

issue #127 — OCT-DEC 2021

The ALUMNUS

"COVID-19 has shown how interdependent the world really is, and how research-intensive universities can play a role...to help solve complex challenges."

PROFESSOR TAN ENG CHYE [SCIENCE '85], NUS PRESIDENT

CHAMPIONING CONSCIOUS CONSUMERISM

MS BIANCA THAM
(ARTS AND SOCIAL
SCIENCES '17)

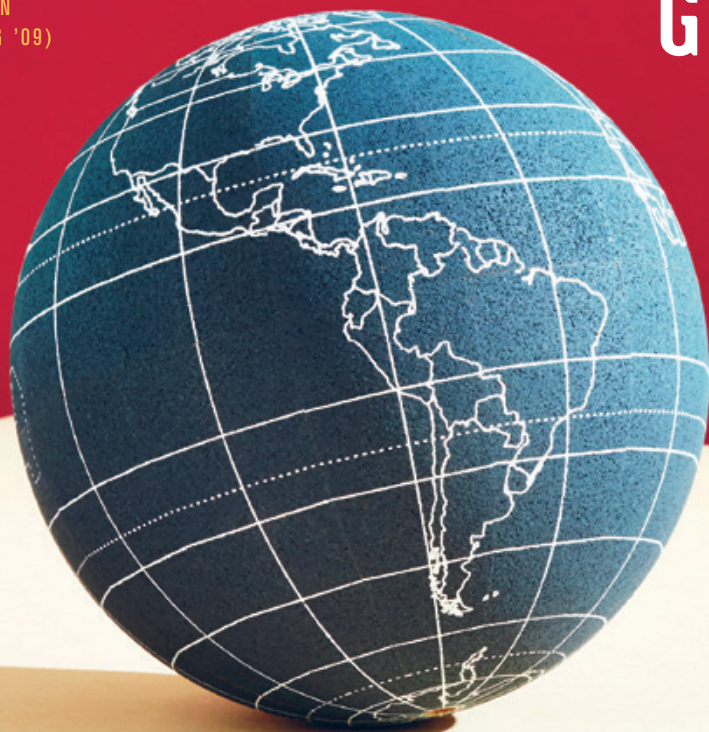
THE LONG AND SHORT OF IT

MR HO JIA JIAN
(ENGINEERING '10)
MR DEREK TAN
(ENGINEERING '09)

NET, CLICKS AND CHILL

WHY CYBER-LOAFING
ISN'T NECESSARILY A BAD
THING, ACCORDING TO
PROFESSOR VIVIEN LIM
(ARTS AND SOCIAL
SCIENCES '85)

STAYING GLOBAL IN THE NEW NORMAL



AT A TIME WHEN THE WORLD
HAS 'CONTRACTED', THE NUS
COMMUNITY AFFIRMS ITS
COMMITMENT TO MAINTAINING
AN INTERNATIONAL PROFILE



Embassy of Peru
in Singapore



Office of Alumni Relations



24 November
(Wednesday)

25 November
(Thursday)

26 November
(Friday)



LA TETA ASUSTADA
(NC16)



CONTRACORRIENTE*



MATAINDIOS*

*Film classification to be advised.

24 – 26 November 2021
Wednesday – Friday
7.30pm – 9.30pm

Shaw Foundation Alumni House



Register at
alumnet.events/PVFF21

In Celebration of:



BICENTENARIO
PERÚ 2021

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The ALUMNUS

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THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE (NUS) HAS SIGNED A MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING (MoU) WITH AMAZON WEB SERVICES (AWS) for a collaboration to boost the development of quantum communication and computing technologies, and explore potential industry applications of quantum capabilities.

Quantum computing has the potential to solve computational problems that are beyond the reach of classical computers by harnessing the laws of quantum mechanics to build more powerful tools for processing information. Developing quantum algorithms and designing useful quantum applications require new skills and potentially radically different approaches. Quantum communication offers encryption that is resistant to computational hacks and new possibilities in networking.

The collaboration is led by the Quantum Engineering Programme (QEP), a national initiative launched in 2018 by the National Research Foundation, Singapore (NRF), which aims to leverage quantum technologies to solve real-world problems. The programme is hosted by NUS.

Under the MoU, AWS will support QEP in the development of quantum computing

research and projects, and connect to the National Quantum-Safe Network for quantum communications. Both areas include the identification of use cases and development of applications that could support the future commercialisation of Singapore-designed quantum computing and communication technologies, and the joint organisation of academic, scientific and public outreach activities like seminars, workshops, festivals and conferences.

Professor Chen Tsuhan, NUS Deputy President (Research & Technology), said, "Singapore's journey to becoming a knowledge-based economy requires a right mix of world-class talent, cutting-edge infrastructure, and a well-established knowledge transfer ecosystem. A cornerstone of this vision is the QEP hosted at NUS, which brings together expertise in quantum science and engineering, and aims to translate radical innovations into commercialisable solutions. This collaboration between QEP and AWS is a crucial enabler for the nation's full digital transformation and opens the door to a quantum-ready future."

Quantum technologies have been identified as a key technology area under the Research, Innovation and Enterprise (RIE) 2025 Plan, which NRF manages. The collaboration between QEP and AWS will accelerate the development of innovations and solutions in this field.

Mr Ling Keok Tong, Director (Smart Nation and Digital Economy) at NRF, said, "Through our early and steady investments over the last 20 years, Singapore has developed world-class capabilities in quantum technologies. We intend to collaborate with AWS to bring these technologies to fruition through actual products and services, and continue to spur our local research ecosystem to push the envelope in developing capabilities and technologies that are of interest to the industry."

"Singapore has built its quantum technology expertise over many



(Front row, from left) Professor Chen Tsuhan, NUS Deputy President (Research & Technology), with Ms Tan Lee Chew, ASEAN Managing Director, Worldwide Public Sector, AWS, inked the MoU between NUS and AWS. With them are (back row, from left) Associate Professor Alexander Ling, Director of the QEP; Mr Quek Gim Pew (Engineering '81), Senior R&D Consultant, Ministry of Defence; and Mr Chen Guan Yow, Vice President and Head (New Businesses), Economic Development Board.

years. AWS is delighted to collaborate with QEP to accelerate the quantum innovation in Singapore working directly with researchers, developers, governments and organisations," said Ms Tan Lee Chew (Arts and Social Sciences '86), ASEAN Managing Director, Worldwide Public Sector, AWS. "We are committed to making quantum technology accessible to any customer to experiment and explore the technology's potential to develop industry-focused solutions that solve meaningful customer challenges."

STRENGTH THROUGH SYNERGY

QEP and AWS forged the collaboration on a common goal of growing capabilities in the quantum community.

Since its establishment, QEP has supported eight major research projects to further the development of quantum technologies. New projects include exploring more powerful hardware and software solutions for quantum computers (which could eventually outperform today's supercomputers) for commercial tasks like optimising delivery routes for goods, simulating chemicals to help design drugs, or making manufacturing more efficient. These solutions could become a reality when larger, more advanced quantum computers become available. Meanwhile, the National Quantum-Safe Network will see the integration of highly-secure quantum communication systems into local fibre networks.

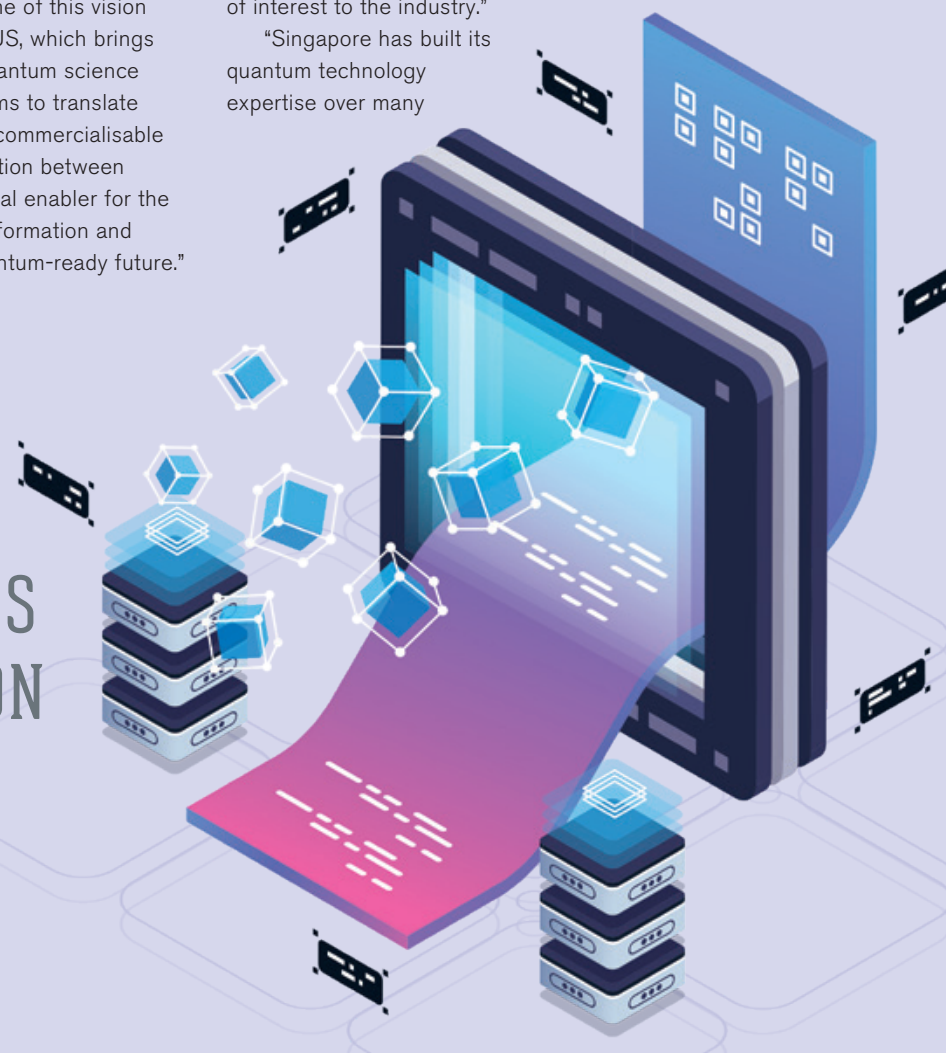
QEP also nurtures opportunities that involve local and international companies in Singapore's vibrant innovation ecosystem.

AWS supports democratised access to quantum computing through Amazon Braket, a fully-managed quantum computing service that helps researchers and developers get started with the technology to accelerate research and discovery. Amazon Braket provides access to three types of quantum hardware, including quantum annealers and gate-based systems built on superconducting qubits and on trapped ions, as well as tools to run hybrid quantum and classical algorithms. Amazon Braket's cross-platform developer tools provide a consistent experience so users do not need to learn multiple development environments, making it easy to explore which quantum computing technology is the best fit for an application.

"QEP is preparing Singapore to be a hub for innovation in quantum devices and services, and making this a success will require combining efforts with industry," said Associate Professor Alexander Ling (Science '00), Director of the QEP. "We are delighted that AWS is bringing its breadth and depth of cloud technologies to support this shared vision. We look forward to seeing the outcomes of this collaboration," added Assoc Prof Ling, who is also from the NUS Department of Physics, and is a Principal Investigator at the Centre for Quantum Technologies.

POWERING THE DEVELOPMENT OF QUANTUM TECHNOLOGIES THROUGH COLLABORATION

Singapore's Quantum Engineering Programme teams up with Amazon Web Services on projects that will advance quantum communication and computing technologies, and explore potential commercial applications to help industry keep pace with evolving trends.



This article was first published on 2 August 2021 on NUS News at news.nus.edu.sg/quantum-engineering-programme-teams-with-amazon-web.

A CONVERSATION WITH NUS PRESIDENT

NURTURING A FORWARD-LOOKING UNIVERSITY

Attendees of the session were given insights into the University's latest plans, initiatives and developments that encourage lifelong learning.

OVER 150 ALUMNI, STUDENTS AND STAFF JOINED A CONVERSATION WITH NUS PRESIDENT Professor Tan Eng Chye (Science '85) to keep abreast of the University's evolving education model and framework that aim to prepare graduates to be tomorrow's leaders.

Today's fast-changing landscape sees growing expectations for adept, multifaceted talents who can stay ahead of the curve. On 14 July, like-minded members of the NUS community tuned in for an enriching session via Zoom to hear about what the University has to offer to meet this challenge. The virtual conversation was led by a panel featuring Prof Tan, NUS Students' Union (NUSSU) President Ms Wee Su-Ann (Law '21) and Graduate Students' Society (GSS) President Mr Gokul M. C. (Engineering, PhD).

In an hour well spent, attendees of the session were given insights into the University's latest plans, initiatives and developments that encourage lifelong learning. Prof Tan shared about the learning priorities of the University, which dictate an interdisciplinary approach and broad-based learning. This effort has been supported by the introduction of the College of Humanities and Sciences (CHS) last December, an enhanced undergraduate experience for students of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASS) and the Faculty of Science (FoS).

CHS will equip students with relevant skills to develop competencies across fields as the curriculum shifts from the previously singular or multidisciplinary studies to a flexible and interdisciplinary one.

In line with the strategy to scale up interdisciplinary teaching and learning at NUS, Prof Tan also revealed upcoming plans to merge the Faculty of Engineering (FoE) and the School of Design and Environment (SDE). As part of NUS' lifelong learning philosophy, a future-ready approach will equip graduates with the necessary skillset to thrive

in a world of accelerated changes. Framed as a 20-year commitment, the University's new education model was also detailed.

Following Prof Tan's informative 30-minute sharing, an interactive Q&A was held to take questions from the floor. Attendees enjoyed an invigorating exchange with Prof Tan, Ms Wee and Mr Gokul as they discussed NUS' commitment to mature into a global university that empowers future leaders.

"Lifelong learning has to be a key capability of our graduates. As new things get introduced, they cannot just rely on their four years of university education to last them for the next 30 to 40 years of working life. With rapid changes and disruptions in industries, we have to imbue our graduates with a capacity to learn as they continue to pivot and specialise in different areas. Interdisciplinarity allows this agility to embrace change," said Prof Tan.



An excerpt of Prof Tan's response to questions raised during the session.

Will interdisciplinarity be encouraged in more advanced modules? How has the teaching faculty been pushed to adopt interdisciplinarity in their modules, given the traditional silos between departments?

The approach is to provide a broad intellectual foundation to all students, which will prepare them to continue learning and re-pivot every few years to meet the fast-changing industry requirements. Faculties understand the value of collaboration and the benefits it brings to our students. For instance, within NUS' Department of Communications and New Media (CNM), a curriculum review has been ongoing since 2017 to reflect rapid changes in media, including the rise of ubiquitous computing and AI, the datafication of society and culture, and the digitalisation of markets. The close collaboration between FoE and SDE also involves SDE colleagues contributing to new common modules in design thinking, project management and liveable cities, while FoE colleagues provide modules that teach AI/machine learning and digitalisation, and prototyping.

Will there be more faculty exchanges (e.g. Medicine/Nursing with FASS) in the upcoming years to prepare students to be global thinkers who go beyond grade performance?

As a start, our initial implementation of interdisciplinary education already involves the four main faculties (Arts and Social

With rapid changes and disruptions in industries, we have to imbue our graduates with a capacity to learn as they continue to pivot and specialise in different areas. Interdisciplinarity allows this agility to embrace change.

Professor Tan Eng Chye, NUS President



NUS President Professor Tan Eng Chye, NUSSU President Ms Wee Su-Ann, and GSS President Mr Gokul M. C.

Sciences, Science, Engineering, and Design and Environment), which account for two-thirds of NUS' undergraduate enrolment. Moving forward, we have plans to reform legal education in response to changes in the profession, in particular, combining legal skills with technological and business sensibilities. We will also reimagine health sciences education to better prepare graduates in medicine, dentistry, nursing, pharmacy and public health for work amid transformative shifts in the healthcare ecosystem and the dramatic changes taking place as the population ages. NUS Business School will be adopting a new grading system in the new semester which will be implemented for Master-level students, enabling them to focus on the learning instead of stressing over assessments, and to be bolder in exploring new topics and building

a more collaborative learning culture. To encourage learning and discovery, NUS also introduced the grade-free first year for all undergraduates in 2016.

Besides the Graduate Research Innovation Programme (GRIP), does the University's curriculum provide development for students to imbue the entrepreneurial mindset?

Besides GRIP, NUS also provides opportunities for entrepreneurial development through the NUS Overseas Colleges (NOC) programme and the Minimal Viable Product (MVP) Studio. Students selected for the NOC programme will do internships in technology-based start-ups in the world's leading entrepreneurial hubs and take classes at reputable foreign universities. The MVP Studio by NUS Industry Liaison Office was established to create commercially-focused prototypes of NUS technologies built by teams of apprentices under the guidance of Master Engineers.

► For the full Q&A feature, please scan the QR code or visit tinyurl.com/3xc7fbns.



BUKIT TIMAH HOMECOMING 2021

Coming Home to Rollin' Good Times

ORGANISED BY NUS ALUMNI RELATIONS AND CO-HOSTED BY NUS LAW AND THE LEE KUAN YEW SCHOOL OF PUBLIC POLICY, the annual homecoming took flight in a fun-filled hybrid format this year. Held on 3 July, the celebration included

a lineup of pre-recorded videos and programmes streamed live from the Bukit Timah Campus Auditorium. Alumni recorded a series of song-and-dance performances, as well as a poem recital and a flash mob that showcased creativity and talent.

