person's well-being journey.

Now, the team is in the midst of building and implementing a staff Peer Support System. "We hope to be better able to reach out to distressed individuals and reduce the barrier to help-seeking behaviours by creating a community of support," said Ms Koh.

## We hope to be better able to reach out to distressed individuals and reduce the barrier to help-seeking behaviours by creating a community of support.

Ms Katherine Koh, Consultant (Organisational Psychologist), Health and Wellbeing Team

Campaigns such as #AreuOK have also been launched to destigmatise mental health issues, she added, noting that an initial survey found the campaign to be effective in driving awareness among staff and students, and increased their willingness to support people with these conditions.

## #AREUOK: PROVIDING HELP TO THOSE IN DISTRESS

But even when people do seek help, getting them to overcome their struggles is not easy, as their triggers and problems can be multifaceted. Being at a top university also adds to the stress. "NUS was recently ranked 11<sup>th</sup> in the world, and No.1 in Asia." Naturally, we attract the best, brightest and highly-motivated staff and students to join our community, creating a vibrant, dynamic and move-fast culture," shared Dr Tay. "This also

brings with it performance stress, which manifests differently in respective persons."

Undergraduates have to deal with challenging curriculum, reduced or very different peer groups, as well as family separation in the case of foreign students who are alone in Singapore and learning to assimilate into local culture. With COVID-19, they also had to quickly adapt from physical to online learning platforms. Professors had to learn how to use new platforms to teach during the pandemic, and juggle domestic duties and professional responsibilities in light of default work from home and home-based-learning arrangements.

"In general, even without COVID-19, living, studying and working in a fast-paced, highly-competitive university environment presents some perennial stressors," explained Ms Agnes Koh, Head of University Counselling Services. Some of the more common student problems she and her team have encountered include personal growth issues such as emerging adult social identity, one's existential purpose in life, and self-acceptance.

Together with her team, Ms Koh offers counselling to students while also taking preventive measures, such as screenings and assessments. Student leaders are also trained to identify risk indicators and to make referrals to the University Counselling Services.

Among staff, the more common issues that cause mental distress are workloads and expectations, family relationships and tensions, as well as conflicts with colleagues. To address these problems, the HWB team offers individual well-being check-ins. It is also developing and delivering workshops to

train staff to identify and support colleagues who may be experiencing distress, said Dr Kinjal Doshi, Lead Psychologist & Senior Wellbeing Specialist Partner on the HWB team. "These initiatives are a start towards maintaining and improving the mental health and well-being of staff. We recognise that by attending to the needs of staff, it will indirectly impact the mental health and well-being of students," she said.

## #RECHARGETOGETHER: A JOURNEY TO EMOTIONAL WELLNESS

While ad-hoc programmes are beneficial, their impact is often temporary and unsustainable. To prolong their effects, NUS will continue to review and prioritise resources to channel towards achieving better mental health. For instance, the HWB team is already preparing for the second run of the #AreuOK campaign, which will take place from January to June 2022.

"I've learned that campaigns cannot just be done as a one-off. Building awareness and having that translate to actual behaviour change takes time," said Ms Katherine Koh. She added that frequent and consistent messaging over the years is essential to facilitate culture change and reduce mental health stigma. This will hopefully put to rest many myths about mental illness, including seeing it as personal weakness, fate, retribution or a test of character.

For Dr Tay, ensuring emotional well-being is a long-running target for the university. "We are never done in our journey. Health and Well-being is a shared objective among NUS staff and student bodies," he said.



The Health and Wellbeing team led by Dr Andrew Epaphroditus Tay.



(From left) Dr Andrew Tay, Director, Health and Wellbeing Office; Dr Patrick Tan, University Health Centre; Mr John Chng, Associate Director, Office of Student Affairs.

\*Source: QS World University Rankings

This article was first published on 27 October 2021 on NUS News at [news.nus.edu.sg/time-to-recharge-together-nus-steps-up-mental-health-care-with-wellbeing-day](https://news.nus.edu.sg/time-to-recharge-together-nus-steps-up-mental-health-care-with-wellbeing-day).



# NUS ranked 24<sup>th</sup> in Times Higher Education World Reputation Rankings

The University was also named 21<sup>st</sup> in the World University Rankings.

**NUS HAS RETAINED ITS POSITION AS THE 24<sup>TH</sup> MOST PRESTIGIOUS UNIVERSITY WORLDWIDE**, in the latest *Times Higher Education (THE)* global reputation ranking. Harvard University clinched the top spot, while the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and the University of Oxford came in second and third respectively. The annual ranking is based on ratings by academics around the world. This year, close to 11,000 academics cast votes to rate 202 universities from 29 countries based on excellence in research and teaching.

An NUS spokesperson said, "We are pleased that NUS continues to be recognised among the world's top 25 universities in the *Times Higher Education World Reputation Rankings 2021*. Our good showing is a testament to the combined efforts of our faculty, researchers and staff to take teaching and research at NUS to greater heights. We will continue to

press on in our efforts to build broad-based excellence across education, research and entrepreneurship, especially in areas that are of strategic importance to Singapore."

On the ranking's significance, Mr Phil Baty, THE's Chief Knowledge Officer noted that "reputation is a powerful currency for universities that plays a vital role in attracting student talent, academic talent, new partnerships and even inward investment".

This ranking is based on the opinions and views of academics worldwide. It differs from the *THE World University Rankings*, which is based on 13 indicators to measure performance in teaching, research, knowledge transfer and international outlook. Last month, THE announced that NUS jumped four places to emerge 21<sup>st</sup> in the overall *World University Rankings* – the best showing by NUS, and Singapore, since the rankings began 11 years ago.

Earlier this month, NUS was ranked the best in Asia for its Computer Science,

Law and Engineering courses in the *THE World University Rankings* by subject. The University was ranked 8<sup>th</sup> globally for Law and Computer Science, and 10<sup>th</sup> for Engineering.

## A GLOBAL TOP 30 SPOT IN THE US NEWS UNIVERSITY RANKINGS

Separately, the University rose three places to claim 29<sup>th</sup> place in the latest *US News & World Report Best Global Universities Rankings*, retaining its position as second-best in Asia. This is NUS' best performance since the rankings started in 2014. The first, second and third spots went to Harvard, MIT and Stanford University respectively. Tsinghua University was named the best institution in Asia.

*US News & World Report* is the first American publisher to enter the global rankings space, which includes the *THE World University Rankings* and the *QS World University Rankings*. In its eighth edition, the 2022 ranking assessed 1,750 institutions from more than 90 countries across 13 different metrics, including research reputation, faculty publications and international collaboration.

**We are pleased that NUS continues to be recognised among the world's top 25 universities in the *Times Higher Education World Reputation Rankings 2021*.**

An NUS spokesperson



This article was first published on 27 October 2021 on NUS News at [news.nus.edu.sg/nus-ranked-24th-in-times-higher-education-world-reputation-rankings](https://news.nus.edu.sg/nus-ranked-24th-in-times-higher-education-world-reputation-rankings).



Left: The Opening Night saw about 50 guests in attendance for a screening of *El Bien Esquivo*. Below: Ambassador Carlos Vasquez (left) and Director of NUS Alumni Relations, Mr Bernard Toh (right), greeting each other at the event.



## CELEBRATING PERU'S BICENTENNIAL AT THE PERUVIAN FILM FESTIVAL 2021



Ambassador Carlos Vasquez giving his welcome address.

**FOLLOWING THE SUCCESS OF AN INAUGURAL COLLABORATION IN 2020**, NUS Alumni Relations is proud to have partnered with the Embassy of Peru in Singapore for the second year to host *Peruvian Film Festival 2021*, at Shaw Foundation Alumni House. The film festival was also a celebratory opportunity to commemorate Peru's 200 years of independence.

Kicking off with an Opening Night on 23 November 2021, the event was organised with strict implementation of safe management measurements to ensure a responsible get-together for all. In attendance were His Excellency Carlos Vasquez, Ambassador of the Republic of Peru to Singapore, and Mr Bernard Toh (Architecture '84), Director of NUS Alumni Relations, who both gave welcome addresses before guests were treated to the selected film of the night, *El Bien Esquivo (The Elusive Good)*.

From 24 to 26 November, guests and attendees of the public screening nights got to enjoy the best of Peruvian films, which showcased the country's unique and intriguing culture. The film festival came to a fruitful conclusion as the NUS community looks forward to building on 41 years of friendship and diplomatic relations between Singapore and Peru.



FUTURE-READY WORKSHOPS

# Investing for Financial Wellness



**IN VIEW OF OUR INCREASING LONGEVITY, HOW DOES ONE EFFECTIVELY INVEST TO ENSURE A LONGER FINANCIAL RUNWAY?** On 12 October 2021, 271 attendees joined Prof Ong Seow Eng (Real Estate '84) from the Department of Real Estate and Mr Shashank Shekhar Tripathi (Business + Computing '19) from NUS School of Computing for a virtual webinar to learn all about future-proofing their assets for the long run. Participants were treated to insights on leveraging data and technology to make better investment



decisions, as well as building and managing real estate wealth for the long term. The Q&A session saw enthusiastic participation from attendees, who seized the chance to have their burning questions answered by industry experts.

Moderator Ms Sherry Yeo (Design and Environment '15) led an engaging Q&A session with Prof Ong and Mr Shashank.

HEALTH & WELLNESS

# BREAKTHROUGHS IN LUNG CANCER DETECTION AND TREATMENT



Dr Lim sharing a case study of a patient diagnosis with participants.

**ON 21 OCTOBER 2021, 148 PARTICIPANTS JOINED** Dr Lim Chong Hee (Medicine '90), a Specialist in Cardiothoracic Surgery at Farrer Park Hospital to better understand the symptoms, risks and treatments for lung cancer. As the third most common cancer in Singapore, Dr Lim shared with the virtual audience the importance of screening, different stages of the disease, various techniques in biopsy and the role of surgery in managing early lung cancer. The session concluded with a robust Q&A session where Dr Lim also shared the effects of COVID-19 on lung cancer patients.



## Shaping a Gender-Equal Workforce of Tomorrow

9 March 2022 | Wednesday | 7.30pm - 9.00pm

Join us Online  
[alum.events/WoWmar22](https://alum.events/WoWmar22)



Founding Chairperson of WoW and Moderator:  
**Dr Intan Azura Mokhtar**  
(Science '98)  
Member of NUS Alumni Advisory Board

PANELLISTS



**Mdm Zulaiha Yusuf**  
(Arts and Social Sciences '85)  
Deputy Chief Executive Officer  
Yayasan Mendaki



**Ms Anuprita Bhomick**  
(Business '03)  
Head of Customer Experience  
Google



**Ms Annie An Dongmei**  
(Computing '15)  
Solutions Architect  
Amazon Web Services



## No More Back Pain! Alleviating the Aches and Pains of Working From Home

With prolonged hours at the desk and decreased mobility, Working From Home has taken a toll on our bodies. Tune in as **Dr Mash** (Medicine '03) shares preventative measures one can take and red-flags to watch out for in keeping your spine healthy. He will also shed light on the latest measures available in dealing with problems related to nerve compression in the spine.

**Dr Mohammad Mashfiqul Arafin Siddiqui**  
(Medicine '03)  
Senior Orthopaedic and Spine Surgeon  
Farrer Park Hospital



6 January 2022  
(Thursday)  
7.30pm - 9.00pm



**JOIN US NOW!**  
Register at [alum.events/HWjan22](https://alum.events/HWjan22)



TECH TALK

# TOWARDS A DIGITAL ORGANISATION AND DATA-DRIVEN WORKFORCE

**IN THE FINAL OFFERING OF THE TECH TALK SERIES**, more than 200 participants attended this session, organised in partnership with NUS School of Continuing and Lifelong Education (SCALE), on 16 November 2021.

Associate Professor Tan Chuan Hoo (Computing '01), Deputy Head (Administration and Research), NUS School of Computing, and Dr Benjamin Lee (Science '84), Senior Lecturer

(Data Analytics and Visualisation), Faculty of Science, gave valuable insights into how data can be harnessed at work, and how companies can re-imagine the way they develop digital capabilities and create effective practices for digital transformation.

Prof Tan gave an overview of the most commonly-committed mistakes in the digital transformation journey, being



Moderator Mr Prantik Mazumdar (Computing '06) leading an engaging Q&A session with Prof Tan and Dr Lee.

pragmatic about it, and suggested ways that such mistakes can be avoided, while Dr Lee explained in detail how professionals can understand what data literacy

is and the fundamental skills required to work with data for the organisation, all before opening up to a lively question-and-answer segment.

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

THIRSTY THURSDAYS

# Insanely Delicious & Nutritious Plant-based Meals

**ON 2 DECEMBER 2021, OVER 100 YOUNG ALUMNI AND STUDENTS TUNED IN FROM THE COMFORT OF THEIR HOMES** and participated in a lively panel discussion on sustainable meat alternatives to find out how going meatless will become the future of food. Organised in collaboration with Insane Meals, the event featured a panel of experts from the plant-based industry – Mr Constant Tong (Computing '91), Founder of Insane Meals, Mr Lee Kuan Loong (Arts and Social Sciences '12), Senior Sales Manager at Impossible Foods Singapore, Mr Vikas Garg, Founder and CEO of abillion and Ms Bonnie Lau, Certified Dietitian. It was an enjoyable evening of healthy and nutritious plant-based bento's, many toasts and fun as participants got to know one another better through ice breaker games and in breakout rooms.



Mr Constant Tong  
(Computing '91),  
Founder, Insane Meals

Mr Vikas Garg,  
Founder and  
CEO, abillion

Mr Lee Kuan Loong  
(Arts and Social Sciences  
'12), Senior Sales  
Manager, Impossible  
Foods Singapore

Ms Bonnie Lau,  
Certified Dietitian

Speaker:

**Dr Nicholas Ho (Engineering '13)**

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

**15 February 2022 (Tuesday)  
7.30pm to 9.00pm**



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## Self-Driving Vehicles: Applications and Trends

Self-driving vehicles are emerging in countries like the US and China, providing services such as transportation and product/food delivery for the consumer market. Current technologies have gotten self-driving systems off to a good start but there is still room for improvement to extend their capabilities. This talk aims to discuss the basic technologies behind self-driving vehicles, their potential applications, and the future of self-driving vehicles involving state-of-the-art technologies like 5G.



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➤ <b>Master of Science in Business Analytics</b> NUS Business Analytics Centre (BAC)	➤ <b>Master of Arts (Arts and Cultural Entrepreneurship)</b> NUS Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
➤ <b>Master of Computing</b> NUS School of Computing	➤ <b>Master of Music Leadership</b> Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music
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➤ <b>Master of Landscape Architecture</b> Design and Environment	➤ <b>Master of Laws</b> NUS Faculty of Law
➤ <b>Master of Science in Building Performance and Sustainability</b> Design and Environment	➤ <b>Master of Science (Maritime Technology and Management)</b> Centre for Maritime Studies and NUS Faculty of Engineering
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## WANDERLUST: THE AMAZING IDA PFEIFFER, THE FIRST FEMALE TOURIST

Authored by Mr John van Wyhe, a historian of science and one of the world's leading experts on Charles Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace. He is a senior lecturer in the Department of Biological Sciences and a Fellow of Tembusu College, National University of Singapore.



*Wanderlust* is the true story of Ida Pfeiffer (1797–1858), one of the most remarkable female travellers who ever lived. It is the story of a stubborn tomboy, of lovers torn apart, and a miserable housewife who decides to follow her dreams despite the strong disapproval of society. At a time when it was considered utterly impossible, Pfeiffer set off, alone, to travel the world. She displayed incredible courage, endurance and perseverance. Along the way she survived storms at sea, parched deserts, plague, malaria,

drowning, earthquakes, robbers, murderers, headhunters and cannibals. She became the first woman to circle the globe alone, and then the first to do so twice and she was the first budget traveller to boot. As a result of her incredible exploits and her bestselling travel books, Pfeiffer became one of the most famous women in the world. Hers is a tale that culminates in spies, intrigue, a botched revolution and a remarkable career cut tragically short by one voyage too many.

