

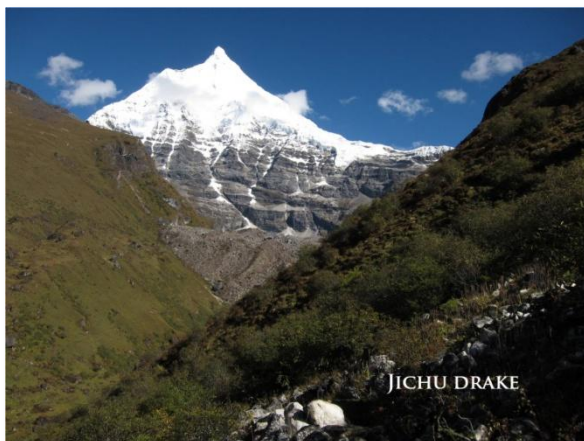
Speech by Professor Tan Chorh Chuan
President, National University of Singapore
University Awards 2012
Friday, 4 May 2012, 8 p.m. at University Cultural Centre

“The Many Facets of Excellence”

NUS Pro-Chancellor, Mr Ngiam Tong Dow
Mr Wong Ngit Liong, Chairman, NUS Board of Trustees
Members of the Board of Trustees
Award Recipients, Distinguished Guests
Colleagues, Friends, Ladies and Gentlemen

This evening, we celebrate exceptional members of the NUS community, and recognise their passion, contributions and achievements.

On occasions like this, it is common for us to talk about “peaks of excellence”, conjuring in our minds, images of tall narrow pinnacles. But the truth is that like real mountain peaks, “excellence” often has a broader profile and several different facets.

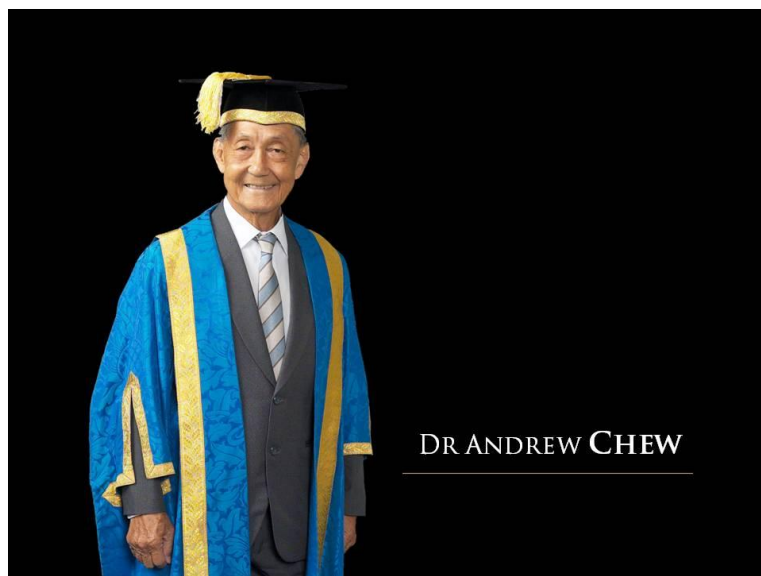


Images from NUS President's own collection

A good example of this is a medical doctor, who is well known to us, someone who despite being trained as a specialist, clearly showed that excellence can be truly multi-dimensional.

He was an alumnus of our university, who as a student, excelled in sports, particularly rugby. As a physician, he was highly regarded for his ability and compassion. As a prominent leader of various Ministries, he nurtured a culture of excellence throughout the civil service.

I speak of Dr Andrew Chew, whose passing on 29 February this year was marked with great sadness by the entire NUS community. Dr Chew was a much-loved Pro-Chancellor of NUS, someone who gave freely of his time, ideas and experience to our community. A man who was truly great, and at the same time, truly humble and kind.



His life bears important lessons for us. While excellence results from the individual's deep desire to be exceptional and to constantly do better, it can be multi-dimensional, it can touch the lives of others and have a positive impact on society in many different ways.

We will all miss Dr Andrew Chew, but the spirit he so aptly epitomised, will be an enduring inspiration for our entire community. It reminds us that as part of our pursuit of excellence, we must keep alive the dedication to draw out latent talents from the people around us, and to help them realise their full potential.

Tonight, the Outstanding Educator Award recognises three remarkable teachers who stand out for their success in inspiring and helping students in their journey of discovery of knowledge and of themselves.



These teachers are driven by the ideal that as educators, our key role is to uncover the talents of our students and help them to develop and grow. They show that what matters most is the authenticity and quality of the teacher-student engagement, and how this can be truly transformative.

A further aspect of excellence is that it is also often achieved through collaboration. Productive collaboration enables individuals to excel, while raising the quality and impact of the wider community. We see this clearly in the exceptional researchers whom we are honouring tonight.

Professor Barry Halliwell has just been accorded the Outstanding Researcher Award this year, in his capacity as a faculty member of the Department of Biochemistry. The selection panel chaired by the Provost, was incredibly impressed by the great impact he has had on his field.

To share just one statistic among many others, I understand he is the most highly-cited faculty member in NUS. This is not surprising since Thomson Reuters has listed him as one of the world's most highly-cited researchers in Biology and Biochemistry.

The other recipient of the Outstanding Researcher Award, Professor Loh Kian Ping, is another very impressive researcher, this time in the area of graphene research. His research is highly original and creative, and has helped put NUS and Singapore on the world map for graphene research.

It is noteworthy that Professors Halliwell and Loh, and our three excellent Young Researcher Award recipients, have extensive collaborations with colleagues in NUS as well as overseas. In a sense, their high achievements reflect their personal talent and hard work, as well as their ability to partner others in very productive research collaborations.



Finally, excellence is often driven by a powerful passion and belief in a cause or a venture. We have a wonderful example of this tonight in the person of Mr Goh Yew Lin, our Outstanding Service Award recipient.

Yew Lin's own talent and passion in music are well-known to many. But tonight, we recognise him for his unwavering belief in the vital role that the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music could play in Singapore and in the world.



As Chairman of the Governing Board since its inception, he has guided the Conservatory through its birth and challenging young years, and placed it squarely on the world map of distinguished schools of music. His contributions extend beyond just visionary leadership of the Conservatory; they encompass much hands-on work, be it in fund-raising, connecting the Conservatory to internationally-renowned artists or shaping the Conservatory and its influential role in the Singapore music scene. Today, the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory is well-placed to contribute to Singapore as an Asian Renaissance City of the 21st century, and Yew Lin has played an instrumental role in this.

Tonight, we are inspired by the enduring impact that all our Award recipients have made on our community, nation and society. We celebrate their accomplishments as individuals, but beyond that, we honour their sense of teamwork and collegiality, which enables us collectively to pursue true excellence as a University. I thank them for their great contributions and offer my warmest congratulations!

Together, they and the rest of the NUS community, demonstrate the multi-faceted excellence which will help propel NUS in its quest to be a leading global university centred in Asia.

Thank you.