Reminiscing about the good old days, alumni Ms Anna Leong (Business '81), Associate Professor Lawrence Chia (Science '69) and Mr Rohan Kamis (Accountancy '75) led a



Ms Ngoh Lay Yian (Science '84), runner-up at the Bukit Timah's Got Talent Contest.



Prof Quah (left) and Prof Chesterman (right).



Alumni groups put together virtual performances including a rousing rendition of Ben E. King's 'Stand by Me'.

nostalgic session of the NUS Senior Alumni Tea & Chat. A highlight of the day was when Professor Danny Quah, Dean of the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, and Professor Simon Chesterman, Dean of NUS Law, hosted an illuminating Interactive Dialogue that discussed the opportunities and threats posed by artificial intelligence (AI).

The celebration went into full swing when creative entries from enthusiastic alumni were awarded at the Bukit Timah's Got Talent Contest prize presentation. NUS President Professor Tan Eng Chye (Science '85) also congratulated the Class of 1971 on their golden jubilee in an uplifting address, bringing the event to a fruitful close.

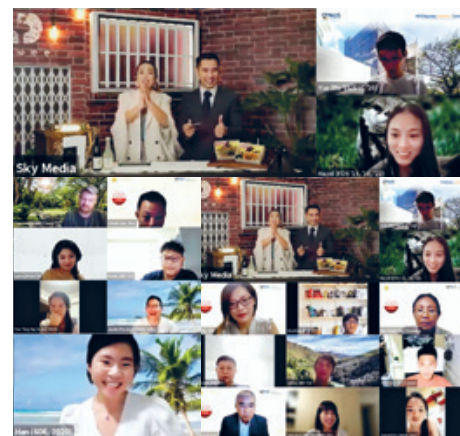


Prof Tan speaking at the event.

THIRSTY THURSDAYS

THE ART OF SAVOURING: SAKE-PAIRING MASTERCLASS

ON 8 JULY, 80 YOUNG ALUMNI TUNED IN FROM THE COMFORT OF THEIR HOMES and learned how to unlock the go-to secret on how different sake profiles complement various ingredients. Organised in collaboration with Sky Premium International, the event was hosted by Ms Charmaine Yee, Radio and TV Presenter, and Mr Chek Wong, Certified Wine and Spirits Educator and Sommelier with 11 years of experience. It was an enjoyable evening of delicious *bento*, many toasts and fun as alumni participated actively in the game segment and post-event networking session. While unable to fully replicate social interactions in-person, the event was nevertheless a welcome respite for young alumni to network and make new friends.



Young alumni participated enthusiastically and interacted with one another during the Bingo game segment.

➔ Watch out for updates on the next Thirsty Thursdays at alumnet.events/TTDec21!

FUTURE-READY WORKSHOPS

MULTILINGUALISM - OPENING NEW DOORS

IN THIS EDITION OF FUTURE-READY WORKSHOPS, alumni were treated to an insightful session on multilingualism as a portal to a better future. On 13 July, over 160 participants tuned in via Zoom to hear from Associate Professor Titima Suthiwan, Director of NUS Centre for Language Studies, as she shed light on multilingualism as an economic and social tool to future-proof oneself. Alumni got to learn about opportunities offered by the University to enable them to harness this advantage. The zestful session was also enlivened by an introduction to common Thai greetings and phrases.

➔ To pick up another language, contact NUS Centre for Language Studies at: [+65 6516 6346](tel:+6565166346) or clssec@nus.edu.sg



Assoc Prof Titima with attendees of the workshop.

INVESTING FOR FINANCIAL WELLNESS

In 2021, the average life expectancy in Singapore is 83 years. Have you been investing for the future in view of this increasing longevity? Learn about how you can leverage data and technology to make better investments decisions, build and manage real estate wealth for the long term, and the pitfalls to avoid.

SPEAKERS



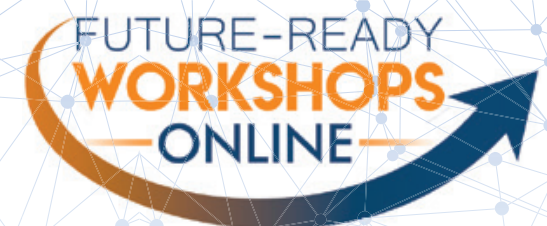
Professor Ong Seow Eng
(Design & Environment '84)

Department of Real Estate
NUS Business School



Mr Shashank Shekhar Tripathi
(Business '19)

Certified Financial Technician (CFTe)
Instructor, Dept of Information Systems and Analytics and
Strategic Technology Management Institute
NUS School of Computing



DATE : 12 OCTOBER 2021, TUESDAY

TIME : 7.30PM - 9.00PM

PLATFORM : ZOOM



Join us online at:

alumnet.events/FRoct21



Dr Andrew Tay
(Medicine '07),
Director (Health &
Wellbeing), Office of
the President, NUS



Dr Kinjal Doshi,
Lead Psychologist
(Health & Wellbeing),
Office of the
President, NUS

HEALTH & WELLNESS

MANAGING WELLBEING - THE NUS EXPERIENCE AND YOU

ON 22 JULY, 172 INQUISITIVE PARTICIPANTS JOINED Dr Andrew Tay (Medicine '07) and Dr Kinjal Doshi from the NUS Health and Wellbeing Team in the Office of the President to strengthen their understanding of mental health. Dr Tay and Dr Kinjal educated the virtual audience on useful tools and resources they can adopt to cope with increased anxiety and uncertainty brought about by COVID-19, along with other strategies they can apply at different stages of life. Participants also benefitted from helpful knowledge on how employers and managers can play a part in maintaining employees' health and wellbeing.



TECH TALK

The Future of Money – Decentralised Finance

ON THE EVENING OF 17 AUGUST, CLOSE TO 200 PARTICIPANTS turned up for an enriching and informative night on Zoom with guest speaker Mr Victor Liew (Computing '12), Co-founder and CTO of Xfers, a Singapore-based payment company which launched the XSGD stablecoin that hit US\$1 billion in transaction volume in merely four months. Mr Liew captivated the crowd with his industry knowledge on decentralised finance

(DeFi) and attendees enthusiastically took the chance to have their burning questions on cryptocurrency and the like answered in a riveting Q&A session that followed.

Catch up on all
our webinars at
alumnet.events/webinars/



Mr Victor Liew
(Computing '12),
Co-founder and
CTO, Xfers



Breakthroughs in Lung Cancer Detection and Treatment

What are the symptoms, risks and treatments for lung cancer; the third most common cancer in Singapore? Learn the importance of screening, different stages of the disease, various techniques in biopsy, and the role of surgery in managing early lung cancer. Dr Lim will also shed light on the effects of COVID-19 on lung cancer patients.

Dr Lim Chong Hee
(Medicine '90)
Specialist in Cardiothoracic Surgery
Farrer Park Hospital



Office of
Alumni Relations



21 October 2021
(Thursday)
7.30pm - 9.00pm
via Zoom



► **JOIN US ONLINE!**
Register at alumnet.events/HWoct21



Speakers:
Assoc Prof Tan Chuan Hoo (Computing '01)
Deputy Head (Administration and Research),
Department of Information Systems and Analytics,
NUS School of Computing



Dr Benjamin Lee (Science '84)
Senior Lecturer (Data Analytics and Visualisation),
Department of Statistics and Data Science,
NUS Faculty of Science



Date : 16 November 2021,
Tuesday
Time : 7.30pm - 9.00pm
Platform : Zoom

Join us online at
alumnet.events/TSnov21



Towards a Digital Organisation and Data-Driven Workforce

In this webinar, gain insight into how you can harness data for your work, as well as how your company can re-imagine the way it develops digital capabilities and create effective practices for digital transformation. In addition, learn about common missteps in companies' digital transformation journeys and how to avoid them.



Office of Alumni Relations
School of Continuing and Lifelong Education

KENT RIDGE ALUMNI FAMILY DAY 2021

A REIMAGINED ANNUAL GET-TOGETHER



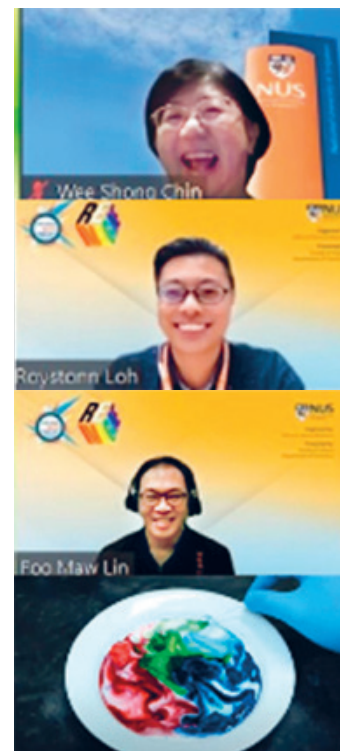
Associate Professor Stella Tan (Science '98) shared about crime scene investigation before leading participants to solve a murder virtually at Forensic Science – CSI.

THE ANNUAL KENT RIDGE ALUMNI FAMILY DAY, THEMED REIMAGINE THIS YEAR, took on a virtual form for alumni, students, staff and their families to participate from the comfort and safety of their homes. Throughout the day, attendees were enthralled by an array of talks, workshops and activities that spanned across different themes of *Science, Wellness, The Arts, Home, Technology* and *Work*.

Held on 14 August, the annual homecoming was set in motion with a strong line-up concurrently streamed and hosted on Facebook Live and Zoom. Participants hopped between sessions of their choice to learn about versatile and eye-opening subjects such as forensic science, game publishing, food security, urban insect farming and health. Other fun highlights of the day included virtual museum

tours, a 'career human library', a female empowerment workshop and an online mooncake-making session.

In the spirit of staying connected as one University community, NUS President Professor Tan Eng Chye (Science '85) led a candid conversation joined by esteemed panellists Dr Intan Azura Mokhtar (Science '98) and Mr Chiam Yeng Heeng (Year 4, Business) in *REIMAGINE NUS*, a discussion forum that shed light on NUS' latest developments and interdisciplinary efforts. The jam-packed day concluded with over 200 attendees tuning in from their homes to a virtual movie screening of the heart-warming animated film, *Soul*.



Dr Foo Maw Lin (Science '99) gave a "colourful" talk on chemistry's application in everyday life.



A piano recital presented by NUS Piano Ensemble Alumni.



Dr Wilson Wong (Science '04) educated the crowd on growing their own food.

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NUS Alumni



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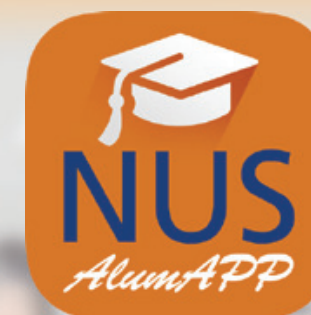


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Office of Alumni Relations

IT'S [NOT] A SMALL WORLD, AFTER ALL

At a time when everyone's physical world has shrunk within their own borders, NUS is not passively watching the pandemic unfold but has recommitted to its global community of enterprising students, influential researchers and inspiring alumni.

TEXT BY WANDA TAN



“THINGS FALL APART; THE CENTRE CANNOT HOLD; MERE ANARCHY IS LOOSED UPON THE WORLD, ...”. Taken from W.B. Yeats' famous poem, *The Second Coming*, the Irish poet wrote these lines in 1919, right after World War I and when humanity was in the grip of the Spanish flu pandemic. Just over a century later, these fearful words are ringing in people's ears once again as we struggle with the previously-unthinkable disruptions unleashed by COVID-19.

Yet out of the chaos, it appears that a new order has emerged. While COVID-19 has exacted a heavy toll on society, things have not completely fallen apart. One of NUS' biggest challenges over the last two years has been how to hold up its own centre — namely, its vision as “a leading global university shaping the future” — in the absence of international travel. Adaptation is the name of the game. Whether by organising virtual exchange programmes and remote internships for students, keeping tabs on new developments in overseas research institutes, or leveraging its 333,000-strong global alumni network, NUS has found a way to stay connected to the wider world.

CROSSING BORDERS, ONLINE

As soon as the gravity of the COVID-19 situation became clear in March 2020, one of NUS' most urgent priorities was to ensure the safe and speedy return to Singapore of all of its students studying abroad at the time, including some 1,300 on the Student Exchange Programme (SEP) all over the world and 250 in NUS Overseas Colleges (NOC) entrepreneurial hotspots. University administrators then had to formulate an alternative plan so that students could still get some international exposure, albeit not in person.

The Global Relations Office (GRO), for its part, rolled out a number of innovative outbound educational offerings, in lieu of the currently-suspended SEP, to help students develop a global mindset despite the travel restrictions. Summer programmes, research attachments and study trips were conducted online, and new initiatives including joint virtual immersion programmes with other universities were introduced. “NUS' active participation in global university networks to co-develop impactful programmes, especially in Asia, has not diminished in this pandemic. We have worked with many partner universities and embassies, such as those in the UAE, Israel, Thailand, Indonesia, China, India and Rwanda,” says Associate Professor Reuben Wong (Arts and Social Sciences '93), Associate Vice President (Global Relations) of NUS.

NUS is also tapping on its membership in university alliances to create global learning opportunities for students. As a member of Universitas 21 (U21) — a global network of 27 research-intensive universities — NUS encourages its students to attend the U21 Global Citizenship online programme, targeted at those who aspire to advance the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals. The University Alliance in Talent Education Development (UAiTED) — an Asia-wide academic network of universities in Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong and Taiwan — recently wrapped up its 2021



NOT FAR AWAY

An out-of-the-box solution to the pandemic that was created by four local universities including NUS is the **Singapore Universities Student Exchange Programme (SUSEP)**, under which students in one university can take a full or partial semester at any of the other three institutions. While a local exchange may not be their first choice, Assoc Prof Reuben Wong notes that students can nonetheless “experience a different learning environment, interact with students and professors across different university campuses, and take modules to complement those of their home institution.”



UAiTED Innovation Competition, where NUS students worked virtually with peers in cross-institutional and cross-regional teams to propose innovative solutions for a better and more sustainable future. In addition, through the International Alliance of Research Universities (IARU) and the Association of Pacific Rim Universities (APRU), NUS students can choose from a wide range of virtual courses and co-curricular programmes offered by partner universities.

Although the inability to travel is no doubt a missed opportunity, these online offerings do have their merits. Ms Chua Bi Quan (Business '09), Assistant Senior Manager of GRO and NUS' Key Contact for IARU, points out that students can still “gain new content knowledge, forge friendships with students from across the world, and make good use of their vacation time to learn in a system that is different from NUS”. The virtual format may even provide “flexible learning opportunities” for those who otherwise would not be able to study overseas due to the demands of their degree programme, she adds. “Students can make use of the difference in time zones to engage in other activities during the day and participate in their [online] course at night.”

HOME AWAY FROM HOME

On the flip side, NUS is also doing its best to support international students who are still committed to studying at NUS, despite the pandemic. There may be fewer of them at present, given the suspension of

NUS' active participation in global university networks to co-develop impactful programmes, especially in Asia, has not diminished in this pandemic.

Associate Professor Reuben Wong,
Associate Vice President (Global Relations), NUS

As we could only see one another through the screen, it felt slightly impersonal. However, I'm thankful we were still able to bond and appreciate cultures through Zoom.

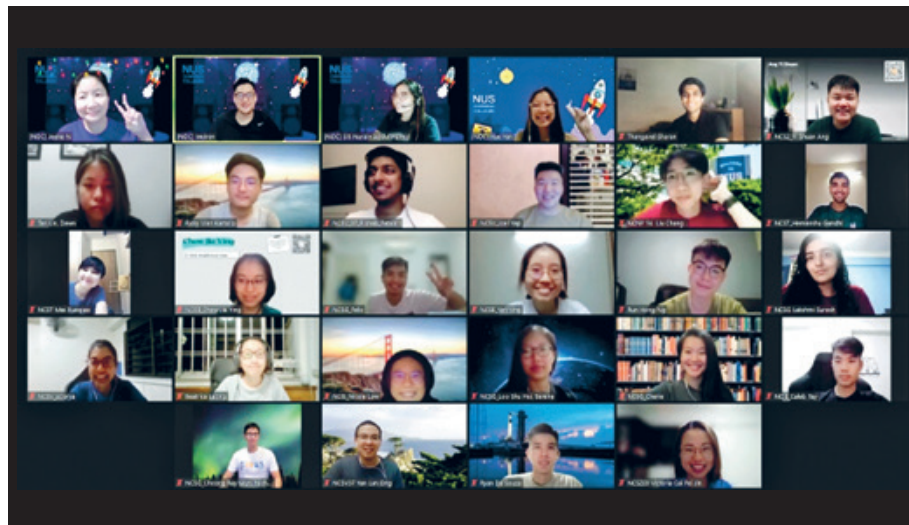
Ms Rachel Tan, iCARE Week Project Director

inbound exchange programmes under the SEP for all countries (except China and Hong Kong). However, the University still welcomed a decent-sized contingent of international freshmen from Indonesia, Malaysia, India and elsewhere at the start of this academic year as well as the preceding one. For them, the first-rate education offered by NUS and its vibrant student life — not to mention Singapore's effective COVID-19 containment strategy — outweighed any reservations they may have had about moving to a foreign country in the middle of a public health crisis.