Available at: [nuspress.nus.edu.sg/collections/frontpage/products/wanderlust](https://nuspress.nus.edu.sg/collections/frontpage/products/wanderlust).

## THE COVID-19 CHRONICLES

Singapore's Journey from Pandemia to Peri-Pandemic Limbo

Authored by Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, National University of Singapore and illustrated by Mr Andrew Tan and Ms Angee Neo.

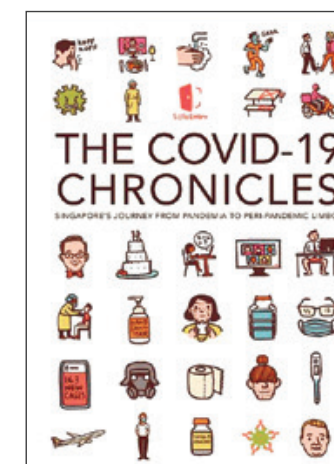
No one is safe until everyone is safe. Singapore's struggle against the coronavirus mirrors those being waged by countries everywhere against a relentless, invisible enemy. In times of crisis, confusion and pandemonium abound. Sensing a need for simple and concise public health education and information that could help people to make sense of a bewildering new abnormal, Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine launched a long-running series of illustrated stories on social media platforms. *The COVID-19 Chronicles* quickly took off, drawing the attention of the WHO's Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network, which arranged for the series to be shared with other countries.

This book features every *Chronicles* story published, and tells the story of the work behind the scenes to bring each episode to life. Offering bite-sized explanations of issues and topics seeded by the pandemic's global march, the *Chronicles* prods readers to stay safe, while also providing a humorous take on Singaporean life in the time of COVID-19.

"Singapore's health response to COVID-19 has been an international exemplar. Integration of the country's world-class medical research with its superb healthcare system enabled a science-led approach to the pandemic that provides myriad lessons for other nations.

*The COVID-19 Chronicles* tells the compelling story of the coronavirus in Singapore. By promoting facts over fake news, this book shows why successful communication is an indispensable, but too often neglected, part of public health. Smart, insightful and urgent."

Mr Richard Horton,  
Editor-in-Chief, *The Lancet*



Available at: [worldscientific.com/worldscibooks/10.1142/12504](https://worldscientific.com/worldscibooks/10.1142/12504).

## THE POVERTY LINE

Authored by Chow and Lin, with contributions by Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, Andrea Brandolini, Lucas Chancel and John Micklewright.



"The cumulative effect of viewing morsel after morsel of delicious food is hunger – a response that feels fitting for a book dedicated to making poverty palpable by expressing it literally, as sustenance, or lack thereof."

MoMA Magazine

*The Poverty Line* uses food to examine the daily choices people face living at the poverty line. The book is authored by artistic duo Chow and Lin, consisting of Mr Stefen Chow (Engineering '03), an award-winning photographer; and economist Ms Lin Huiyi (Arts and Social Sciences '03), who travelled 200,000 kilometres across six continents and documented poverty in 36 countries and territories. The couple studied official as well as proxy definitions of the poverty line in each country, creating a growing conversation that questions the understanding of poverty and inequality.

Traversing cultures and economic systems, the book presents objective, non-emotional observations of our own circumstances, framed against the fragile balance of social structures, growth and divide in an entangled, globalised world.

Available at: [deck.sg/product/the-poverty-line](https://deck.sg/product/the-poverty-line).

# BRINGING US TOGETHER

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# SHEROES, AND THE SHAPING OF A FAIRER TOMORROW



## DID YOU KNOW?

The World Economic Forum estimates that, on the current trajectory, it will take **135.6 YEARS** to close the gender gap worldwide.

Women today, including many from the NUS community, are key players in corporations, government and society. It appears that the faint outline of a gender-equal world can be seen. But it requires some squinting, and we have our work cut out for us.

TEXT BY WANDA TAN

**WHY DEDICATE JUST ONE DAY TO HIGHLIGHTING WOMEN'S ACHIEVEMENTS AND FLYING THE FLAG FOR GENDER EQUALITY WHEN YOU COULD DO SO FOR AN ENTIRE YEAR?**

That was the thinking behind the Ministry of Social and Family Development's (MSF) decision to declare 2021 as the *Year of Celebrating SG Women*. Throughout last year, numerous events and initiatives — some organised by NUS — were held to pay tribute to the achievements of women in Singapore and support their continued progress. These included gatherings to celebrate female trailblazers in their respective fields, candid conversations about women's position in society,

social media campaigns encouraging people to challenge gender norms, and more.

However, progress rarely follows a straight line. While women in the 21<sup>st</sup> century do enjoy more rights and privileges than those of previous generations, they are still far from being on an equal footing with men. Persistent sexist attitudes, gender-based pay disparities, and the COVID-19 pandemic's disproportionate impact on women are some of the obstacles they continue to come up against. Joining the fight and doing their part are the women (and men) of NUS.

## SPARKING A CHANGE IN MINDSETS

To mark International Women's Day on 8 March 2021, Tembusu College held its flagship Tembusu Forum, which was themed 'Women in Singapore: Justice, Equality and Respect'. With the college's rector Professor Tommy Koh (Law '61) as moderator, a three-member panel comprising Mr K Shanmugam (Law '84), Minister for Home Affairs and Law; Ms Corinna Lim (Law '87), Executive Director, Association of Women for Action and Research (AWARE); and Ms Junie Foo (Arts and Social Sciences '90), President, Singapore Council of Women's Organisations (SCWO), discussed issues such as whether the country prioritises gender equality as a core value, the limitations of the Women's Charter, and the possibility of amending the Constitution to expressly prohibit sex-based discrimination.

Ms Stacy Fernandes, a third-year College of Humanities and Sciences student then residing at Tembusu College, was among the in-person attendees at the hybrid event. During the Q&A session, the Political Science major

brought up the underrepresentation of women in politics and asked whether Singapore is ready for a female prime minister. Mr Shanmugam noted that there are several women leaders in politics, including Ministers Ms Indranee Rajah (Law '86), Ms Grace Fu (Business '85) and Mrs Josephine Teo (Arts and Social Sciences '90). That said, he acknowledged more could be done to shift societal mindsets away from traditional gender roles which cast men as breadwinners and women as caregivers, and to provide more support for women entering the political sphere.

"After the Forum, a lot of my peers who watched it online reached out to me with their own points of view. It led to productive and meaningful conversations, and I felt this was exactly the type of ground-up change that the Minister was referring to when it comes to reshaping societal values," Ms Fernandes, 22, tells *The AlumNUS*. "In the microcosm of our university environment, it is easy to believe that we're somehow making a change when we participate in forums and discussions like this or have collective — generally progressive — attitudes regarding such issues. But there is a whole country out there, and change doesn't come as easily to everyone. Nevertheless, it is still progress, no matter how small the scale might be, and it can be a starting point for further, greater things."

2021 also saw not one but two women-centric *WoW* events, a series founded by NUS Alumni Advisory Board member Dr Intan Azura Mokhtar (Science '98). The first was the *WoW: In Conversation* session on 10 March, when then-Manpower Minister Josephine Teo joined several other distinguished NUS alumnae for a Zoom discussion on how to improve gender diversity and inclusion in the workforce. The second was a new spin-off called *WoW: Ignite – TIES* (Technological, Informational and Educational Sharing) on 1 September. Speakers including fellow NUS Alumni Advisory Board members Ms Janet Ang (Business '82), a Nominated Member of Parliament who serves on many boards; Ms Goh Yiping (Design and Environment '05), an e-commerce whiz and advocate of female technopreneurship; and Ms Trisha Suresh (Public Policy '11), Public Policy and Economic Graph Manager of LinkedIn, shared personal stories and tips on empowering oneself in today's career landscape.

"I envisioned *WoW: In Conversation* to be a dialogue on issues that women are concerned



(Left to right) Ms Corinna Lim, Minister K Shanmugam, Prof Tommy Koh and Ms Junie Foo at the Tembusu Forum.





**The reality is that there are more men in positions of leadership, influence and power. Through the *WoW* series, I hope to provide more opportunities for women's voices to be heard and shared, and to inspire other female alumnae, students and staff on their journey to success.**

Dr Intan Azura Mokhtar,  
NUS Alumni Advisory Board member

about, such as employability and gender stereotypes. With *WoW: Ignite – TIES*, I wanted to create a TED Talk-kind of platform, where [established] female alumnae share their experiences, views and insights," says Dr Intan. "The reality is that there are more men in positions of leadership, influence and power. Through the *WoW* series, I hope to provide more opportunities for women's voices to be heard and shared, and to inspire other female alumnae, students and staff on their journey to success."

## MOTHERHOOD PENALTY, FATHERHOOD BONUS

The issues fuelling gender disparity in Singapore were front and centre at the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) Women's Conference on 3 June 2021. As part of a panel discussion on the topic of 'Equal Work, Equal Pay', Associate Professor Jessica Pan from NUS Department of Economics argued that there remains a significant (albeit narrower) gender pay gap,

Assoc Prof Jessica Pan spoke at the virtual IPS Women's Conference.



even though women have caught up with — and, in some cases, surpassed — men in educational attainment.

According to a 2020 report which Assoc Prof Pan co-authored with the Ministry of Manpower, the wage gap between men and women in 2018 — after adjusting for factors such as age, education level and occupational differences — was six per cent. She attributes much of it to the "motherhood penalty" in an interview with *The AlumNUS*: "Data from many countries show that men's and women's earnings tend to increase at the same rate until the arrival of the first child, after which women's wage growth slows down and does not recover even 10 to 20 years later. This is also the case with couples who are similarly educated or where the female partner has better earning potential."

Assoc Prof Pan puts forward various reasons why child-rearing penalises women in their careers more heavily compared to men. For one, stubborn social norms mean that women are still expected to take time off work and be the main provider of childcare within the household. To make matters worse, the parenting burden — which often falls on mothers — has been heightened by the culture of 'intensive parenting' and greater competition for school



places. In addition, rewards for working long and inflexible hours have increased considerably over time, but many women are less amenable to doing so due to their larger share of family responsibilities. "It's a double whammy," she laments.

How can we address this thorny problem? "We should think of policies that benefit not just women, but both men and women — that is, family-friendly policies directed to helping both men and women balance their roles in the workplace and as caregivers," says Assoc Prof Pan. For example, instead of simply extending maternity leave, employers could craft parental leave provisions that incentivise or encourage men to share the workload at home. Another solution is to offer flexible working arrangements while ensuring that those who utilise this option are not penalised for it.

There has been quite a bit of movement towards the latter trend in the wake of the pandemic. On the one hand, COVID-19 and the intermittent school closures have affected working mothers globally, with many being forced to leave their jobs to pick up the slack at home. But on the other, Assoc Prof Pan spots a potential silver lining: "Prior to COVID-19, the idea of working from home every day or meeting important clients over Zoom was deemed impossible. The pandemic dealt an exogenous shock to the way the labour market does things. As we transition from pandemic to endemic, companies are revisiting their workplace policies and starting to see that remote or flexible working on a permanent basis is feasible. This could benefit women as well as men."



Women in Singapore earn about

**6% LESS**

than their male peers for doing similar work.

**We should think of policies that benefit not just women, but both men and women — family-friendly policies directed to helping both men and women balance their roles in the workplace and as caregivers.**

Assoc Prof Jessica Pan,  
Department of Economics, NUS

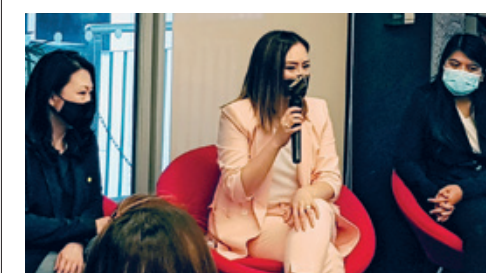


## GETTING A HEAD START

Baby or no baby, many young women experience barriers and biases in the workplace that could hinder their career progression. In a 2020 survey conducted by NUS Centre for Future-ready Graduates (CFG), female alumnae shared that the biggest challenges they faced in their first year of work were voicing disagreements, suggesting ideas or raising questions, building relationships with senior management, and managing stress and workload. "All of these are critical to succeeding in the early years of career development," says Ms Camilla Tam, Head of Learning and Development at CFG.

To address this, CFG piloted a new **Women's Professional Development Programme (WPDP)** in February 2021 for a group of 30 penultimate and final-year female students. "The *WPDP* aims to empower female students with the mindsets and skills to overcome workplace challenges and grasp opportunities early in their careers, to set them on a strong trajectory," says Ms Tam. Over a six-week period, participants brainstormed, pitched and role-played their way through sessions on human-centred design, personal branding, self-advocacy, managing difficult conversations and building a support network.

Ms Calissa Man, now in the final semester of her Political Science degree at NUS, believes taking part in the *WPDP* has boosted her confidence and better prepared her for the working world. "I got to upskill myself and deepen my interest in design thinking and user-centric solutions. I also gained tips to network effectively and formed meaningful connections with peers, young alumnae and female leaders," says the 22-year-old. Come January 2022, CFG will embark on the second run of the *WPDP*.



Female leaders sharing their insights at the final *WPDP* session in March 2021.



One of the participants presenting her key takeaways from the programme.

## → ALL A-BOARD

One recurring issue that came up at the Tembusu Forum as well as the *WoW* session in March was the lack of women in corporate boardrooms. This is a cause close to Mr Loh Boon Chye's (Engineering '89) heart. The CEO of Singapore Exchange (SGX) co-chairs the Council for Board Diversity (CBD), whose objective is to increase women's participation on boards across the private, people and public sectors.

As Mr Loh explains, gender-diverse boards are not just good for women but make good business sense — more



so in these uncertain times: "The impact of the pandemic has been unprecedented, and led to fundamental changes in how businesses operate, challenges in keeping up staff wellbeing, as well as unexpected and regular disruptions as the coronavirus evolves

and spreads. These developments call for different skills and expertise and have put diversity at the leadership level squarely in the limelight. Having diverse perspectives and thoughts in a board will ensure that the organisation considers a wide range of risks and opportunities in planning its strategic priorities."

Things are gradually moving in the right direction, with the proportion of women sitting on the boards of the top 100 primary-listed companies on SGX more than doubling from 7.5 per cent in 2013 to 18 per cent in June

2021. To reach the CBD's long-term goal of an equal proportion of male and female directors on boards, Mr Loh urges everyone — both men and women — to play their part. "As part of good governance, organisations should widen the pool of candidates and involve external parties including search professionals. Women with the skills and experience required by boards are encouraged to avail themselves. Investors, regulators and other stakeholders must also clearly express their expectations of companies' board diversity policies and disclosures."



## GENDER (IN)EQUALITY IN ACADEMIA

Female faculty members at higher education institutions have to contend with their own version of the 'motherhood penalty' in the form of the tenure-track process. Tenured professors enjoy higher wages, job security and academic freedom, but the path to becoming one is long, arduous and highly competitive. It is especially trying for female academics who have young children to care for. As a result, many end up making the difficult trade-off between dropping out of the tenure track and delaying starting a family.

NUS has responded in recent years by introducing pro-family policies to level the playing field for women. When female faculty members welcome a new baby, they can now delay their tenure review by up to a year; and if both parents are NUS academics, either one can opt to extend their tenure clock. A childcare centre has also been set up at the Kent Vale campus to support faculty and staff with young children.