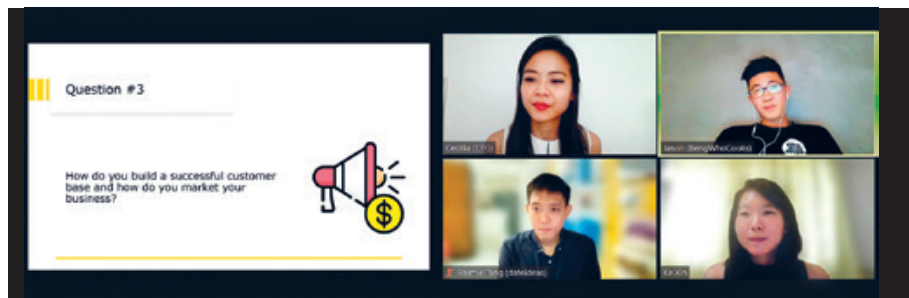
The usual slate of welcome events organised to help international first-year students acclimatise to life in NUS has not ceased either; it has just shifted online. In July and August 2021, these international students joined virtual orientation programmes run by their respective halls and faculties, found out about the various co-curricular activities through Zoom and YouTube Live at the NUS Student Life Fair, and got tips from seniors on adapting to their new environment at the Office of Student Affairs (OSA) Live Show.

iCARE Week, a three-day online event where international students interacted with local peers over games and ice-breaking activities, was also part of the line-up. It was initiated by the student club NUS iCARE, which normally holds food and cultural tours around Singapore to help international students feel at home here. Though not ideal, the online platform served as a safe way to continue facilitating friendships between local and foreign students and promoting cross-cultural appreciation.

"As we could only see one another through the screen, it felt slightly impersonal," says iCARE Week Project Director Ms Rachel Tan. An international student herself, the Malaysian is currently in her second year at NUS' Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. She adds, "However, I'm thankful we were still able to bond and appreciate cultures through Zoom." For instance, participants played a matching game which exposed them to 'Singlish' words and phrases. Holding the event online also had the advantage of allowing a larger group of students to join in the activities than would have been possible in person.



An e-Jamboree in May 2021 welcomed new NOC alumni who had just completed the programme.



NOC alumni spoke at an entrepreneurship-themed fireside chat organised by NUS Centre for Future-ready Graduates in June 2021.

FROM START-UP TO SCALE-UP

Just as GRO has provided a suite of online opportunities to broaden the horizons of students stuck in Singapore, NUS Enterprise — the entrepreneurial arm of the University — has done the same for students in its flagship NOC programme. "We did not pause NOC, but have continued to conduct and replicate as much of the experience as possible," says Professor Chee Yeow Meng, Associate Vice President (Innovation & Enterprise) of NUS and Director of NOC. "Students are organised according to their location of preference and placed in remote internships with our start-up partners at those locations."

Much of this would not have been possible without the support of previous NOC batches. To ensure current students would not miss out on entrepreneurial exposure, NOC alumni have stepped up to help their juniors during this period. Some hired more student interns at their own companies (both inside and outside Singapore), while others rallied their



networks and former NOC employers to take in interns. A number of NOC alumni companies have followed up by offering traineeships and full-time positions to graduating students facing a tough job market.

Indeed, the close-knit nature of the global NOC community has stayed intact through the pandemic. For example, this year's e-Jamboree and NOC Alumni Homecoming (a hybrid event) allowed NOC alumni to connect with one another from wherever they were. NOC alumni can also share their knowledge and experiences virtually through a new series of NOC Masterclasses, in addition to speaking engagements organised by other parties.

Out of the NOC programme as well as benefitting from NUS Enterprise's incubation support, numerous successful start-ups have been hatched — none more notable than Mr Jeffrey Tiong's (Engineering '07) PatSnap, which in March 2021 became the first NUS Enterprise-supported company to achieve 'unicorn' status (i.e. a privately-held start-up valued at over US\$1 billion). But Prof Chee plans to strengthen NUS' entrepreneurial reputation even further, and expand the global start-up and innovation ecosystem, by moving to the next phase of "venture creation".

He describes it thus: "In the past, we focused on providing education to students — through NOC — and changing their mindsets to give them the confidence to create ventures, and then left them on their own after that. To use a cooking analogy, we used to just provide a chef with the ingredients. Now we want to be more deliberate and help the chef cook as delicious a dish as possible, by offering more post-NOC support."

In particular, NUS Enterprise is ramping up support for NOC alumni in four areas:

- 1. Talent.** A list of CEOs with entrepreneurial expertise has been drawn up, from which teams are paired with a suitable candidate to help develop their ventures.
- 2. Money.** A fund has been set up to invest in companies which are spun off from NUS.
- 3. Technology.** Through the NUS Graduate Research Innovation Programme (GRIP), postgraduate students and researchers receive guidance to transform research into their own deep tech companies.
- 4. Market access.** Local start-ups can venture abroad through NUS' global network of entrepreneurial hubs including BLOCK71 and NUS Research Institutes in China (NUSRI China), which support a two-way flow of talent, technologies and start-ups between the respective countries and Singapore.

"By and large, the pandemic did not affect our venture-creation strategy. We just had to find different ways of executing it," says Prof Chee. That means doing things online. Like NOC students who are interning remotely, participating teams in GRIP can either work from home or adhere to safe management measures on campus. BLOCK71 recently opened a new hub in Ho Chi Minh City (Vietnam), and will soon establish its presence in Nagoya (Japan) and Chongqing (China). And in August 2021, Singapore companies wanting to enter the Chongqing market took part in a week-long virtual immersion programme co-organised by the Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA), NUS Enterprise and BLOCK71.



By and large, the pandemic did not affect our venture-creation strategy. We just had to find different ways of executing it.

Professor Chee Yeow Meng,
Associate Vice President
(Innovation & Enterprise), NUS



→ THERE'S NOTHING LIKE THE REAL THING

Pivoting online is the best (and often the only) option so long as the COVID-19 threat does not abate, but as Prof Chee points out, there is one drawback: "Virtual attendance is not able to fully replace the [face-to-face] interactions ... that are so effective in growing networks and building connections." As Singapore transitions to a 'living with endemic COVID' model and gradually loosens border controls, NUS plans to allow fully-vaccinated students to travel to selected NOC locations from as early as October 2021. The SEP will also resume in most countries in January 2022, barring any worsening of the COVID-19 situation.



A hybrid event, the NOC Alumni Homecoming 2021 was attended by guests both in-person and virtually.



Given the huge market size in China, there are also ample opportunities for start-ups and companies from NUS (and Singapore) to do business there and translate their research for application and commercialisation.

Mr George Loh,
Director, NUSRI China

TO CHINA, AND BEYOND

It might seem ill-advised for businesses to attempt international expansion in such times of turmoil, and for some, that may well be true. However, Prof Chee says, "It's important to help our companies internationalise because the Singapore market is so small. If they want to grow, they have to be 'born global' almost from day one." Moreover, although some industries have been hit hard by COVID-19, he notes that "the digital sector is still doing very well — and most of our start-ups are in the digital space."

As the world's second-largest economy, China represents one of the biggest markets for NUS Enterprise-supported companies. This is reflected not only in the fact that there are two BLOCK71 Suzhou incubation spaces located in the Chinese city, but also through the four research institutes which have been set up under the NUSRI China programme. Over the last decade, NUS has steadily increased its presence in China, thus enhancing Sino-Singapore cooperation in research, education and enterprise activities, and extending the University's sphere of influence internationally.

Mr George Loh, Director of the NUSRI China programme, elaborates on the win-win outcomes for both countries: "NUS, being a research-intensive university, has to work with the best researchers globally. In fact, we have a global responsibility to train the best talent for the

world. Our partners in China will benefit from talent development by a world-class university like NUS, while we will benefit from the Chinese PhD students who do excellent research under the supervision of NUS professors. Given the huge market size in China,

there are also ample opportunities for start-ups and companies from NUS (and Singapore) to do business there and translate their research for application and commercialisation."

Founded in 2010, NUS (Suzhou) Research Institute (NUSRI-SZ) is NUS' first overseas research institute, and the first to be independently set up by a foreign university in China. It contributes to China's rapid economic growth through research in three core areas: environmental and energy nanotechnology; food science and technology; and smart medical technology. NUSRI-SZ also supports NUS Enterprise in managing one of the BLOCK71 Suzhou facilities, which enables companies housed there to tap on NUSRI-SZ's research and technology expertise, thus boosting commercialisation of NUS' intellectual property outside of Singapore.

For example, recent breakthroughs have been reported in two research projects conducted at NUSRI-SZ. One team has proposed a triboelectric bidirectional sensor-integrated exoskeleton as a low-cost, customisable solution for monitoring the movable joints of the human upper limbs, which shows great potential for application in robotic automation, healthcare and training. Another team has used Helmholtz coils to design a wireless positioning and wireless charging system that is suitable for wireless capsule endoscopy and other related biomedical and industrial applications.



Professor Xu Guo Qin, Director of NUSRI-SZ, notes that these research achievements are relevant not just for China and Singapore but the world at large: "The triboelectric sensor provides a novel and energy-saving solution to the design and operation of robotic exoskeletons, and will have far-reaching impacts in the development of advanced rehabilitative and surgical technologies. The project on wireless positioning and wireless charging allows for more operational convenience and improved accuracy in both the positioning and orientation of smart medical devices, such as capsule endoscopy for health examination and diagnosis in the human body."

The other three research institutes rounding out the NUSRI China programme are the NUS (Chongqing) Research Institute (NUSRI-CQ), which Prof Xu also heads; Tianjin University-NUS Joint Institute in Fuzhou (NUSRI-FZ); and NUS Guangzhou Research Translation and Innovation Institute (NUSRI-GZ). All engaged in education, innovation and technology entrepreneurship, they provide a gateway for Singapore start-ups to access the China market and reciprocally help Chinese start-ups attempting to break into Singapore.

NUS is also eyeing trends closer to home and fostering ties with its ASEAN neighbours, especially Indonesia. The University has helped to grow Indonesia's innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem in recent years by, among other moves, opening BLOCK71 locations in Jakarta, Bandung and Yogyakarta, and introducing the NOC Southeast Asia programme (which covers these three Indonesian cities, plus Ho Chi Minh City). In July 2021, NUS deepened its involvement by penning an agreement with two of the country's top institutions, Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM) and Universitas Indonesia (UI). Under this partnership, the three universities will establish a venture creation programme in Indonesia, and NUS Enterprise will offer scholarships for Indonesian students from UGM and UI to attend NUS' MSc in Venture Creation programme.



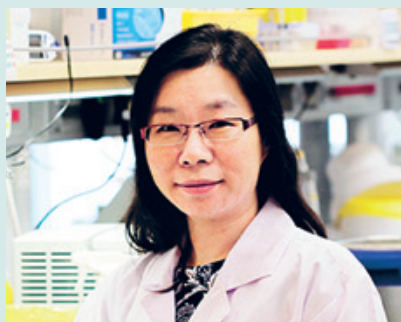
The triboelectric sensor provides a novel and energy-saving solution to the design and operation of robotic exoskeletons, and will have far-reaching impacts on rehabilitative and surgical technologies.

Professor Xu Guo Qin,
Director, NUSRI-SZ



→ PYP-ed to the Post

Collaborating with top talent based overseas is one way NUS burnishes its global credentials as a research-intensive university. Bringing the best and the brightest to Singapore is another. In 2018, NUS introduced the Presidential Young Professorship (PYP) scheme, which aims to attract and recruit young academics — local and foreign — with excellent research track records in their respective fields.



Dr Shao Huilin.

Within the field of biomedical engineering, NUS Presidential Young Professor Shao Huilin and her research lab recently made headlines for their development of the ExoSCOPE platform. Using specially-designed nanosensors, it is a world-first blood test that can accurately and non-invasively measure the effectiveness of cancer treatment within 24 hours after the start of treatment. This enables real-time monitoring of cancer treatment at the molecular level, so that doctors can make timely adjustments to the treatment plan, if necessary, to improve patients' chances of recovery.

Having conducted a successful clinical trial involving lung cancer patients in Singapore, the team is collaborating with US-based counterparts to further develop the ExoSCOPE platform to apply it to a spectrum of cancers and other diseases. If all goes well, they may bring it to market in the next three years. "We hope to bring this technology forward, in Singapore and beyond, for personalised treatment, to guide the selection, dosage and duration of different treatments, and improve treatment outcomes," says Dr Shao, an Assistant Professor in NUS'



The ExoSCOPE nanotechnology platform.

Department of Biomedical Engineering and Principal Investigator at the NUS Institute for Health Innovation & Technology (iHealthtech).

Dr Shao, who returned to her native Singapore in 2014 after almost a decade in the US, speaks effusively about her experience at NUS: "NUS has a rich diversity of cutting-edge expertise in both fundamental and applied sciences, all in close proximity. This diversity is further strengthened by world-class infrastructure and supportive policies. In this hotbed of creativity, new ideas can be quickly conceived and put into action."

CHAPTER BY CHAPTER

Indonesia is also where many NUS alumni call home, and joining NUS Alumni Jakarta Chapter helps them to connect with one another and build meaningful personal and professional relationships. COVID-19 has admittedly made things difficult, as the last time alumni met in person was at a networking dinner in March 2020, right before the pandemic hit with full force. However, Jakarta Chapter Chairperson Mr David Suwanto (Business '09) notes that the group has since held several virtual get-togethers with invited guest speakers. A WhatsApp group has also been created for members to share all kinds of information, from COVID-19 support resources and 'fake news' warnings to cryptocurrency investment tips and celebratory messages on festive occasions.

"Although we can find a lot of information online, we need to hear from people we trust before we go into something or engage a particular service," says Mr Suwanto, who works in Jakarta as a TV series producer. "Trust is also important for collaborations or partnerships to come together. The NUS alumni

network is very helpful to build trust between members and their personal networks."

Down under in Australia, due to the fluctuating lockdowns and reopenings, NUS Alumni Melbourne Chapter has been able to organise some events but has had to cancel others. "This year, we were fortunate to have our Chinese New Year Dinner and our Australia Day barbecue, which dodged a lockdown," says Dr Edna Yeo (Science '93), who chairs the Melbourne Chapter. Members also stay in touch via WhatsApp, where they share information on online events and organise ad hoc activities in between lockdown periods, such as motorcycle rides through the rural countryside.

"Australian borders were closed to all non-residents in March 2020, which means most of us are missing our loved ones overseas," says Dr Yeo, a management consultant. "Against this backdrop, social networks such as NUS alumni chapters are being recognised for the valuable resource they are, and gaining renewed traction, in developing and maintaining friendships and camaraderie."

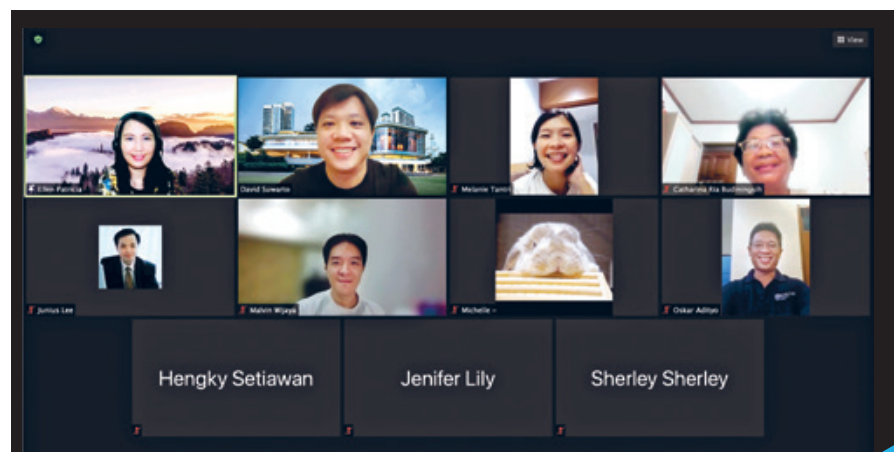


Most of us are missing our loved ones overseas. Against this backdrop, social networks such as NUS alumni chapters are being recognised for the valuable resource they are, and gaining renewed traction, in developing and maintaining friendships and camaraderie.

Dr Edna Yeo,
Chairperson, NUS Alumni
Melbourne Chapter



NUS Alumni Jakarta Chapter last met in person at a networking dinner in March 2020.



Virtual meetings allow Jakarta-based alumni to catch up with one another.



Top left: NUS Alumni Melbourne Chapter getting together in between lockdowns.

Top: Melbourne-based alumni celebrated Chinese New Year 2021 together, in compliance with Victoria's COVIDSafe practices.

Left: Over 50 guests attended NUS Alumni Melbourne Chapter's Australia Day barbecue in January 2021.



Similar stories can be found across all 20 NUS Alumni Overseas Chapters — the newest of which is the Chongqing Chapter, established in May 2021. This Chapter works together with NUSRI-CQ to offer a global platform for the integration of research, education and enterprise in western China. On 8 August, the group held its first online event, where alumni based in Chongqing got to know one another and heard about NUSRI-CQ's research activities from its Director, Prof Xu.

CALLING ON THE ALUMNI DIASPORA

Scattered across the globe, NUS alumni are as diverse in their pursuits as they are in their place of residence — be it giving back to society or leading a multinational corporation. Through their chosen vocations, they are in their own ways helping to raise NUS', and Singapore's, international profiles.

Among the ranks of *Fortune* Global 500 companies, Shanghai-based Dr James Geng (Public Policy '11) serves as Chairman and President of Greenland Financial Holdings Group, a subsidiary of property developer-turned-conglomerate Greenland Group. "Since our core business is in China and thanks to the good job done here to manage the pandemic, our work has not been significantly affected," says Dr Geng. COVID-19 has accelerated its digital transformation, but the Group remains committed to implementing its internationalisation agenda. For Greenland Financial, Singapore — given its status as a major financial and trading hub — is a key strategic market.

Greenland Financial's dealings in Singapore mainly involve two projects: the establishment of a digital wholesale bank and the issuance of a real estate investment trust on the Singapore Exchange, both currently in preparation. In this respect, the time Dr Geng — who is also an NUS Alumni Advisory

Board member and Chairperson of NUS Alumni Shanghai Chapter — spent pursuing a Master in Public Management at NUS has proved valuable. "The programme gave me global insight into the challenges faced by different governments, and I received an unexpected opportunity to work at the Monetary Authority of Singapore," he recalls. "While working with Singapore's public departments and institutions, I was able to observe Singapore's financial regulatory system closely and understand how it works from the inside."



The Master in Public Management programme at NUS gave me global insight into the challenges faced by different governments.

Dr James Geng, NUS Alumni
Advisory Board member



OOTB's Mr Ang (left) and Ms Ng (middle) with their friend Mr Wang Yichao (Design and Environment '13), who is helping with distribution efforts in Singapore.

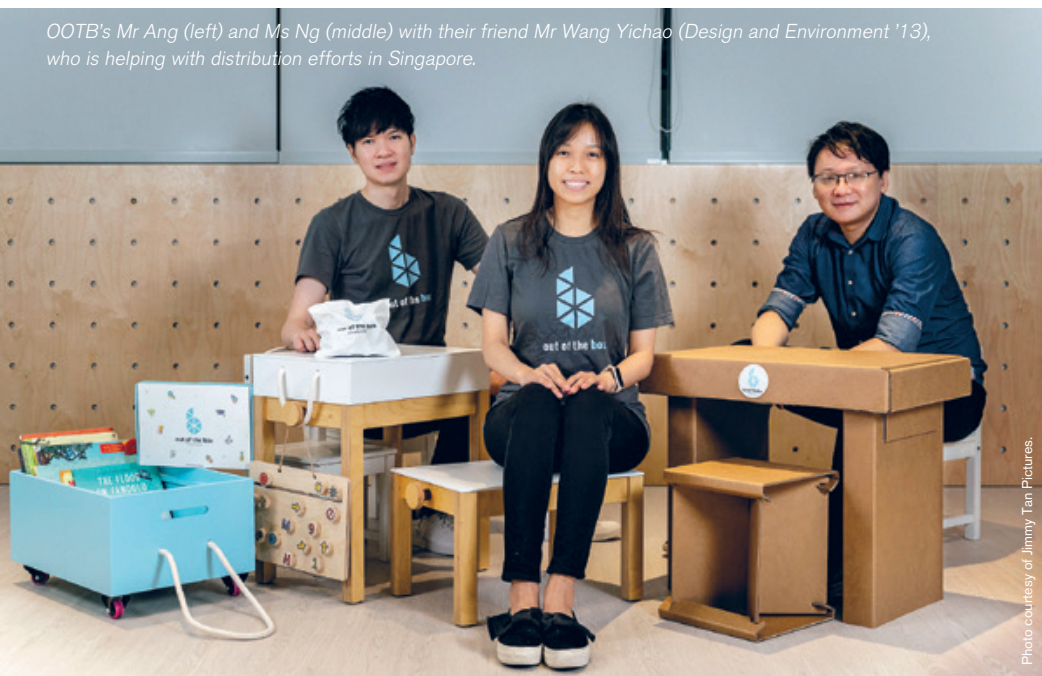


Photo courtesy of Jimmy Tan Pictures.



OOTB is addressing children's home-based learning needs.

Photo courtesy of Mao Otsuki.



Photo courtesy of Mao Otsuki.

More than 150 free cardboard units have been distributed in Singapore and the US.

Other alumni, troubled by the hardships people are facing in the wake of COVID-19, have taken it upon themselves to make a difference and help those in need. From their base in the United States, Mr Ang Yu Qian (Design and Environment '13) and Ms Kloe Ng (Design and Environment '13) – co-founders of edtech start-up Out Of The Box (OOTB) – embarked on a social initiative early this year to help children from less-privileged families both in Singapore and stateside. Their solution? A free, portable cardboard box that can be unpacked to form a table and stool, and which comes with stationery and other learning materials, to help children with home-based learning.

More than 150 free cardboard units have been distributed to date, and OOTB is currently developing artificial intelligence-based learning software which will be integrated

with the mobile classrooms. "Early childhood education is critical for children's development and growth," says Mr Ang. "We are working to help children learn better and hope to maintain a social angle in our venture, where we can continue to help underserved children all over the world."

When India became overwhelmed by its second wave of COVID-19 this year, a group of NUS alumni joined forces with peers from Nanyang Technological University (NTU) and Singapore Management University (SMU) to launch a crowdfunding campaign called Singapore Universities' Mission Oxygen (SUMO) in April. Spread across Singapore, the Philippines and India, Team SUMO managed to raise \$235,000 from 902 supporters in 15 days, with the funds being used to purchase and deploy 200 oxygen concentrators to various parts of India – doubling their initial target of 100 units.

"The most memorable thing about SUMO was seeing how compassion and service can bring people together to save lives," says Mr Vishal Ladha (Computing '17), a SUMO volunteer. Born in India, he now works at an analytics start-up in Singapore. "It was a phenomenal experience and from the huge support we received, we realised there is so much good we can do if we, as alumni, come together."

Ms Selly Amalina Muzammil (Arts and Social Sciences '09), who has made fighting world hunger her life's mission, feels the



Mr Ladha (far left) and other members of Team SUMO visited the High Commission of India to Singapore.

same way. Originally from Indonesia, she has led a peripatetic life both as a student – including a stint at NUS, where she obtained a Master in International Studies – and now in her career with the UN World Food Programme (WFP). Her work with the WFP has taken her from Jakarta to Egypt to New York City, where she recently relocated to join WFP's UN System and Multilateral Engagement Division. "I will be working on various focus areas of relevance to WFP's mandate to promote food security and contribute to global partnerships for the UN Sustainable Development Goals," she says.

Living in different countries and meeting people from all walks of life, from different ethnic groups in Singapore to Iraqi refugees who had fled their country in search of safety, has given Ms Muzammil a unique perspective on life – one that is inherently global. "This pandemic is literally global and relatable to each and every one of us, albeit to varying degrees," says the 2019 NUS Alumni Awards recipient. Even with travel restrictions in place, she argues, keeping up with global developments is not just desirable but vital. "We are all going through this challenging experience together and we have to overcome it together, with integrity, empathy, collaboration and, above all, humanity." **A**



The SUMO campaign deployed oxygen concentrators to India.

We are all going through this challenging experience together and we have to overcome it, with integrity, empathy, collaboration and, above all, humanity.

Ms Selly Amalina Muzammil, 2019 NUS Alumni Awards recipient



A HEART TO SERVE

The actions of Mr Ang and Mr Ladha embody the spirit of NUS' Day of Service (DOS), which has been refashioned in light of the prolonged COVID-19 pandemic. Due to limits on physical gatherings as well as the increased demand for volunteers, DOS has evolved from a single-day event to a year-long platform for the NUS community to give back and help the less-fortunate. While NUS alumni, students and staff still came together for this year's DOS on 4 September and took part in various community projects, many others have been doing good around the world over the course of the year.

➤ **Join in and volunteer all year round!** nus.edu.sg/alumnet/events/DOS

To further develop students' social consciousness, NUS has introduced several new initiatives:

- Both local and international students can volunteer for **Teach Singapore**, a University-wide initiative which provides academic coaching and mentoring to disadvantaged children and youth in Singapore.
- The **General Education curriculum** has been enhanced this year to include a new pillar, **Communities and Engagement**.
- School of Computing students can take part in programmes run by the newly-launched **NUS Centre for Computing for Social Good & Philanthropy (CCSGP)**, which aims to nurture tech leaders with a philanthropic ethos.

"The key point of education at NUS is not necessarily that students graduate and do well in life. Rather, we want them to become the best version of themselves – not just to strive for material success but to also remember to serve," says Associate Professor Ben Leong, Director of CCSGP. Through his Centre as well as the other NUS initiatives, students will be exposed to problems that are at once local and borderless (e.g. income inequality, climate change, access to healthcare) and acquire the skills to tackle them.

→ SURF'S UP!

Also known as 'cyberslacking', cyber-loafing refers to the actions of employees who take advantage of their corporate Internet access for personal use while pretending to do work. Examples of cyber-loafing include surfing the Internet, sending personal emails, watching YouTube videos, spending a lot of time on social media, and even job-hunting.

NET, CLICKS AND CHILL

Rather than being a drain on resources, the phenomenon of 'cyber-loafing' by workers can actually pay dividends, says **Professor Vivien Lim** (Arts and Social Sciences '85).

IN

AN INCREASINGLY DIGITALLY-FOCUSED, ALWAYS-CONNECTED WORLD, few would dispute

that access to the Internet is an essential part of daily professional and personal lives. Consequently, many of us spend a sizeable chunk of the waking day engrossed in our phones or laptop screens to check our social media accounts or email, browse news websites or buy things online. This is even more so during this COVID-19 pandemic, with many forced to work from home.

For many managers and businesses, a common concern is that their employees are accessing the Internet during office hours for personal matters, a practice known as cyber-loafing. The term connotes a waste of time and a drain on productivity. Some firms have tried to curb such practices by blocking access to certain websites or installing monitoring software to track Internet usage. However, such measures can easily backfire. Restrictions or monitoring can lead to resentment among staff and fuel feelings of a lack of trust, undermining productivity and causing talented employees to quit. Employers may also unintentionally block access to commercially-important information or intelligence and actually hamper the ability of employees to do their work. Furthermore, the profusion of wireless devices and cheap data packages means that staff can easily bypass any restrictions or monitoring

imposed on fixed workplace networks. At the same time, the distinction between activities which count as cyber-loafing and others which count as actual work is becoming increasingly blurred — especially as many workers use the same mobile devices and applications for both personal and professional purposes.

Given this fast-changing landscape, many firms find themselves seeking measures to tackle or control cyber-loafing among their staff. But perhaps a better question they should ask is whether cyber-loafing is actually as bad as many perceive it to be. A recent study by NUS Business School, in collaboration with Koblenz University of Applied Sciences' Dr Rashimah Rajah, found that cyber-loafing has several positive effects on productivity, and on the way employees perceive and engage with their place of work.

There is no question that cyber-loafing uses up time that might otherwise be directed at more productive business activities. However, our study found that the self-initiated payback from staff who cyber-loaf can compensate for, or even exceed, this supposed lost productivity. In a series of surveys using undergraduate students and employees at a Singapore-based finance firm, our study centred on the concept of organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB). This is essentially a measure of how helpful employees are towards their colleagues and the company, and how much of an "extra mile" they are prepared to put in for work.

We found that employees generally are aware of their own cyber-loafing, recognise that it represents lost productivity, and in most cases seek to make up for it in their approach to work. This relates to the psychological theory of neutralisation, where individuals seek

to rationalise an activity even if they know it to be wrong or detrimental. Generally, this is done in one of two ways. The first is normalisation, where one tries to justify the activity such as by noting that "Others are doing the same thing, so why can't I?" The second is minimisation, where one seeks to downplay the activity and ask questions such as "It's only 10 minutes, what harm can it do?"

In our study, we observed both in action. We broke down the practice of cyber-loafing into a range of different activities, including non-work emailing,

passive website browsing, and interactive cyber-loafing, which includes engaging with social networking sites or playing games. We found that these generated different levels of guilt feelings among employees and therefore different levels of compensatory response in terms of OCB. For example, employees who engaged in non-work email activity using company resources or during work time tended to compensate with the most OCB towards the firm. This included paying greater attention to conserving firm resources or to using them more

efficiently. We did find that interactive cyber-loafing did not have a positive effect on OCB. The negative effect on OCB, however, was negligible.

Overall, our findings suggest that cyber-loafing is not all dysfunctional. It does have an upside in that employees who cyber-loaf will compensate by engaging in OCB. Specifically, our findings suggest that cyber-loafing produces two seemingly contrasting emotions — guilt and happiness — both of which can ultimately prove beneficial for employee productivity. This gels with previous research which has found that cyber-loafing can be beneficial to employees' well-being, acting as a form of "mental break" before employees return their attention to work matters. Indeed, in many cases, employees view cyber-loafing not as deviant behaviour but rather as a well-deserved reward after periods of high concentration on work tasks. Overall, our study found convincing evidence that while technological developments are making cyber-loafing easier than ever, employees' psychological processes seem to be evolving in such a way that the negative effects are offset by their own initiatives at bringing balance back to productivity in the workplace.

Now that work from home has become a norm, the boundaries between working and personal lives are becoming increasingly blurred. So to managers who view cyber-loafing as stealing company time or a form of deviance, the message from our study is to see the bigger picture, cut your staff some slack, and allow them to pay back by going the extra mile for their colleagues and the company. The benefits may surprise you. **A**



Professor Vivien Lim is a member of the Department of Management and Organisation, NUS Business School. This article was first published in TODAYonline on 22 June 2020.



GIVE US A BREAK

Singapore was among the **BOTTOM 10** for work-life balance and ranked the **second most-overworked city** in a study of 40 cities, according to a 2019 study by tech firm Kisi.

Source: CNA

The message from our study is to see the bigger picture, cut your staff some slack, and allow them to pay back by going the extra mile for their colleagues and the company. The benefits may surprise you.

CALENDAR OF ALUMNI EVENTS OCT. NOV. DEC



OCTOBER



Investing for Financial Wellness

Future-ready Workshops

Speakers:
Professor Ong Seow Eng (Design & Environment '84), Department of Real Estate, NUS Business School
Mr Shashank Shekhar Tripathi (Business '19), Certified Financial Technician (CFTe) and Instructor, Strategic Technology Management Institute, NUS School of Computing



In 2021, the average life expectancy in Singapore is 83 years. How have you been investing to provide for yourself and your family in view of our increasing longevity?

Learn how you can leverage data and technology to make better investment decisions, build and manage real estate wealth for the long term, and the pitfalls to avoid.

12 OCT Tue, 7.30pm - 9.00pm

Register: alumnet.events/FRoct21
Contact: Ms Lee Siao Shuan
s.lee@nus.edu.sg



Breakthroughs in Lung Cancer Detection and Treatment

Health & Wellness

Speaker:
Dr Lim Chong Hee (Medicine '90), Specialist in Cardiothoracic Surgery, Farrer Park Hospital



Learn the importance of screening, different stages of lung cancer, various techniques in biopsy, and the role of surgery in managing early lung cancer. Dr Lim will also shed light on the effects of COVID-19 on lung cancer patients.

21 OCT Thu, 7.30pm - 9.00pm

Register: alumnet.events/HWoct21
Contact: Ms Tan Li Hui
lhutan@nus.edu.sg



Write About Love (PG)

Feature Films (Philippines)



A young, female writer gets teamed up with a male writer to create the perfect romantic movie. Their clashing personalities and different perspectives on relationships lead them through a journey of self-discovery, as they ultimately find out what it really takes to write about love.

28 OCT Shaw Foundation Alumni House, Thu, 7.30pm - 9.30pm

Register: alumnet.events/FFoct21
Contact: Mr Kenneth Phang
kphang@nus.edu.sg



PERUVIAN FILM FESTIVAL

24-26
NOV

In collaboration with the Embassy of the Republic of Peru in Singapore, NUS Alumni Relations is proud to bring the *Peruvian Film Festival* back for the 2nd year! Join us in this immersive 3-night event that celebrates the best of Peruvian films.

24 - 26 November

Shaw Foundation Alumni House, 7.30pm - 9.30pm

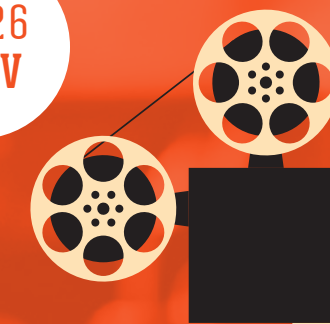
Register: alumnet.events/PVFF21
Contact: Ms Lee Siao Shuan
s.lee@nus.edu.sg



24 Nov (Wed):
La Teta Asustada (The Milk of Sorrow) (2009)
Drama [NC16]

25 Nov (Thu):
Contracorriente (Undertow) (2009)
Drama [Rating to be advised]

26 Nov (Fri):
Mataindios (Indigenous' Slayer) (2018)
Drama [Rating to be advised]



NOVEMBER



Towards a Digital Organisation and Data-Driven Workforce

Tech Talk

Speakers:
Associate Professor Tan Chuan Hoo (Computing '01), Deputy Head (Administration and Research), Department of Information Systems and Analytics, NUS School of Computing
Dr Benjamin Lee (Science '84), Senior Lecturer (Data Analytics and Visualisation), Department of Statistics and Data Science, NUS Faculty of Science



Gain insights into how you can harness data for your work, as well as how your company



can reimagine the way it develops digital capabilities and create effective practices for digital transformation. In addition, get to learn about common missteps in companies' digital transformation journeys and how to avoid them.

16 NOV Tue, 7.30pm - 9.00pm

Register: alumnet.events/TSnov21
Contact: Mr Kenneth Phang
kphang@nus.edu.sg



DECEMBER



"Meat" the Plant-Based Future

Thirsty Thursdays

Join a panel of experts from the plant-based industry, who will share how going *meatless* will become the Future of Food, and witness how healthy food can be insanely delicious!