Assoc Prof Pan, whose two children — a five-year-old and a five-month-old — were born after she got tenure, is appreciative of these measures. "As an employer, NUS has done well in implementing gender-neutral policies, and it continues to try to do more to help female faculty," she says. For instance, since 1 April 2021, the University provides teaching relief for new mothers (or fathers, if both partners are NUS academics), which effectively halves their teaching load for one semester after returning from maternity leave. The two-year cap for the tenure clock extension (for having two children) has also

**Over the years, there has been a gradual increase in women who assumed academic or administrative leadership roles. However, the senior leadership positions at Cluster Head, Dean and Chief Executive levels are all held by men. There is still a leaking pipeline of women that we need to address.**

Assoc Prof Gan Yunn Hwen, Department of Biochemistry and Assistant Dean (Equal Opportunities and Career Development), NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine



Proportion of NUS faculty who are women

28.3% in 2017

↓  
31.7% in 2021

Proportion of women faculty members in STEM disciplines at NUS

25.0% in 2017

↓  
30.2% in 2021

been removed, thus benefitting those who wish to have more children.

Efforts to ensure that male and female teaching staff receive equal opportunities for career advancement take on even more importance in the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields, which have historically been dominated by men. Data supplied by NUS reveals that the proportion of women faculty members in STEM disciplines hit 30.2 per cent in 2021, and the figure was higher — at about 40 per cent — in healthcare-related fields such as medicine, dentistry and public health. While this indicates a slight upward trend, more could be done to boost their numbers.

At the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, the task of fostering gender equality in the workplace is led by its Office of Equal Opportunities and Career Development (EOCD). "EOCD is committed to promoting equal opportunities for all and to ensuring that women are able to not just enter

but also advance in their scientific and medical careers," says the Office's Assistant Dean, Associate Professor of Biochemistry Gan Yunn Hwen. For example, EOCD organises quarterly *Lunch & Learn* sessions in partnership with the National University Health System's (NUHS) Women in Science and Healthcare (WISH) group. Billed as an inclusive networking platform, this series encourages learning and sharing on current and trending issues in the fields of healthcare and STEM. An EOCD Seed Grant has also been created to support NUS and NUHS researchers (male and female) whose work examines gender-related issues in healthcare.

"Over the years, there has been a gradual increase in women who assumed academic or administrative leadership roles," says Assoc Prof Gan. "However, the senior leadership positions at Cluster Head, Dean and Chief Executive levels are all held by men. There is still a leaking pipeline of women that we need to address." To that end, EOCD runs workshops to raise awareness of cognitive biases as well as equip female staff with leadership and mentoring skills. The Office also works closely with NUHS and NUS Medicine conference organisers to ensure that women are represented in organising committees and speaker panels.

## BREAKING THE GLASS CEILING

A slightly rosier picture emerges when looking at the gender composition of students pursuing STEM degrees. Based on the combined university intake data from 2019, the Ministry of Education reported that women made up 41 per cent of the cohort in STEM courses, up from 38 per cent in 2017. In the STEM workforce, however, women remain a minority and are even less visible in senior leadership roles or high-paying jobs. Yet that has not stopped some women from achieving breakthrough innovations and shattering the long-held myth that STEM is exclusively the domain of men.

Several success stories come from NUS, and span generations — from Dr Oon Chiew Seng (Medicine '48), one of Singapore's first obstetrics and gynaecology practitioners, to Ms Aw Kah Peng (Engineering '90), Chairperson of Shell Companies in Singapore. Both were honoured at separate events in 2021, in keeping with MSF's *Year of Celebrating SG Women*. In January, 104-year-old Dr Oon was conferred an Honorary Doctor of Letters at a special ceremony in recognition of her pioneering contributions to women's health and dementia research. And in September, Ms Aw — who was also recently conferred the NUS Distinguished Alumni Service Award — and a few other prominent Faculty of Engineering alumnae took part in a 'Woman in NUS Engineering' hybrid event, where they reminisced about their university days and

**It was at NUS where, for the first time, I felt I was recognised for my talent, and not for any demographic factor. There was a culture of inclusivity and appreciation for diversity among the student community.**

Dr Viveka Kalidasan, NUS alumna & one of Singapore's top 100 Women in Tech in 2021



shared their career struggles and triumphs with the audience.

Among the younger alumnae, there is a new inductee in the 2021 Singapore 100 Women in Tech list: Dr Viveka Kalidasan (Engineering '16) from the Agency for Science, Technology and Research (A\*STAR). Dr Kalidasan's interest in nano-biomaterials led her to obtain a PhD at NUS. She has since spearheaded the invention and translation of WiSe, a wireless sensing platform that can monitor post-surgical complications in real time. Now with A\*STAR's Translational Biophotonics Laboratory, she champions the development and commercialisation of biophotonic technologies for medtech and femtech applications.

Having grown up with two doctors as parents, Dr Kalidasan, 33, counts herself as one of the lucky ones. "My parents have always been my biggest supporters and mentors. As a child, I was allowed to dream and to pursue that dream. Having this supportive ecosystem set the foundation for me to pursue a career in STEM and medtech, and to make good use of the opportunities given to me," she says. That includes her time at NUS. "It was at NUS where, for the first time, I felt I was recognised for my talent, and not for any demographic factor. I also joined NUS Entrepreneurship Society during my PhD studies, and almost the entire society was run by undergraduates, half of whom were women.

## → A MAN IN A WOMAN'S WORLD

Gender segregation works both ways — while it is hard for women to break into STEM, men may also encounter challenges entering a female-dominated profession, like nursing. "I was the first person and the first male in my family to join the nursing sector," says Mr Ibnu Firdaus Bin Nooraman (Nursing '11), a Nurse Manager/Clinic Manager at Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH). "I got some ribbing from a few family members and friends, who said that nursing made me 'less manly'. But now, they regularly come to me and ask me about health-related matters!"

Mr Ibnu's interest in nursing arose following the 2003 SARS outbreak, which left him inspired by the brave nurses working on the frontlines. He pursued a diploma in nursing and subsequently joined the Bachelor of Science (Nursing) programme in



2009, where he was one out of eight men in a cohort of 80 students. Now at TTSH, his years on the job have helped him grow as an ally for his female colleagues.

While there are situations where female colleagues must step in with us, Mr Ibnu, 34, asserts "The call to nurture is not bound to any gender." He adds, "Men are often brought up in a 'tough love' environment and do not express care and concern as openly as women. But there's nothing wrong with showing our 'soft' side through words and actions — not just when rendering patient care but in daily life too."



There was a culture of inclusivity and appreciation for diversity among the student community."

Life in the real world has been comparatively tougher, says Dr Kalidasan. "Being a minority female in the deeptech-medtech space can be challenging. I've had people doubting my calibre as an innovator and technopreneur, because my identity as an Asian woman precedes my capability and talent. Based on personal experience, and after talking to women in similar positions, I feel that once research and translational milestones are achieved, people expect women to take a backseat while the rest of the commercialisation journey is then driven by men. This undermines the women's efforts. I hope it changes soon."

That is why she is passionate about "paying it forward" and being a positive role model. Apart from co-leading A\*STAR's new Diversity Working Group, Dr Kalidasan serves as a mentor for various start-ups and venture creation programmes. She is also the founder of Edify, a mentorship platform aimed primarily at empowering girls and women to pursue STEM careers. "Girls shouldn't shy away from STEM. They are capable of more than they believe; they just need the right push and platform. With more women in key roles in these industries, we will have products and services that are better suited to women."

### IN PURSUIT OF PARITY

Beyond the STEM realm, the women of NUS are also proving that they can excel in areas typically perceived as masculine. Out of the five NUS athletes who represented Singapore at the Tokyo 2020 Olympics and Paralympics — the pinnacle of sports — two were female alumnae: marathon swimmer Ms Chantal Liew

(Arts and Social Sciences '20) and rower Ms Joan Poh (Nursing '16). There are also female business titans like Ms Chua Sock Khoong (Business '79), former Group CEO of Singtel; and Ms Claire Chiang (Arts '74), co-founder of hospitality group Banyan Tree, entrepreneur and social activist. At the intergovernmental level, Dr Noeleen Heyzer (Arts and Social Sciences '71) has blazed a trail at the United Nations (UN) and held multiple senior UN positions.

**I was conscious that there would be more scrutiny on my presidency because of [my gender]. I tried to lead by example to show that leadership can come in many forms, not just the 'strongman' style that is often associated with it.**

Ms Wee Su-Ann, NUSSU's second female president (2020-2021)

Even the top student leadership position at NUS — President of NUS Students' Union (NUSSU) — is slowly becoming more gender-diverse. To date, NUSSU has elected two female presidents: Ms Tay E Teng (Business '07) and Ms Wee Su-Ann (Law '21), who passed the baton to her (male) successor on 1 October 2021, after a year in office. "The fact that there have only been two female NUSSU presidents out of 43 is quite disappointing," Ms Wee admits. "I was conscious that there would be more scrutiny on my presidency because of this. I tried to lead by example to show that leadership can come in many forms, not just the 'strongman' style that is often associated with it."

During her term, Ms Wee and her team worked closely with the University's senior management to promote student welfare on a host of issues, such as the new learning conditions brought about by the pandemic, adaptations to campus events and activities, and NUS' internal restructuring initiatives. And with a woman at the helm, it was only natural that NUSSU would get involved in the *Year of Celebrating SG Women* movement.

"I'm very proud of how the Union built up its advocacy efforts for gender equality. Besides having sanitary pad dispensers installed around NUS, we collaborated with other autonomous universities' student leaders to prepare a Joint University paper on women's issues. The paper highlighted students' concerns on topics relating

to sexuality education in schools, how institutes of higher learning deal with sexual misconduct, gender dynamics at the workplace, and unhealthy expectations of gender roles in society," says Ms Wee. Their inputs formed part of a national review of women's issues, whereby MSF conducted a year-long series of conversations with Singaporeans to solicit their views and ideas.

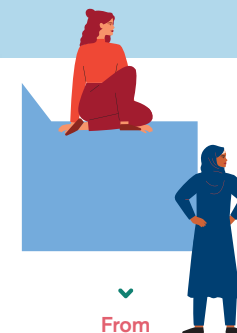
As Ms Wee, 23, embarks on a legal career, she hopes more female student leaders will step forward in the coming years. The provision of training, resources and financial support may help, for example. "Being the head of a student organisation is very public-facing and time-consuming, and some may not want that kind of pressure or publicity. At the same time, women are often more humble about their achievements or abilities and may not think that they are up to the task," she explains. "Top leadership roles need to be seen as an attractive and attainable option — and that has to be achieved by creating an environment for all kinds of leaders to grow, regardless of gender or leadership style."

### WORK IN PROGRESS

After all the celebrations and activities of the past year, Singaporeans are anticipating the release of a White Paper on women's issues, set to be tabled in Parliament in 2022. It will set out policy recommendations to further empower, protect and uplift women, and draw upon feedback received from the Government's nation-wide conversations with both men and women. But regardless of what the White Paper contains, the proposals alone will not be a magic bullet for gender equality.

IPS researchers Dr Mathew Mathews (Arts and Social Sciences '99) and Mr Syafiq Suhaini stressed this point in their CNA commentary on 3 October 2021: "While policy reforms can be quickly passed by Parliament, cultural change happens at a much slower pace. Greater sensitisation of gender equality and individual acceptance require time." They added that it will also require "measured dialogue" to debate issues rather than identities, and an openness to "inclusive, diverse but tolerable nuances on the scale of equality", given Singapore's multicultural and multireligious context.

The pursuit of gender equality remains an uphill battle, and we will probably not get there as quickly as some of us would wish. It will take a whole-of-society effort and a readiness for the long haul. Perhaps someday, then, women will have equal opportunities and enjoy equal recognition as men — and articles such as this one need no longer be written. **A**



From September 2020 to September 2021, the Government held **160**

'Conversations on Singapore Women's Development' with over **5,700** people of both genders.





**H**AVE YOU EVER BEEN CATCALLED OR WOLF-WHISTLED AT FROM ACROSS THE ROAD? What about being soundlessly looked over from head to toe the moment you step into the office by a co-worker? Has an acquaintance or relative ever made remarks about your dressing, weight or looks?

You are not alone.

Most people would have experienced it at least once, at some point. This may seem relatively innocent to some, with others brushing it off as the recipient being “too sensitive” or that “it was just a joke”. But is it? Where do we draw the line between what is a joke and what is not? The truth is that such incidents classify as sexual objectifications. Sexual objectification can happen to all genders, offline or online. Women are more frequently targeted, both actively and passively, especially on social media platforms.

### SEXUAL OBJECTIFICATION: WHAT IT IS, AND WHERE IT COMES FROM

‘Sexual objectification’ refers to the process of reducing women to objects whose worth is based on physical and sexual attractiveness such that their personality, abilities and individuality are devalued. This means that women are valued for their physical appearances rather than who they are or what they can do. This process has been linked with sexual aggression and violence against women.

With sexual objectification primarily anchored on the visual appraisal of a

woman’s appearance, it is no wonder that studies have found that more frequent consumption of media featuring sexualised women on television shows, magazines, social media and gaming, is associated with stronger support of objectifying women.

With the rise of the internet and social media consumption in Singapore, the sharing of information has never been easier. Social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and TikTok have taken centre stage in perpetuating sexual objectification, creeping into our everyday lives unknowingly. According to *Business Insider*, a staggering 1.8 billion photos are posted in just a single day. A report by creative agency *We Are Social* has meanwhile found that 84.4% of Singaporeans are active social media users, spending an average of 8 hours and 7 minutes online a day, with 2 hours and 17 minutes alone devoted to it.

A quick search on Instagram would show more than 70 million posts with the hashtag #fitspo — a word that combines “fitness” and “inspiration”. While fitness inspiration trends aim to motivate individuals to work hard on their fitness goals, some have critiqued this movement as harmful for reinforcing and internalising impossible body ideals.

Indeed, studies have found that browsing Instagram for as little as 30 minutes a day was associated with

higher levels of self-objectification — that is, when you start looking at your own body as an object and comparing it with societal ideals of attractiveness.

It’s not just imagery that contributes to sexual objectification. Comments, usually made anonymously, can contribute to sexual objectification as well. A study conducted by gender-equality advocacy group AWARE and technology firm Quilt.AI has shed light on the online discourse around gender-based violence in Singapore. The researchers studied 1,200 public social media posts across Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Reddit and Hardware Zone. Almost half of the comments online (48%) focused on belittling and objectifying women. Accounts owned by women on Twitter received twice as many misogynistic comments from others, and misogynistic comments were twice as likely to be “liked” and 4.5 times more likely to be re-tweeted when compared to non-misogynistic comments.

### WHY DOES ALL THIS MATTER?

Unsurprisingly, treating people and their bodies as objects can have negative consequences on mental health. While sexual objectification is played out in a virtual environment, the implications do translate over into the real world. In a 2016 study published by the British Psychological Society that used a smartphone app

to gather ‘real time’ reports of sexual objectification, women reported being sexually objectified — most often by the objectifying gaze — approximately once every two days. The same study also revealed that women witnessed the sexual objectification of others at least once a day, demonstrating the prevalence of sexual objectification in women’s day-to-day life.

Exposure to sexually-objectified media can contribute to self-objectification where people become preoccupied with their physical appearances and criticise their bodies. Thoughts such as “How do I look? What will others think when they see me? Do I measure up?” may make people unhappy about their bodies. Such comparisons may breed feelings of shame and anxiety. These feelings may lead to myriad mental health difficulties such as depression and eating disorders. Women who witnessed sexual harassment via objectification may feel as though they are experiencing the harassment themselves. Prolonged exposure to sexual objectification is linked to insidious trauma, characterised by psychological (e.g. anxiety, depression) and physiological symptoms (e.g. headaches, hyperarousal, poor sleep) without overt trauma history.

More worryingly, exposure to sexualised media is linked to increased sexist beliefs and tolerance of violence against women. Women may see other sexualised women as less than capable and cast judgements about sexualised women. They may distance themselves from these sexualised women and blame women for their own sexual victimisation. For instance, 45% of the 1,000 respondents in a survey conducted by AWARE agreed that “women who wear revealing clothes should not complain if men make comments about their appearance.”

### LEARN WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Sexual objectification comes in many shapes and forms. Sometimes, determining if the behaviour is inappropriate can be subjective, but if it makes you uncomfortable, it’s usually a good indication that it is. The first step to

take is to educate yourself on what it is and what it looks like so that you can identify it if it happens. Here are common examples:

- Improper comments about your dressing or appearance: “That outfit is distracting.”
- Jokes about workplace advancements due to appearance, attractiveness, or dressing
- Being held back from a position due to appearance, attractiveness or dressing
- Catcalling, unwanted sexually-insinuating stares, or bodily evaluations
- Blaming you for an outcome or negative attention received based on appearance, attractiveness, or dressing

### DISRUPT THE CYCLE OF SELF-SHAME

A common reaction to dealing with being sexually objectified at work is to self-stigmatise: “Maybe they are right, and maybe if I hadn’t responded, or dressed this way, it wouldn’t have happened to me; If I just ignore it, it’ll just go away”. There are also fears that we deal with: “What if I’m seen as a troublemaker if I flag this? Will I lose my job? Will it make things harder for me at work?”. It is key to understand that the problem of sexual objectification lies with the ones objectifying you, and not the other way around. The abuse has nothing to do with what you wore or did, or who you are. You did not bring this upon yourself, you are not to blame — and most importantly, you are not alone. Being constantly exposed to this and staying silent negatively impacts your mental health and perpetuates the problem and culture of sexual objectification.

### CALL IT OUT WHEN YOU SEE IT AND SET CLEAR BOUNDARIES

Ignoring the problem will not make it go away. Be brave! Respectfully point out that you do not appreciate such behaviour or comments, and that they are not appropriate. Don’t just call it out when it happens to you. Do it when you see it happening to others too. If we constantly highlight that a behaviour is unacceptable, this puts considerable pressure on people to re-think their behaviour. If you do not feel comfortable doing this directly, get someone to support you, such as a friend, trusted colleague or authority figure. As the saying goes, the culture of any organisation is shaped by the worst behaviour the leader

and their team are willing to tolerate. Culture cannot be changed overnight, and everyone has a part to play in creating a safe and supportive environment. Start by setting clear boundaries and firmly communicating what is and is not acceptable behaviour. By working collectively, we can bring about change and create a safe and supportive community for all — by being an active bystander!

### TAKE ACTION

Document the incidents and build up your case. Find out about the resources available to you, such as the company’s policy on how to report this and support available to staff.

### CHECK IN WITH YOURSELF

Finally, it is important to be mindful of how you have been or are being impacted by objectification. This can be a difficult, painful issue to navigate, and you do not have to do this alone. Suppose you are struggling to cope with its effect on your mood, identity, sexual behaviour and relationships. If so, we recommend seeking guidance from a therapist who has received specific training in sexuality and/or discrimination.

Respect and consent go a long way towards helping defray the issue with schools and workplaces setting frameworks, support, practices and policies to combat sexual harassment and sexual violence. NUS, for instance, has developed a compulsory module for all students and staff to raise awareness and educate the NUS community on an inclusive and respectful campus workplace culture. Knowing these potential effects of sexual objectification in media can equip us to better question and be aware of the media we consume. Everything we do shapes the experience of ourselves and others. **A**

*The authors/editors of this piece are: Ms Celeste Teo (Wellbeing Specialist Partner, Clinical Psychologist) (Main Author); Ms Justine Teo (Communications & Branding Manager); Ms Katherine Koh (Consultant, Organisational Psychologist); Dr Andrew Tay (Medicine ’07) (Director, Health and Wellbeing, Office of the President, NUS).*

*A department under the Office of the President, NUS Health & Wellbeing (NUS HWB) is built on the belief that each individual can be empowered to realise their own full potential in body, mind and purpose. Resources and information can be accessed on [nus.edu.sg/hwb](https://nus.edu.sg/hwb).*

# WHERE DO WE DRAW THE LINE?

In this special commentary, NUS Health and Wellbeing Team examines the impact of sexual objectification on Social Media.





## CALENDAR OF ALUMNI EVENTS

JAN.FEB.MAR

### JANUARY



#### No More Back Pain! Alleviating the Aches and Pains of Working From Home

Health & Wellness

Speaker:  
Dr Mohammad Mashfiqul  
Arafin Siddiqui (Medicine  
'03), Senior Orthopaedic  
and Spine Surgeon,  
Farrer Park Hospital



With prolonged hours at the desk and decreased mobility, working from home has taken a toll on our bodies. Tune in as Dr Mash (Medicine '03) shares preventive measures one can take and red flags to watch out for in keeping your spine healthy. He will also shed light on the latest measures available for dealing with problems related to nerve compression in the spine.

**6 JAN** Shaw Foundation Alumni House\* and Zoom, Thu, 7.30pm - 9.00pm

Register: [alum.events/HWjan22](https://alum.events/HWjan22)  
Contact: Ms Tan Li Hui  
[lhtan@nus.edu.sg](mailto:lhtan@nus.edu.sg)



#### Your Relationship with Money

Future-ready Workshops

Speaker:  
Ms Audrey Joy Tan  
(Arts and Social  
Sciences '11),  
Co-Founder, PlayMoolah,  
Circles of Angels

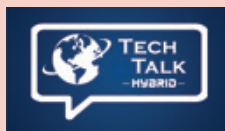


Financial matters have always been a very real and relevant concern for most of us, as prices of commodities soar with no sign of slowing down. How will you overcome monetary concerns to achieve maximum performance and efficiency? Discover how you can build financial and emotional resilience through eight forms of capital, and learn how you can better manage your finances in an economy disrupted by the pandemic.

**18 JAN** Tue, 7.30pm - 9.00pm

Register: [alum.events/FRjan22](https://alum.events/FRjan22)  
Contact: Ms Lee Siao Shuan  
[s.lee@nus.edu.sg](mailto:s.lee@nus.edu.sg)

### FEBRUARY



#### Self-Driving Vehicles: Applications and Trends

Tech Talk  
Speaker:  
Dr Nicholas Ho  
(Engineering '13)  
Lecturer and  
Consultant,  
Artificial Intelligence Practice  
Institute of Systems  
Science, NUS



Join Dr Ho as he discusses the basic technologies behind self-driving vehicles, their potential applications, and the future of self-driving vehicles involving state-of-the-art technologies like 5G.

**15 FEB** Shaw Foundation Alumni House\* and Zoom, Tue, 7.30pm - 9.00pm

Register: [alum.events/TSfeb22](https://alum.events/TSfeb22)  
Contact: Mr Kenneth Phang  
[kphang@nus.edu.sg](mailto:kphang@nus.edu.sg)



9  
MAR



#### WoW: In Conversation

## SHAPING A GENDER-EQUAL WORKFORCE OF TOMORROW

COVID-19 has reshaped the way we live and work. The World Economic Forum's *Global Gender Gap Report 2021* indicated that the pandemic has a more severe impact on women than men. The adoption of remote working, coupled with educational establishments switching to digital-first and home-based learning has likely caused more stress in women.

What changes can be done to better support women in the workforce, especially in commonly male-dominated clusters? How do we pivot away from occupational segregation?

Join us for a panel discussion, moderated by Dr Intan Azura Mokhtar (Science '98), as we discuss *Shaping a Gender-Equal Workforce of Tomorrow*.

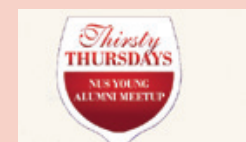
- Panellists:**  
Mdm Zulaiha Yusuf  
(Arts and Social  
Sciences '85), Deputy  
Chief Executive Officer,  
Yayasan Mendaki
- Ms Anuprita Bhomick  
(Business '03), Head of  
Customer Experience,  
Google
- Ms Annie An Dongmei  
(Computing '15),  
Solutions Architect,  
Amazon Web Services
- Moderator:**  
Dr Intan Azura Mokhtar  
(Science '98), Founding  
Chairperson of WoW and  
Member of NUS Alumni  
Advisory Board

**9 Mar (Wed)**  
7.30pm - 9.00pm

Register: Join us at  
[alum.events/WoWmar22](https://alum.events/WoWmar22)  
Contact: Ms Gabriella Nyam  
[gabriella@nus.edu.sg](mailto:gabriella@nus.edu.sg)



### MARCH



#### Thirsty Thursdays

A popular event for young alumni to network over drinks and snacks. Come back to your Home on Campus to hear inspiring stories and chit-chat with new friends!

**3 MAR** Shaw Foundation Alumni House\*, Thu, 7.30pm - 9.00pm

Registration fee: \$10  
Register: [alum.events/TTmar22](https://alum.events/TTmar22)  
Contact: Ms Tan Li Hui  
[lhtan@nus.edu.sg](mailto:lhtan@nus.edu.sg)



#### How Logistics Have Shaped the E-commerce Industry

##### Lunch Dialogues

Speaker:  
Mr Shaun Chong  
(Computing '11),  
Co-founder and  
Chief Technology Officer  
of Ninja Van



If you shop online often, you will be familiar with delivery providers such as Ninja Van that help to bring your purchases to your doorstep. Mr Chong will share how Ninja Van has evolved into the region's largest and

fastest-growing last-mile logistics company. If you look forward to monthly e-commerce sales, join this session to find out the importance of logistics in supporting the e-commerce industry's rapid growth.

**18 MAR** Fri, 12.00pm - 1.00pm

Register: [alum.events/LDmar22](https://alum.events/LDmar22)  
Contact: Ms Carisa Chan  
[carisa@nus.edu.sg](mailto:carisa@nus.edu.sg)





➔ **MEASURING EQUAL MEASURES**

There's no doubt about it — women in our society have made enormous strides over the past 50 years, be it in school, at the workplace or in public life. But with glass ceilings, pay inequalities and social pressures on women still a reality, how far have we truly come, and what more needs to be done?

**OUR PANEL**

**MRS CARMEE LIM**  
(SCIENCE '63),  
EDUCATOR



**MS LAI HAN SAM**  
(SCIENCE '95),  
LIFE COACH



**MS SRISHTI GANGULY**  
(ENGINEERING '21),  
ENGINEER

**... PROGRESS DOESN'T MEAN PERFECT****What was the visibility of women leaders in the school like during your time in NUS?**

**SRISHTI GANGULY:** I've just graduated from Mechanical Engineering and I only had one female professor during my time there. Many people asked why I chose to enter this field, and it was simply a pursuit of my own interest, and I came in knowing full well that it is a male-dominated field. However, having been in mixed schools before, going to university and being absolutely outnumbered by guys — there was even a class where I was the only girl — was a little unsettling. I did feel some pressure to change the way I spoke, behaved, or even dressed in order to make friends and to fit in. That said, the gender imbalance in both my cohort and among the faculty did not, at any point, make me feel like I wouldn't be able to excel or rise in my chosen field of specialisation.

**CARMEE LIM:** There wasn't really any visibility of females in leadership positions during my time. Among my peers, Prof Chan Heng Chee (Arts '64) [*Singapore's first full-fledged*

*female ambassador*] rose to prominence — but she was *just* one of us while we were in school.

**LAI HAN SAM:** I majored in Pharmacy, which is a traditionally female-dominated field. That said, I did have about four male professors and a good mix of male classmates, compared to the male-to-female ratios in Srishti's cohort. However, a pivotal encounter that made me realise that women can really do anything they want, was with Prof Chan Heng Chee at her home. She was in the Singapore International Foundation then, and had invited exchange students to her home. As a book lover, I was astounded by the stacks and volumes of books on all sorts of topics she had on her shelves. Her eloquence and elegance had all of us, regardless of gender, in awe. She was certainly a female figure who inspired me.

**CARMEE:** While I was the principal of Raffles Girls' School, the advice I gave to every girl is to know what you want. If you want something bad enough, pursue it. So, among our alumni are doctors, lawyers, politicians, singers, songwriters... passionate women who know what they want in life. This is important not just to girls, but every child regardless of gender.

**The advice I gave to every girl is to know what you want. If you want something bad enough, pursue it. So, among our alumni are doctors, lawyers, politicians, singers, songwriters... passionate women who know what they want in life. This is important not just to girls, but every child regardless of gender.** MRS CARMEE LIM

**Yet society still holds certain expectations of women when it comes to gender roles, especially within the family. And ultimately, men and women are different in that only women can give birth to children. Do you think that is a stumbling block for women who wish to pursue a career?**

**CARMEE:** Ms Teo Ah Hong, Singapore's first woman to qualify as a commercial pilot, was one of my students and applied to be a trainee pilot for Singapore Airlines in the 1970s. However, she was told that while she had the right qualifications as well as the required flying experience, she didn't qualify as the company only employed men as pilots! This might have been the '70s, but during Mao Zedong's time, the notion that "women hold up half the sky" was already widely promoted: ability isn't based on gender!

**HAN SAM:** It was my own mother who told me that I couldn't become a doctor — because I would (eventually) be taking on the role of being a mother. There are indeed important considerations for businesses when it comes to hiring women in certain

positions: it can be tough and expensive for an airline to have a woman pilot away on nine months' maternity leave. However, individuals and corporations can come together to rethink how to collaborate in order to make things work. Take for example a female pilot: if she cannot fly for certain months during pregnancy, perhaps she can do training for the company? It's not about squeezing round pegs into square holes: both individuals and corporations need to work together to find solutions that maximise everybody's contribution.

**CARMEE:** It's also about women having a bigger support system. Back in the day, we were only entitled to 30 days of maternity leave. I am blessed to have a sister-in-law who was happy to help me look after my three children, and this allowed me to pursue my passions fully. But it is also important to recognise and accept the fact that different people at different life stages will have their own priorities and goals and dreams: not everybody wants to climb the corporate ladder.

**HAN SAM:** I chose to have four children and that put me on a very different career path than I had intended. Even if that was my choice, there were times when I felt like I wasn't good enough. Now, looking back as a 48 year-old, I wish someone had told me to just enjoy the journey. I believe that women can have everything, maybe just not all of it at the same time.

**Have you ever faced any gender bias at work?**

**SRISHTI:** My workplace is very cosmopolitan and well-balanced in terms of gender representation. I actually realised that the male dominance of this industry is a largely Asian phenomenon. When I went on overseas exchange to Canada in my third year of university, more than half of the cohort were girls. However, even in such an environment there can be slight biases too. My supervisor, is a woman and she is a very efficient and productive go-getter. I am so happy to have a woman boss and have that female role model, but I sometimes get the feeling that not everybody appreciates her feistiness — and perhaps expects her to be a bit more mellow, simply because she is a woman.

**CARMEE:** I was once roped in to organise gatherings for the Social Development Unit (SDU) because female teachers were not



# WEAVING HERSTORY INTO HISTORY

It's 2022 — but how far evolved are our attitudes to gender? Do past inequalities remain, or have we far to go to bridge the divide? We speak to alumni — both women and men — to hear both sides of the debate.





**Education is a key factor: women realise the possibilities as they become more educated, and are equipped with the skills to realise their dreams. With education, men are also getting more aware of gender issues and gaining different perspectives.**

MS LAI HAN SAM

getting married. Then one day, the head of SDU came in and said to me that the RGS girls were “too aggressive” and would not be able to find husbands! I replied: they are *assertive*, not aggressive. They just need to find the right man who accepts them as an equal.