2 DEC Thu, 7.30pm - 9.00pm

Register: alumnet.events/TTdec21
Contact: Ms Tan Li Hui
lhutan@nus.edu.sg



➔ A WORLD OF POSSIBILITIES

Since the pioneer batch of 14 NUS students headed to Silicon Valley in 2002 as part of a partnership with Stanford University, the NUS Overseas Colleges (NOC) programme has grown to more than 15 cities, from Shenzhen to Stockholm. Melding start-up internship with academic studies at partner universities, the programme is considered a rite of passage for aspiring entrepreneurs. Six NOC alumni share their experiences of the programme, and the insights gained from it.

LESSONS FROM THE DREAM FACTORY

Alumni entrepreneurs from the NUS Overseas Colleges programme share the profound influence the experience has had on them.

When did you learn of the NOC programme and what made you apply for it?

TOH ANN CHER: As Real Estate students, we didn't get a lot of information on NOC, but I learned about it while I was in Year 2 and got interested because it was a year-long programme that allowed me to work and study at the same time. I have always been interested in the China market and decided to head to Beijing in September 2016 to get an immersive experience of its work culture. While my internship at Xiaomi didn't quite relate to my course, it wasn't difficult to convince my parents (that it would be a valuable experience) — though I didn't tell them about it until two months before my departure! The fact that Tsinghua University is a highly-regarded institution was a saving grace.

DOBARIYAPATEL HARDIK KISHOR: I saw university as a place to try things out to know what is right for me — NOC was one of those exploratory experiences. While I did think of starting my own business, I always figured I would first get myself a corporate job to build experience and credibility. However, joining NOC and working for a small company with three co-founders, who when in doubt might simply turn to Google for answers, changed my way of thinking altogether.

OUR PANEL



MR ANG YI SHUAN
(ENGINEERING '21),
POSTGRADUATE AT NUS
GRADUATE RESEARCH
INNOVATION PROGRAMME (GRIP)



MS CORDILLIA ANN TAN MEI YU
(ARTS AND SOCIAL
SCIENCES '21),
SELF-EMPLOYED



MR DOBARIYAPATEL HARDIK KISHOR
(ENGINEERING '20),
CO-FOUNDER OF FACTOREM



MR MOHAMAD SHIJUDEEN BIN BAJAR RAHMAN
(BUSINESS '20),
CO-FOUNDER OF CARFUX



MS TOH ANN CHER
(DESIGN AND
ENVIRONMENT '19),
CO-FOUNDER OF
HOMEBASE



MS YEOH WANQING
(ARTS AND SOCIAL
SCIENCES '21),
CO-FOUNDER OF HATCH

ANG YI SHUAN: I first learned about NOC as a Year 1 Computer Engineering student through a roadshow. I knew that I didn't want to go into a corporate role upon graduation and joined NOC in 2020 to learn about the tech ecosystem in Shenzhen, see how companies there are driven by R&D, and learn the ins and outs of one of China's most powerful manufacturing and tech clusters.

CORDILLIA ANN TAN MEI YU: I am a Linguistics major and both my mother and I always thought I would become another "Ms Tan" in a school. Then, in the welcome week for Year 1 students, I attended an NOC information session. Under the impression that it was about internships — and not knowing what entrepreneurship was about — I asked for an internship and was given a posting within weeks. Thus began a crazy journey where I, even as an intern, ended up representing my company for roadshows in Korea and Australia. I went on to do the NOC programme in Shanghai from 2018 to 2019, where I was placed in the world's largest accelerator venture capital investment company, and was sent for business meetings in Southeast Asia and Taiwan. I spent another three semesters in N-House (*ENTERPRISE House, an entrepreneurship-themed residence managed by NOC*) where I was a senior resident assistant. I also interned at BLOCK71 (*NUS Enterprise's tech ecosystem builder and global connector for the start-up community*), so my NOC journey was very long! After graduation, I worked at blockchain accelerator Tribe, but have since left in view of starting my own business. It is the biggest decision I've ever made — and one that was influenced by my time with NOC.

YEOH WANQING: I heard about NOC during a talk, but never really prioritised it on my student chart as a Global Studies undergraduate. It was during my second year that I considered it: I was volunteering in a social enterprise that places young people into jobs, saw a lot of meaning in my work and wanted to continue doing this. In a quest to find a sustainable solution, I turned to entrepreneurship and joined NOC to find businesses with a strong social element. I went to Stockholm and the CEO of the company was an NOC Stockholm alumnus who tried to place me in situations where I would gather more knowledge and insights that were relevant to what I wanted to do.

MOHAMAD SHIJUDEEN BIN BAJAR RAHMAN: I had gone for an academic exchange in Year 3 and found living abroad really fun. So I thought I would try working abroad too, and chose New York as it was, to me, the coolest city. I only went for the NOC programme in Year 4, from 2018 to 2019. It was something that I did, in a way, for fun. I had always been interested in entrepreneurship, though it was just something at the back of my

The NOC experience changed my view of problem-solving: it taught me to take charge and just "do the right thing".

MR MOHAMAD SHIJUDEEN BIN BAJAR RAHMAN

mind. Most Business students want to go into the finance industry after graduation, but the NOC experience changed my views, and I went on to start my own company.

What were the biggest challenges you faced?

CORDILLIA: Finding a place to stay within two weeks of landing in a new country was certainly challenging! Also, we had to juggle internship and academic requirements: attending our entrepreneurship classes, writing that idea journal, coming up with a 30-page business case, conceptualising our own mini start-up... It was a lot of stuff jam-packed into 11 months. Mapping out the modules to meet our Unrestricted Elective (UE) requirement was also a challenge. I managed to complete a Linguistics module at Fudan University.

WANQING: As a Global Studies major, I had a very difficult time trying to match my modules, especially since the NOC programme wasn't something which I initially planned to take part in.

SHIJUDEEN: Apart from the culture shock, I kept feeling that I wasn't good enough to be there. At my internship, I was surrounded by younger colleagues who were already senior associates, yet here I was as just an intern wondering what I had been doing all these years! But it made me work harder to match up to everybody, although it took some time.

What were the biggest lessons learnt?

SHIJUDEEN: In my previous internships, I had expected the boss to tell me everything, and would wait for instructions from the top. But in New York, my bosses would ask for my opinions and solutions during meetings. It was a shock but I eventually overcame it, and over time I was given so much responsibility that half the people didn't know I was just an intern! Through the experience, my attitude towards work changed; I became proactive to get the most out of my year-long experience. It also changed my view of problem-solving: it taught me to take charge and just "do the right thing", as one of the co-founders would say. As someone who is running my own business, I realise I don't have to know all the answers — as long as I have the right people with me, we will be able to solve problems.

ANN CHER: We often think that Singapore is fast-paced but it does not compare to Beijing, so I had

to ramp up during my time there. While I was at Xiaomi, the start-up culture was still very strong and when faced with a problem, my boss would tell us to just tackle it quickly. Once, he asked for my take on an issue and I prepared a full presentation deck – as I would in school. The next day as I was about to run the deck by him, he stopped me and said, “No, just go for it. The faster you try, the faster you fail, the faster we can move on.” I took this spirit back with me and I feel that it gave me an edge when I left my job and started my own business.

YI SHUAN: I didn't think that entrepreneurship could be taught. But NOC disproved this notion with its support structure, modules, coaches and mentors. It was not an academic way of teaching but an experiential way to learn how to identify opportunities. One of the most important skills I learnt was how to conduct market validation. With the tools and framework to identify opportunities, a growth mentality and knowledge on creating and capturing value, I've gone on to start my own platform to help music students, having faced obstacles myself while taking up the Trinity ATCL diploma in piano. Another learning point from the NOC experience is the importance of relationships. The founders of the start-up I interned at in Shenzhen were from Cyprus, and had arrived in China not speaking a word of Mandarin. Yet they made it a point to learn the language and build relationships, to the extent of sharing what some might consider “trade secrets” with competitors. I was baffled at first, but later realised that this was how they built trust and earned social credit.

Would it be right to say that the NOC experience has led many of you to what you are doing today – as well as how you do it?

HARDIK: While working on engineering projects, I always saw the effort hardware engineers had to put in to find fabricators who could get things done on time and correctly. We just accepted it as “how things are supposed to be”. But while I was in Toronto for the NOC internship, I saw how a platform worked to connect American suppliers to American manufacturers and decided to create the same for the Asian market. With a couple of batch mates, we pitched the idea of Factorem during NOC and before we knew it, revenue started coming in – and we realised that we were building a business!

The NOC experience also showed me the feasibility of starting a company. When in Toronto, I realised a lot of final-year students had already started their companies about two to three years prior. Their rationale was that since they were young with little financial or family commitments, they had little to lose. Then, when I attended events

THE SPIRIT OF ENTERPRISE

The total valuation of BLOCK71 Singapore start-ups stands at

**\$7.05
BILLION,**

equating to almost a quarter of the total valuation generated by Singapore start-ups in 2020.

.....

BLOCK71 Singapore has engaged more than

**350,000
PEOPLE**

over the last 10 years via community platforms.

in Silicon Valley, I realised you don't have to be a super-brilliant Nobel Prize winner to start your own company: you just need to be somebody with an idea, and who is prepared to give your all to make it work.

WANQING: Previously, I had this idea that entrepreneurs are hustlers who never see the light of day. But the start-up I was working at had a very chill atmosphere with an emphasis on work-life balance – in fact, they insisted that staff knock off at 5pm! I came to appreciate entrepreneurship as a mindset: one that isn't afraid to challenge and improve the status quo. I took it as a spirit that I could bring to any organisation, and I applied it to how things are done at my social enterprise, Hatch. Working in Stockholm also showed me a different model to doing business. Sweden drives a lot of business through trust and interpersonal relationships: there is a trust that your partners will get things done – and done well – and this trust is built through knowing each other as people, rather than just another worker. A lot of their work meetings involve just catching up on each other's lives, changes in the family... anything but business! This resonated with me especially,

for it is similar to how things get done in the social impact space.

Does being part of the NOC alumni – which includes some highly-successful individuals – create pressure to perform or is it more a support network to tap into?

ANN CHER: It has been drilled into us over and over again that only one per cent will succeed, so there really is that pressure. We go in with a lot of confidence and focus on the growth process, but if we have to close, we will just have to bite the bullet and move on to something else. Even if we aren't the next Jeffrey Tiong now, we might still get there in another time and in another industry.

CORDILLIA: Rather than be stressed by the success of others, we are encouraged by their performance. Further, we can also tap into their expertise. The NOC community is very supportive and happy to speak to any member within the group.

YI SHUAN: NUS also offers a lot of support for NOC alumni – for example, NUS GRIP nurtures NOC alumni to be deep tech entrepreneurs. Apart from access to market databases, we also receive guidance, funding and mentoring.

I realised you don't have to be a super-brilliant Nobel Prize winner to start your own company: you just need to be somebody with an idea, and who is prepared to give your all to make it work. MR DOBARIYAPATEL HARDIK KISHOR

ANN CHER: Indeed, when I conceived my business idea a year ago, NOC was the first place I turned to. Their team guided me along, by pointing out the grants available and linking me up to the relevant government agencies. It is comforting to have a community that I can reach out to and fall back on.

Are there any improvements or suggestions you would like to make to the programme?

CORDILLIA: While juggling work and study could be challenging, the modules augment the experience and teach us what we do not learn on-the-job, thus I feel that the modules should definitely remain. However, I think it would be good if there could be greater flexibility in terms of module-mapping. Now with a Southeast Asian programme, it would also be amazing if there is a track for the students to move from a regional to a global experience.

YI SHUAN: While speaking to friends in other NOC colleges, we realised that we were having very different experiences. It would be good to promote cross-college interactivity and get to hear the experiences of students at other NOC colleges in different cities.

WANQING: I do feel that I would have appreciated more touch points with students at other colleges. I knew that the participants at other Southeast Asian colleges would visit one another, but I wish we at NOC Stockholm could do likewise! Another aspect that I feel could be improved upon is support for those who want to start something directly after NOC, but do not know how to do it, as we would be returning to school and having to balance our coursework with other commitments. While we do have access to the NOC network and mentors, there is still uncertainty. It would be beneficial if we can speak to somebody who understands the risks we are taking, or have some form of career coaching from entrepreneurs.

HARDIK: NOC showed us the first steps to becoming entrepreneurs, but as Wanqing said, one might still not know how to start upon returning home. I, for one, did not map my Final-Year Project to my NOC project. Between balancing my academic work and planning my start-up, I had people telling me to forget about school and focus on my business – but I still wanted to learn more of the academic stuff. It would be good if there are talks on this topic, not just for final-year students returning from NOC, but even for freshmen, so that they receive the guidance early. ▲

► If you'd like to join our Forum panel, do write to us at alumnihelpdesk@nus.edu.sg to express your interest.

➔ WHO SHE IS

Ms Bianca Tham is a self-professed “freegan” — a term that describes people who reject unfettered consumerism and try to reduce waste by retrieving and reusing discarded items. She gained fame on the Internet two years ago for diving through dumpsters in search of clothes and other goods, but these days, she uses her role as an educator to build a more sustainable Singapore.

820 MILLION — THAT’S HOW MANY PLASTIC BAGS ARE USED IN SINGAPORE’S SUPERMARKETS EVERY YEAR, according to a study by the Singapore Environment Council. Rising against this seemingly endless tsunami of polyethylene is Ms Bianca Tham (Arts and Social Sciences ’17), who makes it a point to bring her own reusable bag when getting groceries. But how then will we throw away our trash (the other big use of supermarket plastic bags), we ask her, using a question often lobbed at environmentalists. “We have to get creative,” suggests Ms Tham, 27. “I have a rule at home: no wasting of other kinds of plastic bags. So everything from bread bags to the large plastic bags that toilet rolls come in — they can all be used to throw away trash.”

In the grand scheme of things, it may be argued that the impact Ms Tham is making is negligible — after all, even if she were to make 365 trips to the supermarket every year, she would only save about 1,000 bags, which barely makes a dent. And all the good work she does is sometimes negated by her own mother, who admits to taking the occasional plastic bag for its convenience. But Ms Tham is not one to be easily discouraged. “It’s coming from a place of principle: as a consumer, I don’t want my purchases to affect our environment negatively. I don’t let myself be affected by how big or small the impact



I am making is — if I were, I would be discouraged every time I went down to the recycling bin since it’s often contaminated with non-recyclables. But I still recycle religiously because I want to be the change I want to see.”

AN ONGOING JOURNEY

This principle of conscious consumerism continues a journey that began for Ms Tham in secondary school, when she saw videos of how animals were used to test cosmetic products. “I steered clear of those companies but as I grew up, I learnt that every industry has an unethical side that I did not want to support,” says Ms Tham, a Social Studies teacher.

That discovery prompted her to consider not just what she bought but also how much she bought. “I was a shopaholic,” she admits, revealing that she would buy clothes, seemingly in autopilot mode, whenever she stepped into a mall. Disturbed by this, she decided to quit shopping for a year, going cold turkey during her university days. “It was painful but that one year made me so mindful of my habits. I also became mindful of the brands around us — I did some research and found that I did not want to be supporting them because of their labour and environmental practices.”

She adds that it can be challenging to be a discerning consumer in today’s climate, as corporates can “greenwash” themselves to appear more sustainable than they actually are. “So if you’re going to base your decisions on a slogan or an ad they have, don’t,” she says. “Read up on their mission statements and environmental impact reports to make sure they really are as sustainable as they claim to be.” This means sometimes buying goods that are more expensive — but she is fine with this as she values knowing just what her money is going towards.

RALLYING HER PEERS

Ms Tham stresses that being a discerning buyer does not have to be an expensive or lonely pursuit. She championed “freeganism” during her time at NUS, going so far as to run an event devoted to it. Her belief in the ‘power of free’ led to the creation of a ‘free market’ during her undergraduate days, where NUS students and staff could share their talents, skills and goods with the community for free. That event, aptly titled ‘Laissez Faire’, remains a highlight of the University Scholars Programme calendar.

Ms Tham has also gained notoriety for being a “dumpster diver” — which refers to the act of digging through trash to find goods that can still be used. One of her most prized finds is a glass bowl she found in a dustbin near her home. Describing it as being perfect



[ANTI?] SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

Social media has the power to raise awareness of sustainability issues but it can also set the cause back, says Ms Tham. “Influencers have a lot of clout with youths, but they also promote unsustainable habits like fast fashion,” she reflects. “I don’t blame them because they’re in a bind, since they rely on sponsorships — but therein lies the cycle of consumerism that is very hard to break. All the hard work in generating awareness and engaging youths on environmental issues gets drowned out when the kids get on their phones.”

“except for a thin film of dust”, she uses it as a fruit bowl in her home today. “But only after we gave it a thorough wiping down,” she adds quickly.

NEW ARENAS OF CHANGE

These days, Ms Tham admits that the demands of work make it difficult for her to meaningfully engage in activities like dumpster diving. Still, she finds opportunities to make a difference wherever she can — which is more often than not in the classroom. “Today’s Social Studies curriculum encourages teachers to discuss current affairs like sustainability. Character and Citizenship Education classes also allow me to do this,” she explains.

Being an educator for the past three years has shown her that Gen-Z may not be as eco-friendly as they are sometimes made out to be. “I’ve heard that notion before,” she shares. “But in reality, they are still very driven by trends. For example, there was a period when reusable straws and food containers were very popular because of influencers on TikTok. But when that trend died down, students gradually reverted to using disposables again.”

Despite this, Ms Tham’s can-do spirit continues to shine as she seeks to build the same love for the environment that today’s young share for TikTok dance crazes and memes. She looks for creative solutions to tackle these issues: for instance, in 2019, she engaged Swapaholic, an e-commerce platform that allows users to swap clothes, to run a lecture for her students. “They were really engaged and saw that there are alternatives to the ‘buy, buy, buy’ lifestyle we are used to,” she reflects. Her career in education also allows her to pursue a lifelong passion for interacting with youths. “I get energised by them,”

she says. “I grew up in a single-parent household, so I especially empathise with youths from vulnerable backgrounds. I want to give them options in life by being a parent away from home for them, guiding them as they go through their education.” ▲



Besides salvaging trash for her own use, Ms Tham often cleans up her dumpster finds and ‘rehomes’ these items via call-outs on social media.

I don’t let myself be affected by how big or small the impact I am making is... I still recycle religiously because I want to be the change I want to see.

The Long and Short of It

Why Viddsee co-founders **Mr Ho Jia Jian (Engineering '10)** and **Mr Derek Tan (Engineering '09)** are betting on short films.

FILMS LIKE *THE SOCIAL NETWORK* HAVE PORTRAYED THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN CO-FOUNDERS OF SUCCESSFUL START-UPS AS FRAUGHT AND TOXIC.

But for Mr Ho Jia Jian (Engineering '10) and Mr Derek Tan (Engineering '09) — the two men behind short film platform Viddsee — the truth is anything but. Their collegial working relationship shines through during our interview, and as Mr Ho puts it, might be a result of their shared history at the University. “We both studied engineering but we didn’t actually meet in the Faculty. We crossed paths at nuSTUDIOS, an NUS film CCA that brings together film buffs from across

This community is more than just those who went through professional film school. You also have people like us, who are passionate about films but who may do it on the side, and short films allow us to do that. And we wanted to showcase these. MR DEREK TAN

the University,” shares Mr Ho, 34. Mr Tan chimes in, adding, “We managed a lot of projects in the CCA together, from film masterclasses to screenings. So we got a sense of how the other worked quite early on.” Being heavily involved in nuSTUDIOS also allowed the pair to appreciate the passion each had for film, a passion that still burns today.

It is this passion that brought Viddsee to life eight years ago. The platform hosts and distributes short films from Singapore and the region and has become a lifeline for many filmmakers looking to reach more audiences. More than 3,000 storytellers use the platform and have uploaded over 4,500 films on it to date. The platform serves as a launching pad for many of these films and filmmakers, with Viddsee profiling the creatives, matching opportunities and funding for them. And their efforts have borne fruit: the films on the platform have amassed more than two billion views — a testament to the power of short films, says Mr Tan. “You don’t need to invest an hour; just 15 minutes is enough to get a story that someone is trying to tell.”

Tell us about your passion for films.

DEREK TAN (DT): I dabbled in film in secondary school and Junior College. Being in Electrical and Computer

Engineering allowed me to see the exciting developments taking place in computer animation and videography. I had an unofficial Minor in Film; I enrolled in film modules from the Arts Faculty, like *Japanese and South Asian film* — which were technically for fourth-years, but I took them in my first year!

HO JIA JIAN (JJ): Prior to NUS, I was helping out on production shoots in my hometown of Kuala Lumpur. Like Derek, I was also interested in engineering and how things worked. So when I got to NUS, I tried to align my passion for both, which was how I became so actively involved in nuSTUDIOS.

What are your earliest memories of film?

DT: TV was my gateway to film. When I was five or six, I used a videocassette recorder (VCR) to record movies that were being aired on TV and had my own “video rental” store, which I shared with family and friends. My collection was basically a curation of movies that I thought were worth watching.

JJ: My background was a lot more about visuals and creatives. At 11, I remember doing graphic drawings and creating logos on Photoshop. I was very intrigued with the idea of creation. Later on, I got into photography and videos. I then stumbled upon film in a professional setting.

What happened in the three years between graduation and the starting of Viddsee?

DT: Both Jian and I ended up working in the product teams of a major cable network provider, although at different times (Jian joined after I had left). In that role, we got to see first-hand the developments in Internet TV and got an inkling of how that would change the way people consumed content.

JJ: After our stints there, we got to thinking that this might be the right time to branch out and work on something that we were

passionate about, which is creating a community centred on short films. So we leaned on our new professional experience and existing passion to build Viddsee.

Why the focus on short films?

JJ: We feel that short films are the heart for local stories. If you ask people what they know about Singaporean films, they might throw out a big director’s name or a recent mainstream movie. But there are a vast number of stories being told through short films that remain undiscovered. From our experience, we also saw that attention spans were getting shorter and predicted that there might be an increased demand for short films — especially with the rise of mobile streaming.

DT: It builds on our own journeys. We’ve made short films in the past and we know very well the challenges of finding an audience for them, so we wanted to serve that community of filmmakers. This community is more than just those who went through professional film school. You also have people like us, who are passionate about films but who may do it on the side, and short films allow us to do that. And we wanted to showcase these.

Do you have much time for filmmaking these days?

JJ: At times, but we also derive a lot of satisfaction from being able to empower filmmakers who are, frankly, much better than we ever were (*laughs*).

DT: I work quite closely with brands and help them tell their stories. So we do more behind-the-camera ideation now. **A**

THROUGH THEIR LENS

The duo’s must-see short films, available on Viddsee:

DT: *Gift* (2008, Singapore): “The impact of this shows you how powerful short films are. I got an email from a Brazilian kid who was really enthralled by the film and Singaporean culture. Very touching stuff.” **Watch at** viddsee.com/video/gift

JJ: *Final Exam* (2019, Singapore): “It tells the story we all know too well: the stress of a final examination and how that affects our compassion and empathy for others.” **Watch at** viddsee.com/video/final-exam



Mr Ho (right) at the annual Viddsee Juree Awards, which honours the best short films from Singapore, Indonesia and the Philippines.

➔ **WHO SHE IS**

Ms Rilla Melati is a pioneer of Malay speech and drama programmes for schools in Singapore, and the founder of Mini Monsters, which reinvents the way the language is learnt. She is also a popular author of several Malay and bilingual children's storybooks and has written scripts for many Malay children's TV shows since the 1990s. Her name might ring a bell for children who grew up in the 1980s. That's because she was a cast member of one of local television's most popular children's shows, Aksi Mat Yoyo.

M S RILLA MELATI'S PROWESS AS A STORYTELLER COMES TO LIFE AS SHE DESCRIBES HER CHILDHOOD IN THE 1980s.

"I was surrounded by the Malay language. It was on the radio, on television, in my books," the 48-year-old recalls, adding that she spoke nothing but Malay at home. These conditions led to a lifelong love and passion for the Malay language.

Four decades on, she observes that a similar passion for the language is missing in today's youths. "To them, Malay has become just a 'Mother Tongue Language' — something they learn in school for the sake of exams," she explains. "Regrettably, there is no longer a visceral connection to the language." When asked about the reasons for this change, she points to the general lack of creative local Malay content that is age-appropriate and a curriculum that used to focus too heavily on the technical aspects of the language. "Compare this to when I was a kid — it's completely different now. Now it's something you score in, not something you speak in."

VALUABLE LESSONS

These are the things that Ms Rilla is trying to change with Mini Monsters, an educational venture that is charting new learning strategies to help young ones — and the young at heart — learn and relearn the Malay language. It does this through a popular enrichment programme for schools, where Ms Rilla and her team enliven the learning of the language through music and movement, drama and locally-authored storybooks. "These are things I learnt as a



member of the inaugural batch of NUS Theatre Studies, and they are very powerful tools," she explains, adding that they can be used across all age groups and proficiency levels.

It's something she knows very well herself — as a child, she was a cast member of the popular *Aksi Mat Yoyo* television show, which ran from 1982 to 1992. Recalling those days of early fame, she says, "My weekends

were spent on the show. I remember going to Caldecott Hill before the sun rose and then leaving only after it had set." Still, the hard work was worth it as she was able to learn from the greats of Malay entertainment at the time, including Nona Asiah, a Cultural Medallion winner and mother of the late Iskandar Ismail, himself a Cultural Medallion winner. "It was the perfect blend of entertainment and education."

That's precisely what Ms Rilla hopes to do with Mini Monsters. Starting the venture was also a way of instilling in her son, now 20, the same appreciation for and comfort with the Malay language that she enjoys. "Some of the learning materials he had in school were very foreign to him because they were imported from the region. The main characters in the stories had errands like feeding the chicken or goat — which would not make much sense to a student in Singapore! So when children can't relate, they tend to tune out."

SUCCESS WITH ADIL

Realising that there was a dearth of localised Malay content, Ms Rilla decided to take the plunge and make Mini Monsters a publisher as well. After this, she began writing a series of books in the Malay language, known as the *Siri Aksi Adil* (Adventures of Adil) collection. Loosely based on her son, the series follows the adventures of Adil, an inquisitive five-year-old Singaporean Malay boy, along with his friends and family. It also teaches the values of tolerance and acceptance, by suggesting that Adil lives in a single-parent household — and is no less



Top: The first of two storybooks that Ms Rilla wrote with a bilingual glossary that is used in Mini Monsters' Malay speech and drama programmes in schools. It was also Mini Monsters' maiden publication.

Above: Ms Rilla doing a reading of *Baju Melayu Ati*, one of two bilingual books which was a pioneer recipient of the Lee Kuan Yew Bilingualism grant in 2010, also published by Mini Monsters.



ALL IN THE FAMILY

Language is a shared passion for Ms Rilla's family, who live in different units in the same HDB block. Ms Rilla read to her son every night till he was about 12, choosing both English and Malay books. This bode well for him when he topped his school in the Malay language paper at the PSLE preliminary examination and his IB exams at St. Joseph's Institution (SJI) in 2019. He was also named Best Speaker in the preliminary rounds for the tertiary-level National Malay Debate (Bahas 4PM) in 2019 when SJI emerged as the champion team.



Rilla and her *Siri Bacaan Cepak Kanak-Kanak (Confident Reader Series)* at its launch at the Asian Festival of Children's Content 2015.

loved because of it. It's a theme that draws on Ms Rilla's own experience as a single parent. "I want kids who may be in such situations to know that it's okay."

Alongside this, Ms Rilla never loses sight of her goal of fostering a greater appreciation for the Malay language. Each title in the *Adil* series ends with a bilingual Malay-English glossary. In her words, she wants this to be "an entry point for children who might be distant from their mother tongue to appreciate and understand the Malay language better". And the series has been recognised for doing just that: in 2018, *Payung Datuk Adil* (Adil's Grandfather's Umbrella) won the National Arts Council's *Anugerah Persuratan* (Malay Literary Award) for Children's Literature. She credits her parents for the win, especially her father, who was a Malay language teacher for more than 40 years. "He was my editor and helped me go through draft after draft, making it better each time."

The success of Mini Monsters is apparent from its rapid growth, both in terms of size and services. More than a decade ago, Mini Monsters started out as a two-person, two-table set-up for an educational outreach arm of a television production company. Today, it has expanded to include a junior academy — Mini Uni; as well as MonstarsTV — a bilingual children's digital portal. Mini Monsters has also grown from being a provider of Malay enrichment programmes to schools, to a leading bilingual Malay-English edutainment institution recognised for producing high-quality educational materials with the perfect mix of cross-media engagement for its young audience. To Ms Rilla, this expansion was a way of ensuring the longevity of her vision. "If we were too small, we wouldn't be able to go where we want to go and keep doing it for years to come. That's why the expansion was important." **A**

Mind Your Language

Education entrepreneur
Ms Rilla Melati (Arts and Social Sciences '96)

is reimagining the way Malay is learnt.

Malay has become just a 'Mother Tongue Language'— something [kids] learn in school for the sake of exams. Regrettably, there is no longer a visceral connection to the language.

➡ KEEPING A STEADY BEAT

Cardiac stiffness is all too common in ageing hearts, and research shows a similar situation at the cellular level. A collaboration between the Mechanobiology Institute and the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine at NUS will attempt to bridge the gap between basic science and clinical practice to find practical solutions.

Staying 'Young at Heart' with Science

Is the 'pump' that powers our bodies capable of repairing itself? Current research offers some promising evidence that the lifespan of our hearts can be extended.

AGEING IS A FEATURE OF LIFE, AND ALL ORGANISMS EXPERIENCE IT. LIFESPANS VARY GREATLY FROM SPECIES TO SPECIES — bowhead

whales live for an estimated two centuries, while mice might live only a few years. This does tend to make one wonder why this happens, and then, to perhaps ask why ageing is a feature of life anyway. Professor Li Rong of the NUS Mechanobiology Institute (MBI) and Professor Roger Foo (Medicine '92) from the NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine (NUS Medicine) are looking into this fascinating research area, and asking that very question, with a specific focus. "We are trying to understand ageing as a real science," says Prof Li.

As co-leaders of this project, Prof Foo (the Director of the Cardiovascular Disease Translational Research Programme, NUS Medicine) and Prof Li (who is MBI's Director) both have considerable expertise in their respective areas. Prof Li's work in examining cellular dynamics has employed integrated approaches that encompass biochemistry, genetics, quantitative

imaging and fluorescence spectroscopy, mathematical modelling, quantitative genomics and proteomics (the large-scale study of proteins). A clinician, Prof Foo has led researchers from NUS Medicine and the National University Hospital in creating the world's first map of the heart's genes, and the switches that control them, and also established Singapore's first Cardiac Genetics clinical service.

This collaboration is attempting to unlock the secrets behind how heart tissues, and molecular and mechanical functions of heart cells, change as we age. What the teams discover could launch the development of innovative diagnostic methods and more effective treatments for age-related cardiovascular diseases (CVD). These might have direct applications in Singapore, where one in five persons will be above 65 years of age by 2029. "If we understand how ageing works, at the cellular and molecular level, we might be able to slow it down, and reduce ageing as a risk factor for diseases," explains Prof Li. The project's main aim is to understand cardiac stiffness, one of the most

recognisable properties of the ageing heart, at the molecular and cellular levels.

WHAT DOES AGEING REALLY MEAN?

"Our hope for this collaboration with clinical scientists is to bridge the gap between what we study in the lab and clinical observations. So when clinical scientists like Prof Foo tell us that they see stiffness in the heart, we get excited because we see that in cells," says Prof Li.

Their hypothesis is that chronic mechanical and metabolic stressors lead to molecular and biomechanical changes that, over time, result in cardiac stiffness. This in turn contributes to accelerated pathologies of cardiomyopathy and heart failure. It is the word 'chronic' in the aforementioned description that refers to ageing. The scientific consensus is that ageing is the biggest risk factor for CVD in general, and Prof Li and Prof Foo agree. "We cannot prevent ageing — we are not going to become immortal," says Prof Li. "The question is: What does ageing really mean?" When it comes to CVD, multiple ageing processes meet comorbidities and disease modifiers to create a complex story.

To unpack this, the joint team is embarking on a journey into the microscopic core of the matter. This, of course, refers to the cell, and it immediately confronts

We know that cells have enormous ability to fix themselves. So why can't a cell be immortal?

observers with a conundrum. "We don't know why cells age," says Prof Li. "We know that cells have enormous ability to fix themselves, and replace damaged parts, and this is ongoing. So why can't a cell be immortal?" When one scales this up to the level of an organ like the heart, the questions multiply. For example, do we know if cells in the heart can repair themselves, and if they can, do we lose that ability as we age?

SCAR TISSUE

According to Prof Foo, there is good evidence in the animal kingdom that heart cells can and do regenerate. The zebrafish and the newt are only two examples of animals whose hearts can heal themselves. Even if one slices part of the zebrafish's heart off, it can be regenerated to be as good as new. Of course, zebrafish and newts aren't even mammals, but Prof Foo notes that researchers have seen something similar in mice. The NUS Medicine project is looking for answers there.

The researchers have discovered that mice below a week old could heal from a

heart attack. They form a bit of fibrotic tissue, just as the zebrafish and newts do, but it heals nicely and their hearts are as good as new eventually. Past this one-week window, a heart attack results in a permanent scar, says Prof Foo. We all learn that the heart is a muscle, so it is made up of muscle tissue. Given that our other muscles do heal, it seems intuitive that the heart should heal in much the same way. Of course, the heart is made up of specialised cells, so it does exhibit properties different to the skeletomuscular system.

Prof Foo notes that heart muscles respond to increased stress by becoming larger. New muscle fibres are not added because cell division does not happen. Instead, existing cells become larger and the resulting tissue might scar. This is because the heart is incapable of growing new healthy tissue, which one might expect given that there are no stem cells involved, as there are in the skeletomuscular system. A common consequence of this scar tissue, which also forms as a result of heart attacks, is a degree of stiffness that afflicts the heart.

FROM MICE TO MEN?

This is what makes the historical research finding in mice particularly impressive, because mouse hearts do not have stem cells either. It is not the case that stem cells were present in the young mice, and then disappeared

or atrophied. That healing happened without stem cells warrants further investigation. "When we looked at neonatal mice, the healing was from endogenous cells. There is now emerging evidence that this capacity is not entirely lost (as the mice age). So we will be looking for where these cardiac cells are, and how we can resuscitate this healing capacity. These are the research questions we'll be looking at," says Prof Foo.