**HAN SAM:** As my 20-year-old daughter would say: this sounds like a “You” problem, not a “Me” problem. But I too have observed that while it seems okay for men to speak out on certain things, the same said by women would make many uncomfortable. However, I do see a shift, and people are a lot more sensitive now. In my line of work, I meet a lot of women who struggle to decide between reaching for more at work or taking on bigger family commitments. There seems to be an imbalance between husband and wife, and whose needs are more important. Even if there isn't such a power imbalance at home, women might also get passed over for promotions because they take a year out after childbirth — though that really depends on the company and its corporate culture. You have to find the right environment for yourself. Indeed, there are entire industries that have not progressed much in terms

of gender inclusivity and equity, and some of my clients suffer because of inequality at work. That said, things have improved tremendously in recent years, with more companies changing their policies.

**Would you extract yourself from a environment that's biased against you because of your gender?**

**SRISHTI:** I don't think so, but I would pick my battles. For example, I thought of getting into NUS Formula SAE [a group that designs and fabricates a formula-style single-seater car to compete in FSAE Michigan, one of the toughest inter-varsity competitions], but they were infamous for taking in only male applicants. A part of me wanted to get in just to see if the legend is true, but then I decided that this was an unnecessary pressure (to put on myself).

**HAN SAM:** Toxicity doesn't necessarily come from the other sex: my studies have shown that women are often the ones who stop other women from rising, because positions are limited and they don't want to introduce competition against themselves. The key is to have systems that focus on abilities and achievements, regardless of gender. My husband once shared that he qualifies all the feedback he gives to his staff so that it's never taken personally, or brushed off as a bias. This way, the feedback he shares is also more constructive. But not all companies and bosses operate in such a manner, and if you find yourself in a toxic environment, removing yourself might not be the best solution; constantly changing jobs can reflect poorly on your CV. It could be better to determine what you want to gain from a work experience, tough it out to achieve that goal, and give yourself an end-date too. Or if you feel that you can advocate change from within, and have people who can support you on the journey, be that voice of change!

**What do you think has sped up the progress towards gender equality in recent decades?**

**HAN SAM:** My mother and mother-in-law are brilliant women who tailor clothes,



## THE DIVIDE IS REAL

According to a survey by the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry conducted from November to December 2020,

**4 in 10**  
WOMEN

have encountered gender discrimination in the workplace, while only

**1 in 10**  
MEN

has experienced the same,

Source: *The Straits Times*

The Global Gender Gap index score for wage equality for similar work in Singapore in 2020 was

**0.727,**

(with a score of 1 being absolute parity and a score of 0 being absolute imparity).

Singapore was ranked **54<sup>th</sup>** out of 153 countries in the world

Source: [www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GGGR\\_2021.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2021.pdf)

cook dishes and do myriad things just through observation. Had they been educated, they probably would be running hugely successful businesses. Education is a key factor: women realise the possibilities as they become more educated, and are equipped with the skills to realise their dreams. With education, men are also getting more aware of gender issues and gaining different perspectives. For example, my husband actually feels that society's gender bias works against him, as he would really rather be taking a step back at work to be at home with the kids!

**SRISHTI:** The increased awareness of gender issues could sometimes make people overly sensitive... these days, you have to make sure you get everybody's pronouns right! I find myself scared to say things casually too, in fear of offending somebody or coming across as biased. But apart from such stressors, I think conversation, awareness and greater sensitivity to other gender groups are all steps in the right direction.

**CARMEE:** Indeed, gender issues are bigger than just men versus women, but about LGBTQ demographics too. Equality is, in essence, about embracing diversity and differences.

**The increased awareness of gender issues could sometimes make people overly sensitive... But apart from such stressors, I think conversation, awareness and greater sensitivity to other gender groups are all steps in the right direction.**

MS SRISHTI GANGULY

## RECOGNISING MALE PRIVILEGE

**What was the visibility of women leaders in the school like during your time in NUS?**

**KEE KEAH POH KEITH:** In my time, perhaps 10 per cent of my cohort were female, the professors were all male, as were the deans. It never struck us as odd, though. It was a different era and there was no debate about female representation in leadership positions — this is especially so in civil engineering, which is a traditionally male-dominated field.

**RAEDI HAIZER BIN SIDIK:** The Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences is the direct opposite of Engineering, and there are many female academics in leadership positions. After all, studying humanities is about learning different perspectives, so it isn't surprising to have both male and female representation — though I was often the odd-guy-out in Gender Studies classes!

**CHRISTOPHER LAWRENCE DAHL SKELTON:** NUS has a brilliant and strong female leadership in the faculty: I remember the vice dean at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, who proved very capable and engaged well with the students when faced

with initial concerns to start in-person classes during the pandemic. I feel the school benefits from women in leadership and I hope to see more of them promoted to even higher positions within the university.

**Have you ever observed gender bias around you?**

**CHRISTOPHER:** In my study environment, I observed a certain unconscious level of gender bias. For example, female professors easily drew heavier criticism and had their credentials questioned by classmates as compared to male professors. This became even more apparent for teaching assistants in tutorials, where female tutors received

### OUR PANEL



**MR KEE KEAH POH KEITH**  
(ENGINEERING '87),  
OIL AND GAS  
PROJECT MANAGER



**MR RAEDI HAIZER BIN SIDIK**  
(ARTS AND SOCIAL  
SCIENCES '17),  
ASSISTANT MANAGER,  
NUS CARE UNIT



**MR CHRISTOPHER LAWRENCE DAHL SKELTON**  
(MASTER IN PUBLIC  
POLICY '21),  
JUNIOR PRODUCT  
ASSOCIATE, AVPN



more questioning about their qualification to give lessons on economics, and were judged differently than their male counterparts.

**HAIZER:** Indeed, the perception of women leaders is different still. This is especially so in places with a very strong masculine culture, such as in uniformed services, where women leaders giving the same instructions as their male counterparts can be perceived as bossy or authoritative rather than firm.

**KEITH:** Civil engineering is a very masculine field, but there are women engineers too, and I feel that as long as a person is ready to get their hands dirty and prove that they can do their work, everyone will accord him or her with due respect. To illustrate, one of my female classmates is a resident engineer respected by all her colleagues, but I have also encountered female engineers who refused to walk the worksite and get literally dirty. Oil and Gas in particular is a tough industry and to excel in it is all about what you are ready to give. For example, to rise to a senior leadership position in a particular oil company, one must take up at least three overseas assignments, sometimes in countries where the standard of living is not the same as what we are used to. Depending on your priorities or life stage, this might not

be something you want to do. It's not about gender, but personal priorities — and what you are prepared to confront in terms of real-world challenges.

#### Do you think women face more real world challenges, though?

**HAIZER:** The women I meet at different stages of my life never fail to amaze me with how much they do outside of work: during National Service, I knew a lady who would finish her 12-hour shift and have to take care of her family when she headed home. Society's expectations of men and women are still different — though things are definitely changing and there are men playing bigger roles at home when it comes to taking care of the family.

**KEITH:** I don't think anything can stop anybody if they really want to rise up, and to do that you have to fit in, get involved and get visible. As a man, I too have faced obstacles trying to get into certain committees and organisations which I looked to join to advance my career, but after a while I learned to be wiser: if you want to move in a certain circle, you have to behave in the way the circle behaves, and if you simply cannot fit in, find another environment where they appreciate you and you can thrive. Life is tough. Choose your own battles! There will be people who are very biased: don't give them your time of day, because human bias is very difficult to change.

### We cannot just stop at representation and corporate solutions without addressing the social and cultural aspects of the issue.

MR RAEDI HAIZER BIN SIDIK

### ON THE RIGHT TRACK

In the United Nations Gender Development Index, countries were placed into five groups based on the level of equality in Human Development Index (HDI) achievements between genders, measured by the absolute deviation from gender parity in HDI values.

#### > Health:

Life expectancy of individuals. Allowance is made for the biological edge that women enjoy in living longer than men, since biology is not country-specific.

#### > Knowledge:

Two-thirds weight is given to adult literacy and one-third to combined primary, secondary and tertiary enrollment;

#### > Living standards:

Adjusted real income.

Singapore is in Group 1 with a score of **0.988**.

Group 1 comprises countries with high equality in HDI achievements between women and men,

Source: [www.msf.gov.sg](http://www.msf.gov.sg)

**HAIZER:** I agree that you need to have the right skills and connections, but preceding that you have to think about what are the opportunities to get the visibility. Between genders, there may be differences in terms of who pulls you in, in terms of transitions from school to work, even in terms of having the time to network afterhours, rather than dealing with housework or attending to children and the elderly. We need to think about what may be stopping women from getting these opportunities.

#### There are certain measures taken to promote gender inclusivity (e.g. mandating gender ratios on members of a board). Do you think they are effective?

**HAIZER:** While there are declarations in fair practices, there is a gap in terms of understanding the obstacles to equality for women. The practices might not necessarily translate to equal access or opportunities, or address the difference between equality (giving everybody the same) and equitability (fairness and giving everybody what they need). Some workplaces might mandate representation, but culturally we haven't evolved so much, and we might end up seeing those female members as token figures, rather than contributing members with valuable insights and perspectives. We cannot just stop at representation and corporate solutions without addressing the social and cultural aspects of the issue.

**CHRISTOPHER:** Ideally we should work from both ends — through top-down mandates and ground-up initiatives — and meet in the middle. A top-down approach is the most important first step. We need a certain level of

### Mandated representation is not enough, but it's an important first step.

MR CHRISTOPHER LAWRENCE DAHL SKELTON

affirmative action, like gender quotas to bring about change and ensure that the minimum standard is met. This precedence and representation helps normalise having women in leadership and positions of power. It's not enough to say that "women are encouraged to apply". We can't wait for "qualified" women to appear if they don't have a role model or are judged on an unfair basis. Mandated representation is not enough, but it's an important first step.

**KEITH:** I like what Haizer said about equality versus equity. That said, men and women all face disadvantages: you just have to take on the challenge by the horns. **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 HE IS

Mr Pranama Moorthy works in the global financial services sector and has spent the past decade equipping vulnerable women with basic financial literacy skills through his work with Aidha. For his commitment to helping open the doors of opportunity for migrant domestic workers, he was recognised by the Singapore Committee for UN Women and received the HeForShe Everyday Hero Award in 2017.

**M**OST CHILDREN WHO RECEIVE PREFERENTIAL TREATMENT FROM THEIR FAMILY MEMBERS DO NOT QUESTION THEIR GOOD FORTUNE. But not

Mr Pranama Moorthy: as a child, he noticed that his elder sister was treated differently from him. "Being a girl, my sister was dumped with most of the chores at home, and I wouldn't be assigned as many," explains Mr Moorthy, now 36. This struck him as unjust, and he bravely questioned his elders about their actions, before making sure that both siblings were treated the same way. "I would go ahead and help my sister with her chores, which led to a mindset change at home."

This early experience with the unequal treatment of females struck a chord with him, and he would eventually turn his convictions into concrete action. "During my time at NUS, I learnt how to execute gender neutrality and provide equal opportunity across genders," he recalls. Shortly after graduating, he put these lessons into practice by volunteering with Aidha, a non-profit organisation committed to helping migrant domestic workers — who are among the most vulnerable of all women in Singapore society — shore up their money management, communication, computer and entrepreneurial skills. "I was one of the first volunteers to join," he recalls. "In the early days, I took on various roles, teaching everything from computer literacy to finance and entrepreneurship."



### A REWARDING ENDEAVOUR

Given his equally gruelling day job at a global bank, Mr Moorthy's volunteer work was a demanding commitment, but his strong sense of purpose kept him going. He was deeply struck by the impact that Aidha was making on a group that was heavily underprivileged. According to *The Business Times*, foreign domestic workers directly contributed more than \$1 billion to Singapore's economy in 2018, and in turn allowed local working mothers to contribute more than \$3.5 billion. But despite their impressive contributions, close to half of them did not even have access to a bank account, which stymied their ability to save and support their families. Research has shown that only six per cent have saved enough by the time they return home.



### BOOSTING A COMMUNITY

Over the past year, Aidha has held

**689**

**CLASSES** for more than **800 STUDENTS.**

These were facilitated by **173 MENTORS.**

Through these efforts, the monthly savings of students grew by **MORE THAN 38%.**

Mr Moorthy receiving his HeForShe Everyday Award in 2017.

Mr Moorthy and his team of volunteers hope to change this through their weekly lessons with migrant workers. He was pleased by the commitment they showed to learning, with up to 15 workers attending each session. But he soon realised that the impact he was making went far beyond those present in the classroom. "We discovered that for every one domestic worker we were able to teach, we could impact nine other lives in their home countries," says Mr Moorthy. "As we progressed through the modules, I was reminded of the sacrifices that all women make and how they are able to juggle priorities equally. If anything, the experience has only made me feel even stronger about treating everyone equally and providing equal opportunities." He also appreciated the fact that this learning was two-way. "I learnt a lot from the students every week, understanding the hardships they faced from their employers, as well as the challenge of sustaining and supporting their families back home," he adds. It was not just the challenges that he learnt about; he also picked up insights on running small businesses, as many of these women had ambitions of setting up restaurants, farms and boutiques. "Mentors like myself would brainstorm with each student about their ideas and help to make them better and successful."

### THE TIME IS NOW

As Mr Moorthy knows all too well, the issue of gender inequality doesn't just plague low-income women. It's an issue in all sectors, including his own field, where he is the director of the cloud platform of a major bank. "The gender pay gap, unfortunately, exists even today; I really wish employers would look into raising minimum wage, increasing transparency in pay, achieving better work-life balance and expanding paid family and medical leave."



Mr Moorthy was a panellist for the Aidha Alumni Development Programme Big Pitch, where he mentored Ms Janet Bermudez Bisares — who hoped to set up a Junk Recycling store in the Philippines — for a year.

**The gender pay gap exists even today; I wish employers would look into raising minimum wage, increasing transparency in pay, achieving better work-life balance and expanding paid family and medical leave.**

Having been on the ground for nearly two decades, he understands the problems that can arise if gender equality is not achieved. "If this issue is not addressed now, we will see a significant gender pay gap in the next few decades," he predicts. "This would also demotivate women from joining the workforce, which would result in some of the smartest talents essentially 'sitting it out.'" And he feels that it is not just something for C-suite executives to think about; instead, he believes that more people, especially at middle and junior management levels, should discuss the issue and bring it out into the open. Men, too, should be at the forefront of these conversations. There may be resistance to voicing out these issues, but Mr Moorthy suggests that men consider the source of their discomfort. "It's important to understand what the shackles are that prevent one from stepping up. Often, it could be an inner fear of how people perceive these acts of gender equality in society and at the workplace. But all I can say is that my involvement has helped me strive for things that really matter to me in life."

That being said, he does understand that men who champion gender equality face several challenges. For instance, he points to the "pedestal effect", where men who do the slightest bit for gender issues are lauded far more than women who do more. "And that invariably creates a vicious cycle of gender bias," he says. He overcomes this by paying little attention to the accolades that have come his way. "I try to remember why I got involved in the first place. It is because I enjoy the work and find that I can add value with my support." **A**



# Levelling The Playing Field

Why success to **Mr Pranama Moorthy (Engineering '08)** — a champion for the causes of vulnerable women and domestic workers — means more than just doing well for himself.



➔ **WHO SHE IS**

The recipient of the President's Award for Nurses, Dr Shefaly Shorey cares deeply about supporting each individual within a family unit from "womb to tomb" through research-driven programmes. She has published over 130 papers on these matters and works closely with the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Social and Family Development to effect change in the community.

# A Catalyst for Change

Why **Dr Shefaly Shorey (Nursing (PhD) '13)** is driving research to uplift families in Singapore.

**L**AST JULY, DR SHEFALY SHOREY WAS CONFERRED THE PRESIDENT'S AWARD FOR NURSES, THE HIGHEST ACCOLADE IN THE REPUBLIC'S NURSING PROFESSION. Such an award would

undoubtedly be a feather in the cap for any nursing professional — but it was an especially sweet moment for the 43-year-old, since nursing is her second career.

Despite being surrounded by medical professionals — her late father was a physician and her mother, a retired midwife — Dr Shefaly never seriously considered a career in healthcare. Instead, she spent her early years in biomedical research. That changed when her grandmother-in-law became ill in 2003. "She had terminal cancer and received great palliative care from her nursing team. That stirred something in me and made me want to impact people's lives directly," she says. Armed with that passion, she dived headfirst into an education in nursing.

It was early in this education that Dr Shefaly found her passion for academia and research. "Early on, I did an Advanced Diploma in Midwifery," she tells *AlumNUS*. "During practical sessions, I learnt from my clinicians that we had to suction excess secretions from a newborn's nose and mouth. But I questioned why we had to do that practice and that became my first clinical investigation. After vigorous research, we found that there was no benefit to the practice and it was eventually discontinued at the hospital I was attached to."

This experience gave her a taste of the difference she could make through research and academia. "As a nurse, I could impact a great many patients. But as a nurse educator and academic, that impact could be profoundly multiplied," she says, explaining her decision to pursue a PhD in Women's Health at the

University. She completed the programme in a record two years and, after a short teaching stint at Nanyang Polytechnic (NYP), returned to the University's Alice Lee Centre for Nursing Studies to develop research programmes and train undergraduates and graduates. "I loved teaching the students at NYP but at NUS, I felt I could make a big difference by designing research efforts, in addition to the teaching."

## DOCTOR NURSE

To Dr Shefaly, having the title of a "doctor" is a double-edged sword. "I am someone who thrives on learning from role models — but a decade ago, there

**The runway is very long for me, since there are so many issues to explore. In the coming years, I am deeply interested in seeing how grandparents can be better supported, as they are the pillars of family life in Singapore.**

weren't that many I could look to," she notes. "I hope to be a role model for other women in STEM fields, as well as nurses seeking to venture into research." But while the title is lauded in some circles, it can also confuse others. She recalls one incident two years ago when she met the parents of her student. "The student referred to me as 'Doctor' and the parents were dumbfounded, because they could not make sense of how a nursing professional could be a 'Doctor'."

Although she laughs off such incidents, she admits that it motivates her to better publicise the difference that nurse academics — and more broadly, nurses — make in healthcare. Through her research, she is driving this awareness. Her research interest is in enhancing family dynamics, which has been met with some discouragement from some peers in the profession. "Out of genuine concern, they would tell me not to take on maternity and parenting research because in their view, 'it's not rocket science' and



## A RECOGNITION OF EXCELLENCE

The President's Award for Nurses recognises nurses who have shown sustained outstanding performance and contributions to patient care delivery, education, research and administration. Dr Shefaly was one of 2021's seven awardees.

not befitting of serious academic study. But I completely disagree," she says in her trademark straight-shooting manner.

Such close-minded attitudes like these are precisely what have shackled parents for generations. "Through my research, I learnt about the lived experiences of parents, especially mothers, who were so struck by feelings of guilt that they felt like crying after childbirth. Fathers would tell me that they were scared to even hold their newborns for fear of hurting their child. And you tell them that it's not 'rocket science'? We need to talk about these issues, not sweep them under the rug."

## CHAMPIONING CONVERSATIONS

Other issues that are sometimes shunned by some quarters of medical research include menopause, breastfeeding and working women. Dr Shefaly has taken all of these on in her various projects and hopes that they will lead to greater conversations on these issues. These, she stresses, must be rooted in science, evidence and data. "You cannot let go of your scientific fundamentals. All our projects enjoy the same scientific rigour of other STEM fields and I am very proud of that." Only then can these conversations lead to real change, as it did in the case of neonatal suction.

While we are on the topic of conversations about change, Dr Shefaly segues into another aspect we should consider: the channels of conversation. To her, research cannot live in medical journals or be spoken about in medical circles. Instead, they have to be a part of everyday conversation, which is something she tries to do, both at home and in the community. As a mother of an 18-year-old son, Dr Shefaly is well-placed to have these conversations at home. "I share my research findings with him at the dinner table and encourage him to think about these issues at an early age. These are not women's issues or men's issues — they are human issues and we should all talk about them freely."

It's with this same enthusiasm that Dr Shefaly gamely accepted an invitation from the Ministry of Social and Family Development last year to lead a series of virtual parenting workshops during the Circuit Breaker. Through outreach sessions such as these, she hopes to encourage the community to stand behind parents and support them through their journeys. "We often say that it takes a village to raise a child. I want to reframe that and remind people that it also takes a village to raise a parent." **A**



# Thriving in the Unknown

National Arts Council Young Artist Award recipient **Dr Yanyun Chen** on finding her voice as a visual artist and helping her students find theirs.



**N**ESTLED WITHIN THE LUSH YALE-NUS COLLEGE CAMPUS ARE TWO ART STUDIOS, ONE OF WHICH IS NAMED AFTER THE EMINENT PAINTER GEORGETTE CHEN.

Here, students of the liberal arts college learn the secrets of the trade from Dr Yanyun Chen. It is a class that many students look forward to, since they will be learning from the best in the business: Currently the Arts Practice Coordinator for the college's Division of Humanities, Dr Chen, 35, is a recipient of the National Arts Council Young Artist Award, Singapore's highest accolade for young arts practitioners.

But it is not just her artistic prowess that draws these students to her class — she is also a favourite because of her approach to issues



## A GLOBAL FOOTPRINT

Dr Chen's works have been exhibited in Argentina, South Korea, Canada, United States, Belarus, The Netherlands and Czech Republic.

that students care about. "Studying in a liberal arts environment, these students care deeply and are vocal about a lot of issues," Dr Chen observes. "I am very impressed by their concern for the community, as well as their sense of social awareness and social justice. So with my class assignments, I keep the themes open and let them work on issues that matter to them." Her hope is to guide the students through artistic concepts and techniques so that they can express themselves better.

For some students, not having a framework stokes fears and insecurities. These, Dr Chen says, are part of the learning process. "At first, they may feel scared and lost because of all the freedom," she shares. "But with time, they get more comfortable and eventually thrive in these environments. Seeing that transformation is very enriching."

## QUALITY QUESTIONS

Her aversion to overly-prescriptive education extends to her own art as well. "I would like the audiences to come to their own understanding of the works and I prefer not to take away from that experience by telling them what they are about or being prescriptive," she explains. That, to her, is the crux of an art education: "Helping students ask questions that will lead them to better appreciate art."

For example, stepping into a gallery, one can ask whose works are not being seen? Up

Wife - Stories of a Woman and Her Dowry; lantern, teak chairs, red ribbons, 2019.



Above: Variations and Variables I, charcoal print on cotton Panama fabric, 2019. Below (left to right): Flowers VII, Nitram Charcoal on Fabriano Roma paper, 2015; Untitled, pencil on Canson paper, 2013.

**Being in a liberal arts background, these [Yale-NUS College] students care deeply about a lot of issues. I'm very impressed by their concern for the community, as well as their sense of social awareness and social justice.**

until a few years ago, a common answer would be "women artists and artists who have taken time away to start families", explains Dr Chen. "While we see less of a discrimination in Singapore, the issue is more pronounced in the international art scene. We do have a large number of women artists and artists with families practicing in Singapore."

"There has been progress," Dr Chen elaborates. "For example, Ms Shubigi Rao will be the first female artist representing Singapore with a solo exhibition at the Venice Biennale." At the same time, Dr Chen is not taking anything for granted, and advocates greater support for women artists and those with young families. After all, just a century ago, female artists were turned away from Europe's finest art schools, simply due to their gender.

Even among women, there are those who have privileges that afford them greater opportunities. Does she fit into this category? After some thought, Dr Chen says that she does. She acknowledges that she was able to throw herself into the arts after graduating, because nobody was dependent on her for a living. "I also benefitted from scholarships, so loans and student debt didn't keep me up at night," she explains matter-of-factly. "I'm very grateful for those factors."

## THE ACCIDENTAL ARTIST

Her decision to go into the arts came from the peace she found in it as an adolescent. "When I was doing art projects in secondary school and junior college, I would be left quite alone. There

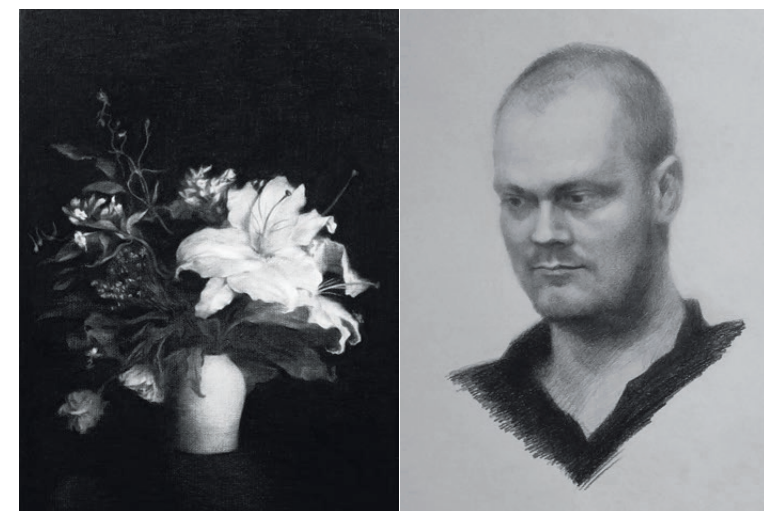
weren't many expectations placed on art as a subject at the time and I found that very liberating." When it came time to decide on a subject to read at university, she was torn between mathematics and the arts. In the end, she pursued the latter, because of what she describes as "a personal gamble to see if I could carve a space for myself."

Given her early connection to the arts, it is no surprise that Dr Chen decided to plunge into this arena further after graduation, even though it was not the easiest time to do so. "My batch entered the workforce amid a recession, so it wasn't all rosy. But social media was not as pervasive, so we didn't feel like we were competing with our peers every second of the day. There was a sense that we would figure it out along the way. And we did."

For Dr Chen, "figuring it out" first meant starting an animation business, where she helped brands and companies tell stories through her signature brand of quirky and colourful drawings. She then embarked on a postgraduate trek through schools in Denmark, Sweden, Czech Republic and Switzerland, where she expanded her knowledge of the arts to include classical forms. The influence of these years is apparent in her recent collection of charcoal still life. Following her return to Singapore, she joined the University as an adjunct lecturer in 2015 and started teaching full-time three years later. "Initially, my family and loved ones were very confused by my choices with the animation studio and postgraduate studies. But joining the University made things a lot clearer for them, because they saw the impact I was making with students." It's an impact that she hopes to continue making for the final batch at Yale-NUS, which enrolled in the University in 2021. Beyond enriching their lives, Dr Chen also remains committed to furthering her art through a series of residencies, both local and overseas.

The first, which started in December 2021, took her to the Singapore Tyler Print Institute (STPI), a creative workshop and contemporary art gallery based in Singapore that specialises in artistic experimentation in the medium of print and paper. At the time of this interview, Dr Chen was unsure about just what she would achieve there — or in her planned 2022 residencies in Portugal and Ireland. But staying true to herself, she says, "That's the fun, isn't it? Starting a journey without knowing the end." We couldn't agree more. **A**

➔ See Dr Chen's works at [yanyunchendrawings.com](http://yanyunchendrawings.com).



Main photo: Zachary Tang, Rice Media





## A PILLAR OF STRENGTH THROUGH THE YEARS



**MS CHONG SIAK CHING** (Real Estate '81), Chief Executive Officer, National Gallery Singapore



**MR SEAH CHENG SAN** (Engineering '82), Chairman of Alumni Student Advancement Committee and NUS Alumni Advisory Board Member

➔ *Ms Chong's career has brought her into the worlds of real estate, manufacturing, fast food and IT. Through it all, she has demonstrated a keen sense of professionalism and a can-do work ethic, which has helped her climb the ranks in all those sectors. Today, she continues to help other women realise their professional potential.*



### Her words of wisdom to women:

1. Believe in yourself and be yourself!
2. Be clear about your priorities in life and accept that these will differ at each phase of our lives. It is okay to adjust your career pathways to accommodate these priorities.
3. Success in raising kids or being a good daughter to our parents is no less an achievement than success in our careers.
4. Reach out for help, guidance, advice and mentorship when needed.

**We are increasingly seeing more women rise to the top of large organisations, yourself included. What do you think has contributed to this trend?**

We should be asking why this did not happen earlier! I believe it's happening now because there's growing advocacy for equal and greater recognition of the contributions women make to the workforce. This has put pressure on companies, as well as the male-

# Drawing Strength from Love

Three accomplished alumnae share their secrets to achieving success as a woman — while highlighting the value of a strong marriage and support given to them by the men in their lives.

dominated leadership, to focus on ensuring gender equality and representation. We also have to thank the increasing number of women-to-women support groups that coach, mentor and open doors of opportunity for women.

### Have you faced discrimination at the workplace because of your gender? How did this affect you?

If I did, I was probably oblivious to it or chose to ignore it altogether. It could be because I didn't focus on this at work. I was focused on doing my best and letting outcomes speak for themselves. I had very supportive bosses in all my different career steps, who were gender-blind and rewarded their staff according to their contributions and potential. I learnt a lot from these male bosses. The lady bosses that I had were very nurturing and demonstrated that if there were any gender biases, it didn't affect them.

### Tell us about your marriage and the role it has played in your success.

My husband and I met in Dunearn Road Hostels; so we were one of many "campus couples". Through the years, he has been my loyal supporter and cheerleader. He even schedules his meetings or golf games around my calendar. I was able to travel for work without having to worry about home, knowing that he was there for our daughter when she was growing up and in school. He also inspires me with his passion for giving to the underprivileged in society, especially students, through setting up bursary funds to support their education.



## BUILDING ON A SHARED LEGACY



**MS JOCELYN CHNG** (Arts and Social Sciences '89), Co-Founder and CEO of JR Group



**MR RICHARD WONG** (Arts and Social Sciences '89), Co-Founder, JR Group

➔ *Her husband's sudden passing in 2004 plunged Ms Chng's world into darkness. As a mother of three young boys and a business owner, she faced a tough road ahead of her. But she relied on her inner strength and faith to become a trailblazer in Singapore's F&B scene.*

### Her words wisdom to women:

As women, we need to be strong for our family and the people around us. We are filled with determination, perseverance and grit. Never forget this inner strength of yours so go forth and make your dreams come true.

### How did you overcome the challenge of being a single mother as well as a working woman?

I found my support pillars, which were faith and my family. My in-laws moved in to help care for my three boys. My mother and sisters visited me often so that I would never feel alone. Their support and encouragement helped me realise that I had to move forward



with my life and care for my sons. And I did just that: In the early days, I remember I would sleep less just so I could wake up early and send my kids to school. The days were long — I would work late into the night almost every day. But seeing how everything has turned out, it was all worth it.

### What have been the most challenging parts of the experience?

As a woman, it took longer for people to build their trust in my abilities, especially to lead such a big organisation. And it was always a work-in-progress; it wasn't enough that I built my reputation in Singapore. I also had to build it in every new market we entered, and this was challenging in some markets, where views on women are different. But thankfully, my perseverance paid off: it took longer to convince them of my abilities, but once I did, we had a strong and fruitful partnership.