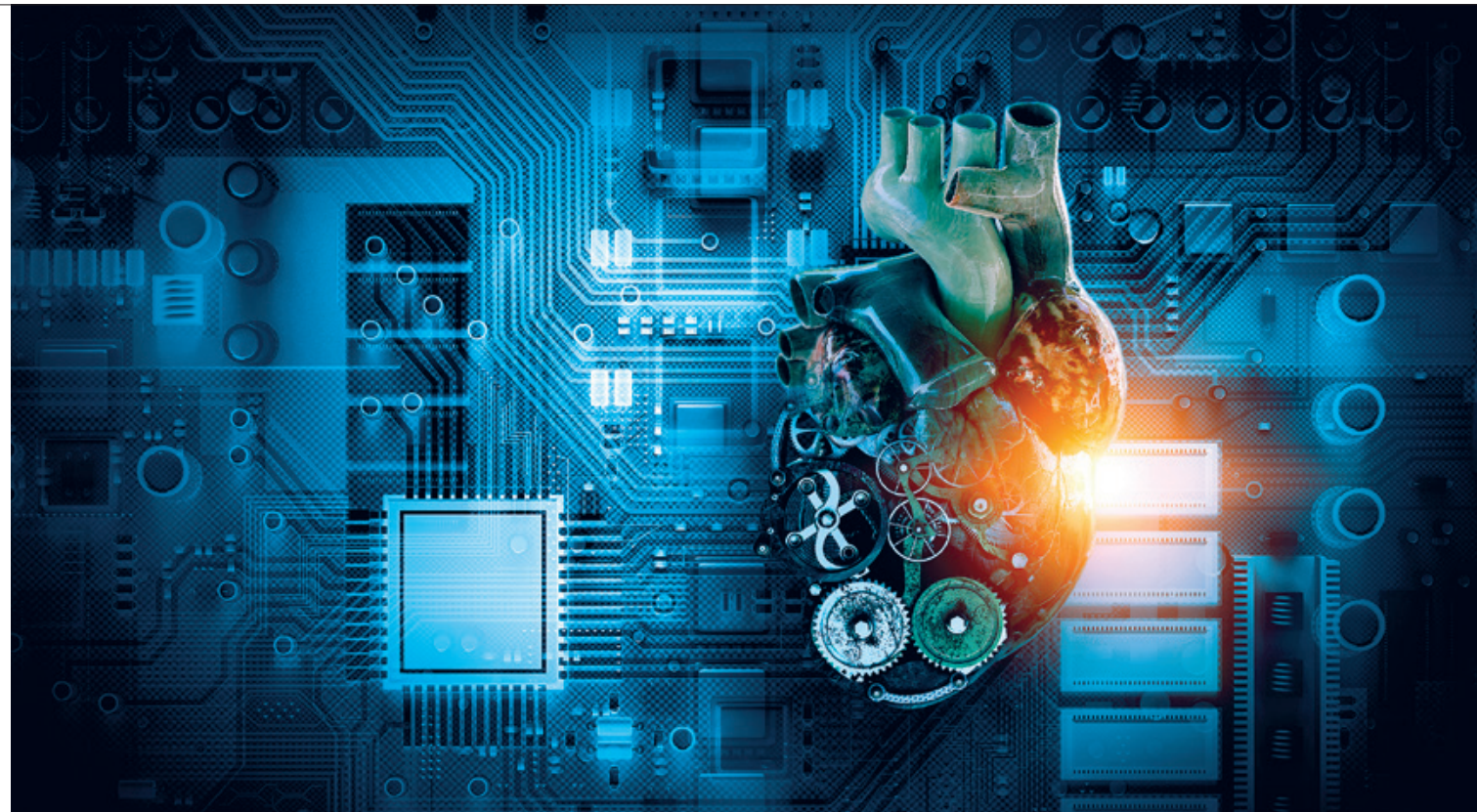
To find the answers, Prof Foo and Prof Li have assembled an interdisciplinary team. This joint team aims to conduct a rigorous study that looks into the molecules and structures of the heart, highlighting NUS Medicine's exciting recent discovery of a novel protein molecular chaperone involved in cardiac pathology associated with the Singaporean population. With this as an entry point, the MBI team will investigate the molecular control of protein homeostasis and the heart's ability to contract.

GROWING MODEL ORGANS

The team will also examine how cardiomyocytes (cells that generate contractile force in the heart) lose biomechanical function due to ageing, while looking into how the heart cell's ability to communicate with its own components is affected. A specific novel hypothesis to be tested is that the misfolding of proteins in cardiomyocytes is linked to chronic mechanical stress experienced by force-bearing structural proteins. "This is the beauty of science today, because we have the tools to fix problems at the cellular level," says Prof Li. "We just need to know what the problems are, which is where clinicians come in."

The scientists at MBI are currently able to grow miniature organs in petri dishes. These organoids can be grown from samples originating in both the young and the old. In this way, the scientists can study differences and learn if they can reverse certain processes in older organoids or cells. This is one of the tools that might be useful in the collaboration between basic science at MBI and clinical research at NUS Medicine.

At the tissue and organ level, the scientists will be studying the behaviour of cardiomyocytes in the context of complex cardiac tissue microenvironments in the ageing heart. All told, this project will cover everything from molecules to cells and tissues, resulting in an integrated framework explaining age-associated cardiac stiffness. "MBI's strong expertise in proteins as the building blocks of cells (is particularly relevant) ... because the cardiac apparatus is contractile. So cardiac stiffness really lends itself to being studied from a bioengineering perspective," says Prof Foo. **A**



Prof Li Rong



Prof Roger Foo

FROM ACEDIA TO CHOICE

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed everything, and yet it has changed nothing, say **Dr Adrian W. J. Kuah** and **Ms Katrina Tan (Arts and Social Sciences '98)**.



AS PART OF OUR COVID-19 CONTAINMENT STRATEGY, we in Singapore hunkered down the way the English 'plague village' of Eyam did in 1665–1666 (when combatting the Black Death) — by closing borders, self-isolating, socially distancing, and meeting outdoors only when really necessary (i.e. church, in the case of the villagers).

Other than that, life in our present day continued pretty much as it always did. We turned up and showed our faces/avatars on Zoom, performed while being watched, and produced as much as — if not more than — we did in the old normal. Essentially, we transported what we did at school or the workplace to the home, and put it on steroids. In her 2021 paper "The Inappropriate: On Oikology, Care and Writing Life", Kéline Gotman calls this "perpetual performativity... constant presenteeism, hyperproductivity, and

hypertrophic mechanisms of surveillance and control." In spite of, or maybe due to, the maintenance of this semblance of normality in a clearly abnormal situation, global levels of stress have skyrocketed.

The United Nations has said that mental health and the wellbeing of whole societies have been severely impacted, and that psychological distress is widespread. Unless some action is taken, we are on the brink of a major mental health crisis. The journal *Nature* reported on this uptick, and highlighted that the young (in particular women), those with young children, and people with a previously diagnosed psychiatric disorder, are most vulnerable.

However, as a 1999 study by Joseph Volpicelli on the role of uncontrollable trauma in the development of PTSD points out, it is not uncommon for people to experience a traumatic event — and experiencing one does not necessarily

lead to psychopathology. He cites other studies which place the proportion at eight per cent of the population who suffer prolonged consequences from trauma. This is supported by *The Lancet's* COVID-19 Commission Mental Health Task Force, which stated that most people should be able to return to pre-pandemic routines without impact on their mental health.

It may, therefore, be rather gauche to declare that everyone has some form of mental illness and needs to take care of it. But what if the pandemic has irrevocably changed us, without making us mentally ill? In the words of Danish poet Naja Marie Aidt:

But what happens when an event occurs that is so catastrophic that you just change? You change from the known person to an unknown person. So that when you look at yourself in the mirror, you recognise the person that you were, but the person inside the skin is a different person.

As we move into a future where COVID-19 is endemic, what if we have changed so much that we can't, or won't, go back to the past ways of living?

CAN'T OR WON'T?

As the pandemic extends into its second year, the pressure to kickstart the economy and get back to normal becomes ever more urgent. People are being pressed to return to the state of 'before'. But what if people refuse to, for various reasons? What if, as Aidt points out, we are now a "different person"? Maybe one who has become so inured to this lack of purpose, that a numbness has set in? Or that the pursuit of previously sought-after material wealth and social status no longer holds meaning? What if people have adapted so much to the new way of life that they are willing to relinquish certain benefits so they can continue with what they have now? What if the experience of the pandemic has caused uncontrollable trauma, such that people simply cannot return, and need to hunker in place?

ACEDIA / SIAN / LANGUISHING

Some authors have suggested that following the initial panic and grief in 2020, we have collapsed into 'languishing' in 2021. One definition of languishing is "a sense of stagnation and emptiness," while another is the vague lack of purpose, sometimes while beaver away at work.

Two recently-created neologisms — 内卷 (*nèijǔǎn*) or 'involution' (a novel definition by 985 Waste), and 躺平 (*tǎngpíng*) or 'lie flat' — have caught the attention of young Chinese and the government. While *nèijǔǎn* conjures images of a hamster running madly and getting nowhere on a hamster wheel, *tǎngpíng* is the solution to that mindlessness — stepping off the wheel. Both are responses to the doomed project of self-advancement and fulfilment of society's expectations, with no possibility of reward. Whether this was caused or accelerated by COVID-19, a protest against the unfair expectations of the 9-9-6 Chinese work culture, an ideological emancipation from consumerism, resistance against the constant need to be socially responsible, or people simply being defeatist or stoic, is irrelevant. As the originator of *tǎngpíng*, Kind-Hearted Traveller, points out, the phenomenon has enhanced his physical and mental freedom. This is, therefore, the individual wresting back control in an

The United Nations has said that mental health and the wellbeing of whole societies have been severely impacted, and that psychological distress is widespread. Unless some action is taken, we are on the brink of a major mental health crisis.

uncertain and uncontrollable time. It is the choice to settle for enough, rather than strive for the unattainable.

And yet, this phenomenon is not necessarily new. Downshifting, or the voluntary choice by individuals to change aspects of their lives in order to create a simpler lifestyle, has been on the rise in the UK and the US for several decades. This downshifting is in line with the Aristotelian concept of *oikonomy*, whose goal is for health, virtue, and human and communal flourishing, within the community. It is the antithesis of chrematistics, or the art of acquisition, i.e. profit maximisation, the neoliberal order and the rat race. Gotman speaks of the shutdowns allowing the emergence of a new paradigm, an *oikonomy* of care. Her incomplete *Manifesto for an Economy of Care* states:

1. The current pandemic is not a matter of virology only, but an entire social, political and economic system that is falling apart. What the virus shows is that we do not have enough support for the vulnerable; that all of this support structure has been cut.
2. It is not merely sufficient to shore up national healthcare systems, but necessary to entirely rethink the way we live our social, political and economic lives. This means that health has to be understood as the bedrock of our lives, and not as something that can be tacked on after.
3. We mean by 'health' not just the vitality of the neurobiological system, but an entire system of emotion and affect as well: anxiety and fear are all part of the 'health' systems of our lives. They affect our immunity and ability to thrive.
4. 'Work' has been taken as central to the economic productivity — the productivism — of the capitalist paradigm, at the expense of 'private' life. We are calling for a shift towards an economic culture that protects

the family home, however it may be construed: of same sex, opposite sex, multi-generational, single, or whatever sort.

5. 'Private' life is vital and necessary for allowing thoughtful, caring life.

And yet, just as many young Chinese will continue to "roll", Gotman admits that she will continue to perform and conform, because lying down offers no connections and no sense of security and freedom from want. But maybe, this is the opportune time for us to reconsider whether there truly is a need for the relentless pursuit of chrematistics, and whether and how we can downshift from the 9-9-6 work culture.

TAKING BACK CONTROL

As the pandemic settles into a predictable normalcy, more companies have been calling staff who have been working remotely for more than a year to return to the office. Schools are opening and calling students back for face-to-face lessons. In the workplace, distinct camps have cropped up. One camp is willing to relinquish benefits, forgo a US\$30,000-a-year raise and even quit in order to choose where they need to work. The other has those willing to pay to come into the office.

While it is still early days, the hybrid model of working both at home and in some specified location has gained traction. What this specified location is, however, could be different for different people, situations and companies.

The pandemic has changed the way we view the spaces we exist in. The conjoining of our first (home) and second (workplace/school) places, as Ray Oldenburg (1989) posits in *The Great Good Place*, was traumatic for many. However, the long adjustment has allowed some to create a "fourth place" (Morisson, 2018). This is a space where previously clear boundaries between work, home and the third place (shared, community spaces like parks

COVID-19 MENTAL STRESS

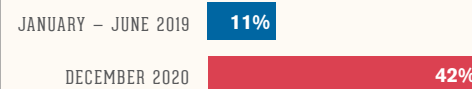
The percentage of people experiencing symptoms of depression and anxiety has surged amid the COVID-19 pandemic, data from nationally representative surveys shows.

UK adults reporting symptoms of depression



BEFORE PANDEMIC

US adults reporting symptoms of depression



DURING PANDEMIC

Source: *Nature*



and coffee shops), as Oldenburg highlights, are blurred to create a place that generates interaction, stimulates mingling, cooperation and frontal communications, and supports the exchange of implied knowledge. This place exists outside a singular physical space, and instead is any space where these activities can occur. The hybrid model of work not only brings back the sacred delineations between the first and second places; it gives people agency to convert these places, along with the third place (even Starbucks is redefining their concept of this), into the fourth, where and when desired. Similar to the *tāngpíng* phenomenon, it returns control to the individual.

COVID-19 IS DEAD, LONG LIVE COVID-19

In his model of epidemic psychology, Philip Strong (1990) says that alongside the medical footprint, we must take heed of the epidemic of fear, which includes irrationality, fear, suspicion and stigmatisation. Strong refers to these when he points out how 600 years on, the Black Death still has extraordinary historical resonance in popular culture, despite it becoming "normalised and institutionalised" in later years. In a word, endemic.

The Ministers in charge of the COVID-19 Taskforce speak of a time when COVID-19 becomes endemic, and we can "get on with our lives". Some researchers have suggested flipping this switch may not be so easy. A 2020 study by the Anxiety & Depression Association of America shows that 17 years after recovery, SARS patients and their relatives, as well as those placed in quarantine, showed signs of PTSD and other psychological issues. A study on the manifestation of physical and mental ailments post-9/11 shows similar results. Correspondingly, a 2018 replication study in the *Community Mental Health Journal* also suggests that while the general public eventually returns to a normal pre-adversity level of functioning, this may not be due to distress symptoms disappearing, but because people have better recovery and coping strategies.

To enable this recovery and mitigate this epidemic of fear, the language used in dealing with COVID-19 needs to change. From the outset, many national leaders invoked the language of war, as seen in references made to World War II in articles by McKinsey and BBC Future. Daily death toll reports, disruption of normal life routines, shortages of certain services, conversion of industries and global economic decline were par for the course. And yet, the COVID-19 pandemic is not a war.

KEY FINDINGS

64%

of employees would pay out of their own pocket for access to office space.

79%

of the C-suite plan to let their employees split their time between corporate offices and remote working, if their job allows for it.

1 out of 2

employees would prefer to spend 3 days a week or fewer in the office, and when they do go in, they want to be there 5 hours a day or less.

75%

of employees would give up at least one workplace benefit or perk for the freedom to choose their work environment.

76%

of the C-suite say they are likely to give their staff a stipend to work from home or a co-working space.

2X

After COVID-19, employees who are more satisfied and engaged want to spend twice as much time in locations other than their home or corporate office than less-engaged colleagues.

Source: WeWork

We are not fighting an enemy who wants to kill us especially for specific reasons. We do not need to hate the enemy, nor be ever-vigilant – remember "Loose lips sink ships"?

Commentators have cautioned that while the war metaphor calls for solidarity and national cohesion, it is also divisive. It drives antisocial behaviours like racism and xenophobia, and fuels anxiety and panic. We have seen this in the global obsession with toilet paper, price gouging on masks and hand sanitisers, and the many trending topics that perpetuate ethnic and racial discrimination. Furthermore, the actions this war demands in forced lockdowns, closures of schools and businesses, and postponements of major personal, national and international events, have created deep uncertainty, and stripped many of any sense of control. All these reinforce the epidemic of fear.

Some leaders have tried to change the rhetoric. Danish Queen Margrethe II has called the virus "a dangerous guest". This is a fascinatingly apt metaphor, as like a guest, we invited the virus into our house, and now have to patiently await its timely departure. The Director General of the World Health Organization, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, has used a sporting metaphor, "You can't win a football game only by defending. You have to attack as well."

As we try to entice people out of their homes by showing it is safe to come out, governments need to moderate their language and change the tone of their efforts. War metaphors are used to impress the seriousness of the situation on people. We are past that. We need a language of togetherness and care to move into the next stage. An *oikonomy* of care, if you will. As pointed out by Rutger Bregman (2020) in *Humankind: A Hopeful History*, humans are hotwired to seek out the exceptional and dramatic, the ghastlier the better. As ghastly as this pandemic has been, it has given us time to take stock of what matters and consider what we value. We are at the edge of the woods and can choose which road to take.

Will we take one less travelled? A



Dr Adrian W. J. Kuah is Director of the Futures Office, NUS.



Ms Katrina Tan is Associate Director of the Futures Office, NUS.