### What have the years taught you?

That leaders have to make tough decisions! When I took over, I was keen to embrace challenges while also fostering a sense of community and compassion for others. So I was drawn to help people who needed a job and was always willing to give people, especially ex-offenders, a second chance through my company. But sometimes, you have to make difficult decisions. I remember there was an ex-offender who I hired fresh out of prison and he was exemplary... very talented and driven. So naturally we promoted him, but I was crushed when I found out that he had re-offended. This experience goes to show that some things are not in your control and that we don't ever know what the future holds.

### You have achieved much on your own, but have often paid tribute to your late husband as well. How was he instrumental to your success?

Women have great innate strength. But in my case, I owe a debt of gratitude to my husband Richard. We had a shared vision for the future of F&B. Together, we came up with the idea of providing hot ready-to-eat meals from vending machines, and that has grown into a viable and exciting venture for us called Chef-In-Box. Looking back, I wish I had spent more time with Richard, to have an intimate meal or talk about something besides work. But I cherish him greatly and I am proud that in my own way, I am bringing his vision to life.



## LESSONS FROM A LIFE PARTNER



**MS CHERYL WEE** (Arts and Social Sciences '10), Founder, Cheryl W



**MR ROY FONG** (Design and Environment '13), Architect and Entrepreneur

➔ *A brush with fame left Ms Wee suffering from an eating disorder. But with the help of her loved ones, she regained her self-worth and remains committed to helping other women realise theirs.*



### Her words of wisdom to women:

Don't have the wrong concept of beauty standards. I know it's easier said than done in today's social media age, but if it helps, talk about your insecurities with your girlfriends and loved ones. You'll realise that everyone has such insecurities and when you talk about them, you take away their power.

### How did you end up struggling with an eating disorder?

I used to be an actress and went to Taiwan to further pursue my career. The celebrity world there is obsessed with how much you weigh, so that rubbed off on me. As a new artiste, I felt like I needed to conform to certain beauty standards and so I began obsessing over my weight and diet. I would always feel the need to detox, and started abusing laxatives. I deprived myself of nutritious food, but thankfully, was able to come out of that dark space with the help of my family and a therapist.

### How do you hope your experience will help others facing a similar situation?

I know there are those who only allow themselves to eat one protein shake and a sweet potato every day. When I hear things

like this, I am motivated to help change their mindset and make a difference. But when I look back on my own experience, I realise that at that time, nothing anyone said would have changed my perception of myself. So me telling these women that 'they look fine' is not going to be effective. What I hope to do is start a conversation so that they may at least become aware that their feelings about their bodies are not healthy. I hope that with this awareness, they will be able to seek help and come out stronger. I'm very grateful to have a platform to spread this awareness, as I feel a real connection with other women suffering from low self-esteem.

### You are a working mum with three kids under the age of three. Tell us about that.

It's definitely a new challenge and I think like most working mothers, I'm itching to get back into the swing of things after giving birth. As a working mum, I think it's important that we carve out space and time for ourselves, as well. Having my parents with me has been instrumental to that. But that also brings its challenges: you have to manage the dynamics well, because there may be some friction sometimes. But what helps is to remember that everybody is trying their best and that the well-being of the child is the foremost priority.

### How has marriage changed your life?

We've known each other since we were 17. From being friends to dating to getting married, Roy has been there, supporting me in every way. Back when I was busy with pageants and being an artiste, he would send and fetch me from those Chinese New Year and New Year show performances. In my absence, he'd have dinner with my parents, and often ended up counting down in the car alone! He was there for me during the years that I was struggling with an eating disorder and crying after every meal. These days, he helps with my business venture, Cheryl W — I'm so bad at math but he's great at it. And helps me so much in every other way, too. **A**



*If you and your spouse are an NUS Campus Couple, we invite you to join NUS Campus Couples Alumni Group by emailing Ms Akanksha Batura at [campuscouples-alumni@u.nus.edu](mailto:campuscouples-alumni@u.nus.edu).*



## ➔ BUILDING PATHWAYS FOR PROGRESS

Dr Ng Shi Yan (Science '08) is an Adjunct Assistant Professor at NUS Department of Physiology and a rising force in the area of stem cell research, particularly in the realm of motor neuron diseases. Dr Ng has received a number of awards, including the National Research Foundation Fellowship (2018), A\*STAR International Fellowship (2012) and Merck Millipore Young Scientist Award (2011).

### I N 2014, FEW PEOPLE WERE AWARE OF THE ICE BUCKET CHALLENGE.

It had been around for a few years, and involved people dumping ice water on themselves. But it then blew up on the Internet when it took on a different purpose: raising funds for the treatment of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis or ALS. In a way, the ice bucket challenge was perfectly suited to ALS, as Dr Ng Shi Yan (Science '08) notes — pouring ice water on oneself mimics the sensation that ALS sufferers feel.

At her Neurotherapeutics Laboratory at the Institute of Molecular and Cell Biology, Dr Ng investigates ALS and other motor neuron diseases, using human-induced pluripotent stem cells (iPSCs) to model the diseases and do incredible things such as build spinal organoids. More impressive still is her discovery of the potential of a form of vitamin B3 called nicotinamide in treating ALS. “My interest has always been in using stem cells to understand how our body functions,” she explains. “In the later part of my research, we’re looking into the context of disease, and the rationale was to be more relevant to the kind of work we are doing in Singapore, where we are trying to solve problems.” Dr Ng notes that Singapore’s ageing population poses the biggest risk factor for neurodegenerative diseases, such as ALS. “I wanted to work on a simple enough problem to address,

because with complex problems, we would only be advancing the field forward just a little bit at a time,” she adds. By focusing on a simple project, Dr Ng hopes to make a bigger impact.

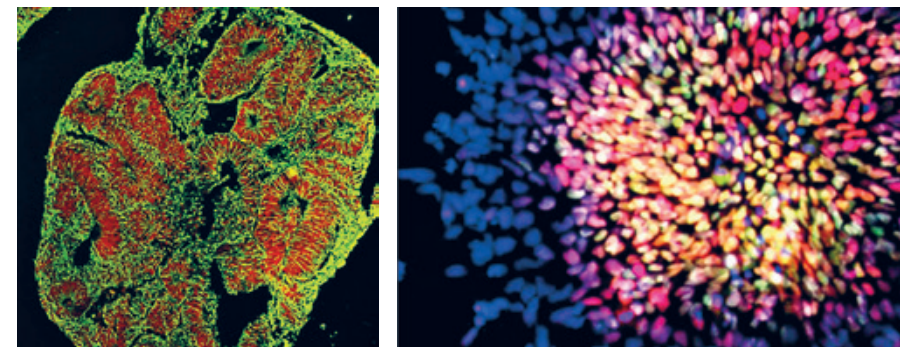
### MOTORING ON

To understand all this a little better, here is a working definition of ALS. It is a progressive neurodegenerative disease that affects nerve cells called motor neurons in the brain and the spinal cord, resulting in the brain losing control of voluntary muscles. The Greek word ‘amyotrophic’ literally means no muscle nourishment. According to the published literature on ALS, it is the most common type of motor neuron disease. There are two types of ALS, sporadic and familial — sporadic ALS has no known cause and is the version where age is the decisive factor, while familial ALS arises in individuals with ALS running in the family. ALS is almost always fatal within five years of diagnosis, although many of us may be familiar with a man who lived with ALS for many decades — the late physicist Dr Stephen Hawking. Needless to say, Dr Hawking’s case is exceptional.

Motor neurons are nerve cells that connect the brain and the spinal cord with the skeletomuscular system, and Dr Ng’s work focuses on these types of cells. In a 2020 study, she and other researchers found that

all forms of ALS motor neurons exhibited similar defective metabolic profiles, which they attributed to issues in the mitochondria of cells. In the mitochondria, a type of protein called Sirtuin-3 (SIRT3) maintains mitochondrial function and integrity. Activating SIRT3 using nicotinamide reversed the defective metabolic profiles in the team’s ALS motor neurons, as well as correcting a constellation of ALS-associated phenotypes (characteristics which are observable). Dr Ng notes that this work was done in the lab on iPSCs from healthy controls, those with familial ALS, and sporadic ALS patients. While she hopes to partner with clinicians for trials outside the lab, with real patients, the work has not progressed to that stage yet.

As noted earlier, nicotinamide is a vitamin B derivative and its usefulness with regard to affecting SIRT3 was “serendipitous,” says Dr Ng, as her team did not set out with this result in mind. “This was what our research showed, and we changed our thinking accordingly.” What they were doing was investigating if defective mitochondrial



Images of neural rosettes in organoid (left) and floorplate progenitor cells (right), both found within the spinal column.

**I wanted to work on a simple enough problem to address, because with complex problems, we would only be advancing the field forward just a little bit at a time.**

respiration could be the common pathway implicated in both sporadic and familial ALS, and they discovered that it was. In fact, the respiration issue was caused by reduced SIRT3, which they resolved with nicotinamide. Dr Ng stresses that while the idea of popping a vitamin to treat ALS is exciting, it is meant to complement existing pharmaceutical therapies. “We hope that combining nicotinamide with the existing drugs will improve health spans and longevity for ALS patients,” she says. Of course, this will all depend on the aforementioned clinical trials.

### MAKING MINI SPINAL CORDS

Dr Ng’s expertise is not specifically related to ALS but to motor neurons in general, and she came to this area due to her exceptional skills with this type of cell in the lab. “The lab I was in while I was doing my post-doctoral work was very good at making motor neurons. Obviously, if you want to have a wider impact on diseases of the central nervous system, you’d look specifically into Alzheimer’s or Parkinson’s, but it turned out that I was not very good at that time at making those cells in the lab. So the reason I work on motor neurons is because I’m good at making the cells!” Prior to setting up her lab here in 2015, Dr Ng was looking into spinal muscular atrophy (SMA), but since a promising treatment was already in the

works, she turned her focus to ALS and other matters of the spinal cord.

On that note, the Neurotherapeutics Laboratory is working on another project that involves growing spinal organoids, intentionally damaging them and then injecting stem cells into these structures to try and heal them. This work is most relevant to people with spinal cord injuries due to accidents and the like, rather than diseases. “Spinal organoids are like mini spinal cords that are supposed to mimic spinal cord development. We’re trying to see what happens if we cut these mini spinal cords... does it resemble the effect of actual spinal cord injury? We’re still trying to figure this out.”

Dr Ng explains further that she and her team believe that the spinal cord retains its expertise in doing its normal work, and that what is needed to return more or full functionality in cases where the spinal cord is severed or injured, is to heal the damage by injecting specific stem cells. Creating spinal organoids in the lab also has potential as a platform for therapeutic discovery,

which Dr Ng and her team highlighted in another earlier project to do with SMA. The project demonstrated overt motor neuron degeneration in SMA spinal organoids (created from SMA patient-derived iPSCs), and showed how such degeneration could be prevented.

### SLOWING DOWN AGEING

Another more recent project from 2020 also showed promise in reversing defects in spinal organoids grown from mitochondrial encephalomyopathy, lactic acidosis and stroke-like episodes (MELAS) patient-derived iPSCs. This project was the first to look into motor neurons or neuromuscular junctions in MELAS, and it revealed that excessive Notch signalling (a type of communication between neighbouring cells) underlies a variety of defects. The study also demonstrated how to reverse these defects in the organoid cultures. MELAS is both an adult-onset disease and one that develops in foetuses, which is a reminder that motor neuron diseases are not just a threat to older people.

Of course, many types of neurodegenerative diseases are related to ageing, and it seems that there might be general benefits to Dr Ng’s research. “One of the things we had in mind when we started the ALS project was that what we found might have wider implications for other ageing conditions as well. Diseases like ALS are like an exaggerated form of ageing because they share some commonalities at the molecular level. So in one sense, we are saying that if we can slow down ageing (at the level of the cell), we can prevent neurodegenerative diseases (like ALS).” **A**

# B-ing Part of the Solution

While dousing oneself with an ice bucket may show solidarity with sufferers of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), what is really needed is a breakthrough to combat such neurodegenerative diseases. A project on ALS involving the use of vitamin B may deliver a simple therapeutic option.



## GIRL-POWER IN STEM ➤

Dr Ng says she always saw herself as the principal investigator in her own lab. She was always curious about the natural world and biology, so she gravitated to STEM fields, from her undergraduate days at NUS, and PhD studies at the Genome Institute of Singapore at NUS.

While she never saw herself as a ‘woman scientist’, but rather just as a scientist, she is keenly aware of the importance of role models for young women who are interested in a career in science. “With the idea to inspire more young people (especially girls) to be interested in STEM, I actively engage primary school (P5 and P6) students in scientific workshops. I’ve worked with Henry Park Primary School since 2017 to conduct hands-on workshops such as “Microbes and Me”, and “Cells and DNA” to spark their interest in scientific research.”



Dr Ng Shi Yan



## Volunteering at Willing Hearts Soup Kitchen



4 September 2021

**NUS Day of Service (DOS) 2021** was truly a trial for the Raffles Hall Association (RHA) alumni community. When some undergraduates were issued quarantine orders in the week leading up to DOS, RHA resolved to excuse Hall residents from the activity for the safety and wellbeing of all.

With the evolving situation, the DOS Programme Directors, Mr Leonard Tan (Engineering '18) and Mr Ng Kian Seng (Science '86) swiftly adapted to plan B. The party of alumni comprised Mr David Peh (Accountancy '74), Mr Lui Seng Fatt (Architecture '78), Ms Elsie Lian (Accountancy '81), Ms Kam Wai Kuen (Science '86), Ms Lim Swee Kim (Computing '88), Mr Soo Yew Weng (Engineering '89) and Ms Rosita Ng (Law '93), who volunteered at Willing Hearts on the afternoon of 4 September.

Willing Hearts operates a soup kitchen that prepares and distributes about 10,000 daily meals to over 70 locations island-wide, 365 days a year. Beneficiaries include the elderly, the disabled, low-income families, children from single-parent families or otherwise poverty-stricken families, and migrant workers in Singapore.

Since the RH alumni volunteers consisted of mostly seniors, they were assigned to prepare vegetables in an open area that had good circulation of clean air. All volunteers, including RH alumni, were briefed clearly on safe management measures, before they



Left: Ms Rosita Ng and Ms Lim Swee Kim slicing and dicing cauliflowers with a new friend. Right: RH volunteers staying safe, wearing masks and adhering to safe management measures at the assigned workspace in Willing Hearts.

worked hard to prepare meals for over 10,000 beneficiaries.

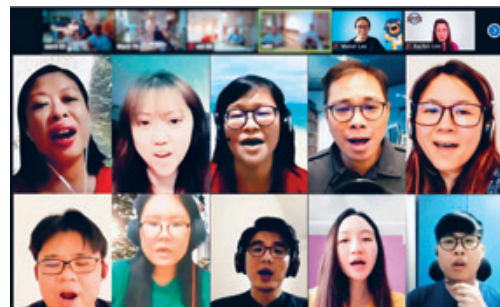
It is commendable to note that Mr Leonard Tan arrived at Willing Hearts in the morning, volunteering alongside the staff of NUS Alumni Relations and NUS Students' Union (NUSSU) Alumni for the earlier shift. He assisted with meal preparation from the early hours of the morning, and was more than happy to continue serving with his RH family.

Added Mr David Peh, "I did not know what to expect when I signed up for DOS at Willing Hearts. But I'm glad I did. It was heartening to see members of RHA cheerfully working as a team and helping out. Thank you, organisers!"

## Virtual Meetup with Outram Community Hospital & Sengkang Community Hospital



7 September 2021



Pre-recorded sing-along of two familiar tunes, 'Home' and 'Voices of the Heart'.

**Every year, NUS Economics Alumni joins NUS Day of Service.** In 2021, the group collaborated with NUS Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASS) for the third time, to host the patients of Outram Community Hospital and Sengkang Community Hospital. Due to the COVID-19 situation, the event was held online on 7 September.

Participants first did a warm-up exercise, followed by a round of Bingo and a game where participants had to guess the name of 10 songs. All participants received a goodie bag, comprising items which included a 500ml thermal flask. The day ended with a recorded sing-along of 2 familiar tunes, 'Home' and 'Voices of the Heart', by the FASS community of staff, students and NUS Economics Alumni. The event was well-received by the patients, nurses, hospital staff and members of the NUS community who were a part of this year's activity.



A beneficiary delighted to participate in the Bingo game.



A group photo with panellists, club members and guests.

## Panel Discussion – Career Guidance for Young Graduates and Mid-Career Professionals



10 September 2021

**NUS Alumni Toastmasters Club** aims to help its members achieve personal growth through improving communication and leadership skills, and by allowing them to develop meaningful networks with like-minded alumni. The group is guided by a structured education programme. Meeting regularly, it also creates opportunities to learn from the collective wisdom and experiences of fellow members.

On 10 September, club member Mr Xavier Dong (Business '17) prepared and moderated a simulated panel discussion on career guidance targeted at young graduates and mid-career professionals. Three alumni, Mr Wee Gee Shing (Business '07), Mr Marcus Tay (Engineering '08) and Ms Pei Wei (Business '17) were invited as panellists. They come from diverse backgrounds and industries, which include Management Consulting, Sustainability Operations and Investment Services. Their individual work experiences range from four to more than 10 years. During the panel discussion, a top concern for many graduates was how to navigate career options and development in an increasingly complex global economy. Concurrently, Mr Dong posed questions to the panellists about their career paths, personal motivations, important considerations in choosing an industry/organisation/job roles, and the challenges of maintaining focus in the current global health crisis. The panel discussion ended on a high note as each panellist shared a piece of advice which would help participants develop the right approach in career choices, organisations and people whom they work with.

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## A Date with DBS! (Session 6)



2 October 2021

On Saturday, 2 October, the **Department of Biological Sciences (DBS)** held the 6<sup>th</sup> installment of the virtual event **"A Date with DBS!"**. The talk was hosted by Professor Prakash Kumar, Outreach Chair, and was attended by 46 participants, including local and overseas alumni, staff and students.

The speaker, Dr Adrian Loo (Science '97) is the Group Director of Wildlife Management and Senior Director of Community Projects, National Parks Board (NParks). He shared how NParks enforces illegal wildlife trade laws to prevent the illicit trafficking of wildlife and their parts such as ivory and pangolin scales. The Q&A session saw robust exchanges among the participants.

After the event, Ms Dhanushri Munasinghe (Science '07) wrote in to show her appreciation to the organisers, "Thanks for organising this event! It was a fascinating talk by Dr Loo. I enjoyed it, and it was a good excuse to connect with old friends and colleagues!"



Find out more about Dr Adrian Loo at [bit.ly/Dr-Adrian-Loo](https://bit.ly/Dr-Adrian-Loo)!



## Future Career Quest 2021



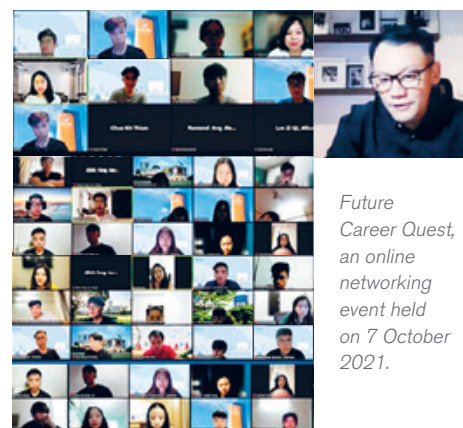
7 October 2021

**NUS Business School Alumni Association (NUSBSA) Accountancy Wing**, in partnership with NUS BizAd Accountancy Network (BAN), organised the first-ever *Future Career Quest* on 7 October. Pivoting from the typical networking night held physically at CPA Australia (Singapore Division), the event shifted online. *Future Career Quest* was a networking event aimed at providing career guidance to NUS Accountancy undergraduates, with a focus on the Big Four accounting firms.

The event saw 70 freshmen and sophomores joining in over Zoom to learn and network. Executive Chairman of PwC Singapore, Mr Marcus Lam, graced the event with an impactful keynote speech on how students can prepare for a career in a digitising world and amid a pandemic. As Mr Lam shared personal anecdotes,

his candour and approachability helped the audience understand his life experiences, and how these have influenced him and his career decisions. Students walked away with a newfound appreciation of the future of accounting – where accountants are expected to possess multidisciplinary competencies, digital savviness and a passion for sustainability. Mr Lam emphasised that the type of internship or career one chooses is less important than how proactive one is in learning and contributing to the organisation. This served as a reminder that developing the right “heart-ware” is more crucial than amassing the right “hardware”.

Students also participated in breakout rooms featuring nine young alumni with three to five years of work experience, including those who had stints in the Big Four. As they were all graduates of NUS Accountancy, it was easier for the students to relate to them, and their experiences in university, during internship and in the workplace. All alumni



*Future Career Quest, an online networking event held on 7 October 2021.*

echoed the same advice: to keep an open mind and explore various career options.

It was a fruitful evening for both students and alumni, with special thanks to the organising committee of BAN and NUSBSA Directors, Mr Edward Ta (Business '87) and Mr Pang Jun Xiang (Business '17). The organising committee also extends its thanks to NUSBSA President, Mr Chua Hung Meng (Business '81) for securing Mr Lam as the keynote speaker, and NUS BIZAlum for sponsoring his thank-you gift.

## Kent Ridge Hall Mentorship Programme

### Connecting the Past and Present



19 October 2021

**19 October marked the third edition of Kent Ridge Hall's (KRH) mentorship programme.** This initiative was created in 2018 with the aim of connecting KRH's beloved alumni with current residents by engaging them as mentors.

In view of the COVID-19 situation, KRH decided to bring this event online. Five mentors were invited to share their various areas of expertise, careers and industries as well as their experience and journey during their stay in KRH. The event mirrored an online career fair, where mentors each had their own breakout room and residents were free to join and listen in.

It was a delightful evening, with familiar faces sharing their career experiences and

reminiscing their times in KRH. Current residents were all ears as they listened to intriguing stories and had genuine conversations with the mentors, with some even keeping in touch with them after the event concluded.

Ms Renee Leong (Arts and Social Sciences '21) shared, “I was honoured to be invited as a mentor as I had attended one of these programmes previously and felt that it was really interesting! I believe that the Social Relations Unit's (SRU) mentorship programme provides a wealth of insights and opportunities to network. It was quite a chill and well-run event and I hope that the residents enjoyed it as much as I did!”

“It was tough having to conduct this on Zoom as it removes the human interaction

element prevalent in a mentorship programme,” said Ms Pu Yu Qing, (Year 2 Student, College of Humanities and Sciences) Vice-Chairperson of the SRU. “However, we felt that it was an extremely beneficial and meaningful initiative for both mentors and residents. Thankfully, the turnout was good and the feedback was positive! Hopefully this will serve as a stepping stone for future alumni-related initiatives for KRH!”

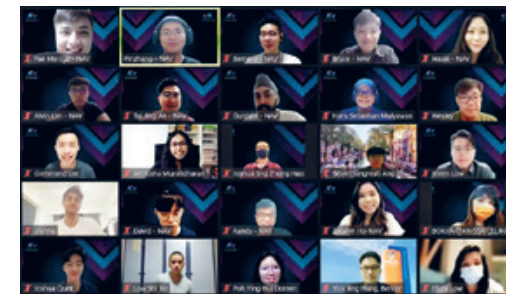
Ultimately, this was a small initiative to help strengthen bonds between different generations of Kent Ridgeans. The organisers hope that the success of this programme will inspire more mentors to volunteer their time at KRH!



## NUS ALUMNI VENTURES WELCOMES YOU!



12 November 2021



*NAV Members' Welcome Day was held virtually over Zoom.*

**NAV was founded in June 2020 by a group of alumni** from NUS Entrepreneurship Society (NES). The group identified a gap in the early-stage start up ecosystem, where budding entrepreneurs lacked funding, resources, and found difficulty tapping into the rich alumni network. Inspired by Stanford University's entrepreneurship efforts, NAV was thus born as the first alumni-led angel investment

network in Southeast Asia, with the founding batch of 56 members. Despite the challenges faced due to the pandemic, NAV members adapted quickly under the strategic management of the executive committee, led by Chairperson Mr Chen Pinzhang (Engineering '21). Within a year, NAV attracted and built a diverse network of over 80 NUS Alumni angel investors and partners from scratch to support NAV's mission and vision.

NAV has thus created a close-knit network where NUS Alumni angel investors, mentors, entrepreneurs and like-minded peers can share their insights and learn from one another to scale their businesses. So far, NAV has held five Demo Day runs of their flagship Direct Investment Programme (DIP),

where each round shortlisted at least seven carefully-selected start-ups that pitched to NAV's network of angel investors. To date, three start-ups have successfully obtained funding. Read more about past DIP events at [nav.org.sg/blog](http://nav.org.sg/blog).

NAV aims to pull together a community of NUS alumni angel investors and entrepreneurs that will allow for investments ranging from pre-seed to pre-series A investments. If you are an early-stage start-up looking to raise funds from our angel investors, or an alumnus interested in mentoring or funding start-ups, the NAV team is happy to connect with you! Please reach out to [nusangelventures@gmail.com](mailto:nusangelventures@gmail.com) or send the group a [LinkedIn](#) message.

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## NUSS-YST Fundraising Concert 25 November 2021

**The first-ever fundraising concert organised by NUS Society (NUSS) and Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music (YST) raised over \$400,000 to date**, with matching grant from the Tote Board. Exceeding its initial target of \$250,000, the amount raised will be channelled towards NUS Alumni Bursary Endowed Fund, NUSS Golf Section Bursary Endowed Fund, amongst others. This concert was the eighth instalment of Beyond The Score: Simple Gifts and Springs of Transcendence. Livestreamed on NUSS' YouTube Channel, it

garnered 650 online views (as of end November 2021).

Presented by YST students and Vice Dean Associate Professor Brett Stemple and Principal Conductor Jason Lai, the concert featured an hour-long programme of music by American composer Aaron Copland. Said NUSS President Mr Edward Tay (Law '92), “We are pleased to serve our alma mater in cultivating the spirit of giving and especially to support needy students. We wish to thank our members and friends of NUSS for their generosity in contributing to this worthy cause.”

Associate Professor Ho Chee Kong (Affiliate Alumnus '19), Interim Dean of YST commented, “It has been our pleasure working with NUSS on the Beyond the Score series. In this year's event, we are especially delighted to give further support to NUS students, as we continue to give music greater resonance in the community.” The concert also featured a Q&A session where Assoc Prof Stemple and Mr Lai answered questions posted to them online.



*Photo: Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music*



The *AlumNUS* thanks all contributors for the articles and photos in Alumni Happenings, showcasing our vibrant alumni community. For the full stories, please visit [nus.edu.sg/alumnet/TheAlumNUS/issue-128/community/alumni-happenings](http://nus.edu.sg/alumnet/TheAlumNUS/issue-128/community/alumni-happenings).



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# GONE TO THE DOGS

How Ms Audrey Sin (Business '20) is putting a new twist on the ancient practice of yoga – by offering it to pets.

BY KEENAN PEREIRA



THE WEEKS BEFORE GRADUATION MAY NOT BE THE MOST INTUITIVE TIME TO START A BUSINESS. But that is precisely the position Ms Audrey Sin found herself in at the end of 2020: the finance major started her company, Puppy Yoga, only three months before she graduated from the University.

And as she tells The AlumNUS, Puppy Yoga was literally a 'dream venture' as the idea for it sprang from a dream. "It was wacky. I was doing yoga in a room full of 30 or 40 dogs! When I woke up, I was so inspired that I immediately Googled it and found some studios that did it overseas, but none in Singapore." Inspired by this, Ms Sin started Puppy Yoga, a yoga space where canines and humans can get into downward dog position together. Its daily classes at Boat Quay draw not just people with pets, but animal lovers in general. "For non-pet owners, there are very few opportunities to mingle with animals of any sort, and you often have to worry if the owners would be comfortable if you interact with their pets," explains Ms Sin, who does not have a dog of her own. "Puppy Yoga affords them a safe space to do this. Pet owners can also use the space to help their pets socialise with one another."

Besides the joy of interacting with animals, Ms Sin is also eager to spread the benefits of yoga to a wider audience. She has reaped these benefits since her university days, when she used yoga as a stressbuster during a challenging



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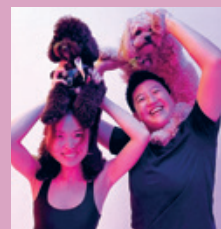


Find out more about Puppy Yoga at [puppyyoga.sg](http://puppyyoga.sg)

internship. "Yoga has helped me in so many ways that I cannot describe: changing my body, calming my mind, helping me learn more about life and acceptance!"

Running a business at the tender age of 23 has also come with a slew of lessons. "I had a lot of self-doubt as I wondered if starting a business without much experience would be foolish," she admits. "But the experience has taught me a lot, and I've definitely grown in confidence." Not all these experiences were pleasant: she reveals that the pandemic has been tough on the fitness industry, as it has had to quickly adapt to changing safe management guidelines. But she overcame these

struggles using the lessons of mindfulness and gratitude she gleaned from her years of yoga practice. In fact, she is so much more comfortable with entrepreneurship these days that she has expanded her presence into another yoga concept (see sidebar). The road doesn't end there: Ms Sin shares that she will be unveiling yet another yoga concept sometime in 2022. "Why all these unique experiences?", you may ask. It is her way of putting into practice the lessons she picked up during her time at NUS. "It's important to have a unique selling point that sets us apart in the saturated fitness market in Singapore! I want to give my customers a fresh experience every time." A



Puppy Yoga is a space where people and their furkids take their relationship to a more 'spiritual' level.

MAIN PHOTO: AIK CHEN



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## NUS Alumna's Legacy Gift for Education



The late Ms Koh Seoh Hoon (Accountancy '74) and her friend Ms Sharon Ng (Accountancy '74)

With a strong belief in the transformative powers of education, the late National University of Singapore alumna Ms Koh Seoh Hoon dedicated a legacy gift to her alma mater. Her generous gift will fund a campus-wide scholarship and bursary for NUS students.

As a tribute to her parents, the scholarship and bursary will be named in honour of her father Mr Koh Bak Chua and mother Ms Chua Hui Eng. Her father supported the family by running a fresh fruit importing business, while her mother was a homemaker who cared for nine children.

Education was the foundation of Ms Koh's successful career. After graduating from NUS accountancy in 1974, the only daughter in her household to do so, Ms Koh went on to serve as the Secretary and Director in firms across industries, such as investment, engineering, automobile and electronics.

Besides her sterling career achievements, Ms Koh is remembered for her steely spirit, kindness and contributions to worthy causes.

Good friend Ms Sharon Ng (Accountancy '74) recalls: "Despite struggling with breast cancer, she remained humble, strong-willed and cheerful. She was determined to be independent and always helpful."

The magnanimous Ms Koh frequently heeded the calls of NUS annual donation drives. Since her passing in 2017, her bequest has gone into funding cancer research at the Singapore Cancer Society, Singapore Thong Chai Medical Institution, and Traditional Chinese Medicine at the Singapore General Hospital.

Today, the scholarship and bursary named after her parents will ensure that the same door of opportunity that Ms Koh had will remain open for the next generation.

✉ 🌐 If you would like to know more about making NUS a beneficiary of your CPF, or if you would like to enquire about making a legacy gift to the University, please email [legacygift@nus.edu.sg](mailto:legacygift@nus.edu.sg), call +65 6516-6529 or visit [nus.edu.sg/nusgiving](http://nus.edu.sg/nusgiving)



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