Shaping Your Future

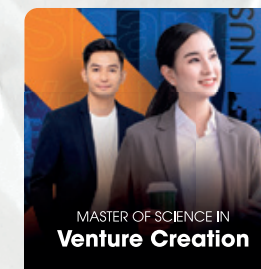
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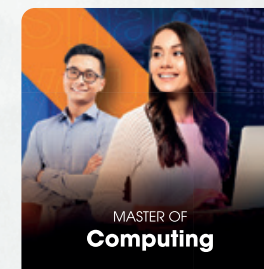
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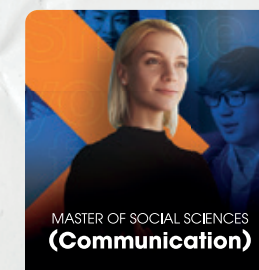
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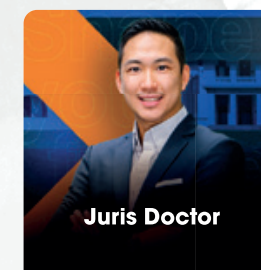
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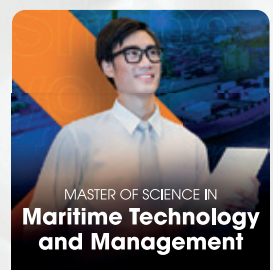
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THE ALUMNUS HIGHLIGHTS



LEADING WITH IT: LESSONS FROM SINGAPORE'S FIRST CIO

by Professor Alex Siow

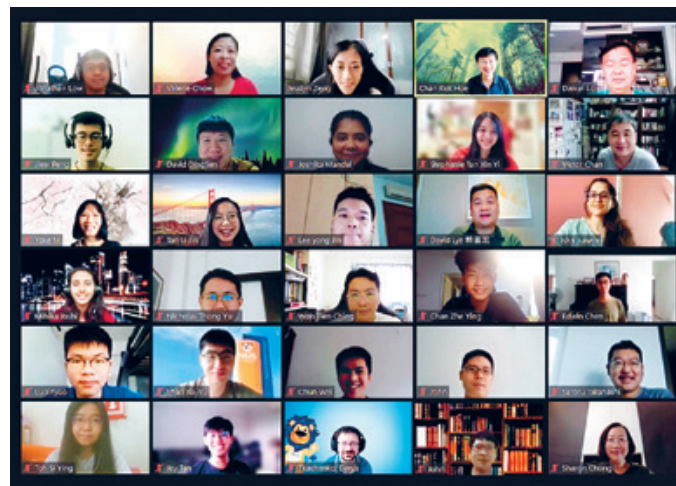
For organisations to stay relevant, leveraging technology is essential. Professor Alex Siow – currently Professor (Practice) in the School of Computing, NUS, and Director of the Advanced Computing for Executives – draws from his experience as Singapore's first Chief Information Officer (CIO) at HDB in the 1990s, and shares advice on IT's role in keeping pace with rapid business changes in the digital age. His book provides business leaders with insights for effective IT governance and highlights the core competencies required of CIOs.

Written as a first-person account, the book also covers topics such as AI and the future of money and of work, giving expert analysis of each topic. A highlight is a guest chapter by Jim Lim Shien Min, healthcare sector lead at NCS Group, on lessons learned from managing the COVID-19 crisis in Singapore. Peppered with tips, case studies and expert recommendations, it is a suitable read for anyone interested in the intersection of technology and business.



➤ \$41.95 (before GST) in hardcover in bookstores and online. Publisher: Wiley

NUS Economics Alumni Alumni Sharing and Networking Event



Like-minded Economics alumni and students enjoyed an opportunity to network in breakout rooms after the sharing segment.

📅 29 May

NUS Economics Alumni recently organised the Alumni Sharing and Networking Event, which took place on 29 May via Zoom. The event garnered a turnout of about 40 Economics Alumni members.

The speaker for the Alumni Sharing segment, titled *Investments in The Post Pandemic World*, was Mr Jonathan Low (Arts and Social Sciences '17). With five years of experience in investment banking and private debt investing across EMEA and APAC, Mr Low is an associate at Orion Capital Asia working on middle-market private debt investments across APAC. His sharing session included insights into different industries impacted

by the pandemic and the volatility of future markets.

Following the sharing segment, like-minded alumni and students enjoyed an opportunity to network in breakout rooms. The networking session provided an opportunity for participants to enhance their ongoing professional development.

Overall, it was a fruitful event that received positive feedback from participants. In particular, many participants enjoyed the networking session, which was effective in providing them with a platform to reconnect with fellow Economics Alumni members.

➤ **The NUS Economics Alumni Committee welcomes Economics alumni who would like to give back – do contact President, Ms Valerie Chow (Arts and Social Sciences '97) at valeriechow@hotmail.com if you are interested to join the Committee!**

🌐 www.nuseconomicsalumni.com/about-us/
✉ valeriechow@hotmail.com

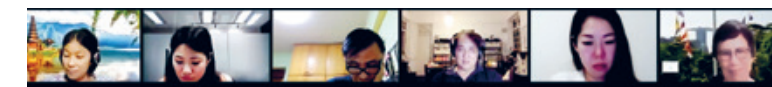
Webinar – Continuing and Professional Education (CPE) Talk on Corporate Governance



📅 17 June

The Accountancy Wing of NUS Business School Alumni Association (NUSBSA) organised the Continuing and Professional Education (CPE) Talk on 17 June. The ninth run of this series, the recent session marks the second year running that the talk was held virtually. Covering key elements of corporate governance and its failures, the talk was delivered by Associate Professor Mak Yuen Teen, who teaches corporate governance at NUS Business School. Assoc Prof Mak is also an active researcher, commentator, speaker and advocate in this area, having published reports on corporate governance, board diversity and executive and director remuneration. With a wealth of experience leading governance reviews for numerous listed companies, Assoc Prof Mak is also regularly engaged by regulators and organisations to conduct workshops for directors, regulators and other industry professionals.

The event garnered 60 attendees and started with a speed networking session in breakout rooms. Mr Derrick Kew (Business '17), the emcee for the evening, then gave an introductory speech, which was followed by a corporate presentation from Pivotal, the sponsor for the talk.



Corporate governance ecosystem

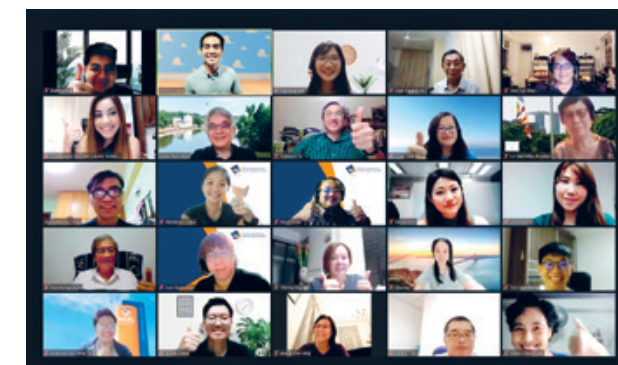


Assoc Prof Mak's presentation was accompanied by a number of cartoon illustrations on the corporate governance ecosystem in Singapore.

With the tagline 'Is there a vaccine for governance failures?', Assoc Prof Mak shared the regulatory framework and investor protection in Singapore, its deficiencies, and a comparison with the markets in other countries. His presentation was accompanied by a number of cartoon illustrations on Singapore's corporate governance ecosystem. With the help of case studies, Assoc Prof Mak also explored how the average investor could potentially identify problematic companies by using public information. Despite the seriousness of the topics discussed, Assoc Prof Mak kept the talk light and entertaining. The audience was also constantly engaged with the use of polls and a Q&A segment

that allowed them to delve deeper into some issues raised. As the session drew to a close around 10pm, attendees gained many insightful takeaways and expressed their wish for the talk to be extended, to hear more from Assoc Prof Mak. The event, which was well-received, ended on a high note with a photo-taking session.

The event would not have been possible without the generous sponsorship from Pivotal, and was organised by NUSBSA Director, Mr Edward Ta (Business '87) and NUSBSA Accountancy Wing members – Mr Raffles Ng (Business '18), Mr Pang Jun Xiang (Business '17), and their dedicated organising committee. The event ended in anticipation of the next session as the quest for a vaccine for governance failures continues!



The event ended on a high note with a photo-taking session.

USP Classes of 2020 & 2021 E-Commencement Gathering



Graduates posed for a photo at the USP sign in the courtyard, as they concurrently watched the Commencement Ceremony being streamed on a "monitor" in the same virtual space.



26 June

This year, the combined **University Scholars Programme (USP)** Commencement Ceremony for Classes of 2020 and 2021 was streamed online via NUS YouTube on the afternoon of 26 June. This was an important occasion as it marked a major milestone for students who completed their undergraduate studies and transited into a new phase of their lives beyond USP and NUS.

To make this occasion more meaningful and intimate, USP graduates from both classes, as well as USP professors and staff, gathered on Kumospace, an interactive online platform that allowed attendees to watch the pre-recorded ceremony together via video chats. It was interesting how the virtual space replicated spaces like USP Chatterbox, USP Sign at the courtyard and even the Theme Rooms! This would not have been possible without the hard work of the USP Class Representatives and graduates – Mr Miguel Tan (Science '20), Mr Roger Liew (Arts and Social Sciences '20), Mr Yeo Shao Jie (Science '21), Ms Jaymee Justiniano (Business '21) and Ms Jazreel Low (Engineering '21).

LKYSPP Alumni Webinar: The Future of Work in a Post-COVID World



03 July

Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy (LKYSPP) invited three alumni to speak on the topic *The Future of Work in a Post-Covid World* on 3 July. Speaking from their vantage points from the private sector, non-profit organisation and multilateral organisation, Ms Cheryl Chung ('13), Mr Zhou Hao ('09) and Mr Tauvik Muhamad ('07) shared their valuable experiences and



insights to a crowd of more than 53 alumni who came from all around the world. Moderated by Ms Akshita Nanda ('21), the webinar was LKYSPP's fringe event, exclusively for LKYSPP alumni. This session coincided with Bukit Timah Homecoming 2021 – this year, the Class of 2011 also commemorated their 10th anniversary.



The *AlumNUS* thanks all contributors for the articles and photos in Alumni Happenings, showcasing our vibrant alumni community. For the full stories, please go to nus.edu.sg/alumnet/TheAlumNUS/issue-127/community/alumni-happenings.

Raffles Hall Association Homecoming 2021



03 July

In conjunction with **Bukit Timah Homecoming 2021**, Raffles Hall Association (RHA) held its virtual *Balik Kampung* ('going home' in Malay) event on 3 July. Attendees included past and current residents of Raffles Hall between 1966 and 2021 – an amazing span of 55 years!

The event was led by Programme Director, Mr Dixon Tioh (Computing '14), who was also the emcee. The afternoon began with a speech by Raffles Hall Master, Associate Professor Stella Tan (Science '98), who warmly welcomed many senior alumni in attendance from Singapore, Malaysia, Australia and the United Kingdom. Past President, Mr Sonny Yuen (Business '85) expressed his appreciation to the group for their strong support over the years in the formation of RHA, before handing the time over to current Chairperson, Ms Lim Swee Kim (Computing '88), who thanked attendees for continuing to demonstrate the spirit of the legendary RH Phoenix with renewed vigour.

She also introduced the new Executive Committee, which comprises:

- Mr Desmond Ee (Engineering '74)
- Mr Lui Seng Fatt (Architecture '78)
- Mr Ng Kian Seng (Science '86)
- Ms Rosita Ng (Law '93)
- Mr Dixon Tioh (Computing '14)
- Mr Leonard Tan (Engineering '18)
- Mr Pang Wei Han (Science '18)

Mr Tan updated plans for NUS Day of Service, which he had been planning with Mr Ng. Additionally, Mr Tioh presented an online quiz he had created, bringing



Homecoming 2021 welcomed the RH family!

everyone back to the good old days while giving their memory banks a little workout! Attendees were then enchanted by stories from alumni such as Dr Jon Lim (Design and Environment (PHD) '90), past RH Senior Common Room Committee member; and Dato' Y. Sivaloganathan (Law '71), who enriched everyone's knowledge of RH history.



Master of Ceremony and Homecoming 2021 Programme Director, Mr Dixon Tioh.

The final segment – an RHA Amazing Alumnus Production 2021 – featured a 16-minute-long musical. Produced by alumni from the 1980s, the talented

cast included Mr Al Dizon (Arts '83), Ms Steph Chee (Science '85), Ms Tan Beng Chiak (Science '86), Ms Carol Lim (Design and Environment '87), Ms Ngo Hwee Boon (Computing '88), Mr Ong Wai Kin (Engineering '89) and Ms Lim Swee Kim. The musical celebrated RHA's strengths, determination, care and concern for one another in the face of life's adversities. The production also celebrated the past and present, and recalled great moments such as the upcoming Singapore National Day in August despite COVID-19.

To close the session, Mr Tioh invited all attendees to put on their RH regalia (mostly caps and T-shirts) as everyone sang the beloved RH anthem with gusto. The committee thanked Rafflesians for joining in the annual *Balik Kampung*, and hoped that everyone continued to stay safe.



RHA premiered its first online musical, inspired by the world-famous *Les Miserables*, with its very own talented alumni!



Watch the music video here: www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qkdr2YPdfzl

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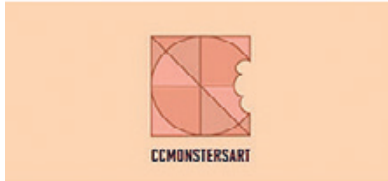
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LEAPS OF FAITH

One of Singapore's most familiar faces, actor **Mr Tay Ping Hui (Arts and Social Sciences '95)** has no interest in the tried-and-tested.

BY KEENAN PEREIRA

AN NUS ECONOMICS AND POLITICAL SCIENCE GRADUATE MAY NOT BE THE FIRST PERSON THAT COMES TO MIND WHEN YOU'RE CASTING SOMEONE TO PLAY GENGHIS KHAN IN A CHINESE DRAMA. But that's

precisely what happened to Mr Tay Ping Hui (Arts and Social Sciences '95) a few years ago, when he decided to venture into the lucrative Chinese entertainment scene. "On the first day of filming, I found myself wearing 20kg worth of armour, brandishing a golden sword in one hand, controlling my horse with the other and leading a cavalry charge of 100 horses," says the veteran actor.

The role was quite a departure from those that won over local audiences in the 1990s and 2000s. But, as he tells *The AlumNUS*, it was important for him to take it on. "I've never been one to just be contented with whatever I have achieved," explains the 51-year-old. "I'm the sort of person who constantly questioned 'What's next?'. So what if people said I was number one? It doesn't matter to me. I am more interested in challenging myself as an actor and as a person."

Taking up a challenge was what brought Mr Tay to Caldecott Hill in the first place. Shortly after graduating from NUS, he became the General Manager of a global American franchisee and was preparing to pursue an MBA when executives from then-TCS



(now Mediacorp) came calling.

"They had actually approached me right after graduation but I turned them down because I wasn't interested in acting," he shares. "But after I quit my job, I had a bit of time so I accepted a role." Before he knew it, he was getting the top billing on local television, winning the Best Supporting Actor award at the 1999 Star Awards for his portrayal of a gang leader in *Stepping Out* (出路).

In the years since, he has become a regional star, appearing in over 60 dramas, theatre performances, stage musicals, concerts and live entertainment shows. He gave all that up four years ago when he was invited to sign with Chinese media company Perfect World Pictures to try his hand in China, despite being relatively unknown there. Still, he has no regrets. "I was hoping to try something I had never done before, to have my passion reignited,

to be pushed more than I had ever been," he says. Fortunately, his gamble paid off and Mr Tay is now a growing presence in China, with a slew of projects in the months ahead. 22 years into the game, he says that he has learnt more from his failures than his successes, which is a lesson he wants to share with the NUS community. "The old and well-trodden paths of life might sound safer," he observes. "But if you are constantly wondering if there is more to life than what people are constantly telling you that you should do, I would strongly recommend that you try something that you want to do. "At least you will not be wondering 10 years later whether you would have, could have, or should have done something. If you fail, so be it, learn from it and move on. Maybe next time you will succeed." And in Mr Tay's case, he certainly did. A



THE ROAD AHEAD

"The pandemic has definitely changed so many things for the movie and television industry," says Mr Tay. "Everything is more difficult and complicated in terms of logistics and casting." Still, he is soldiering on, with the following projects in the pipeline:

Starring as the main antagonist in 《南洋女儿情》 (*Sisterhood*) to be shot in China.

Filming 《狮城山海》 (*The Contenders*) at the end of the year and then the final part of the *Nanyang Trilogy* 《南洋英雄泪》 (*Nanyang Transport Volunteers*) next year.

Working on a script for a feature film he will be directing in collaboration with Clover Films and iQiyi which is slated to be filmed next year.



LINA. NUS. CPF.

WHAT CONNECTS THE THREE?



"It's legacy gifts."

"Lina is one of the students in NUS, who has to work part-time to fund her education due to financial constraints. Ideally, all students should be able to experience the full suite of an NUS education – not only attending classes, but also participating in student activities and bonding with university mates. Student bursaries support students like Lina so that they can focus on their studies and experience the rich university life without worrying about finances.

Nominating NUS as the beneficiary of my Central Provident Fund (CPF) savings to fund student bursaries was an easy decision for these reasons: I am an alumna who benefitted from an NUS education; the integrity of NUS assures me that all donations would be properly accounted for; and the process for bequeathing CPF savings is incredibly simple – go to the CPF website cpf.gov.sg to nominate your beneficiaries online or go in-person directly to the CPF Board, fill up a nomination form witnessed by two CPF officers and inform NUS, in writing, how you wish your CPF savings to be utilised. No fees will be incurred either. How much easier can it get to help young people have access to a transformative NUS education to realise their aspirations and shape a better future for all?"

Ms Agnes Sng (Law '84)
Writer and author

"Nominating NUS as the beneficiary of my CPF savings to fund student bursaries was an easy decision."



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