NUS120 Distinguished Speaker Series – Minister for Education Mr Desmond Lee
Shaping the Future of Education
Welcome remarks by Prof Tan Eng Chye, NUS President
Thursday 21 May 2026, 10am, Sea Building (COM3)

Good morning, Minister, distinguished guests, colleagues and students. A very warm welcome to the NUS120 Distinguished Speaker Series.

Today, we gather for a timely and vital conversation, one that is cornerstone to our aspirations as a university and as a nation: the future of education. The world around us is changing at an unprecedented pace. New technologies, shifting societal needs and global challenges are redefining what it means to learn and to teach. Education is no longer confined to the classroom, or just for a chapter in one's life; it is a lifelong journey that needs to be carefully guided by purpose and shaped by innovation.

Against this backdrop, we are deeply honoured to welcome Education Minister Mr Desmond Lee as our distinguished speaker today. Minister Lee's vision for an inclusive and forward-looking education focuses on equipping our students with the skills and competencies to navigate the future – such as AI – while also developing them holistically to be resilient and adaptable.

This balance is indeed something that we and educators around the world are dealing with today, especially with the powerful reckoning of AI.

AI is transforming how we teach, how we learn and how we solve problems. At NUS, we have embraced this revolution. Our faculty and students are leveraging AI to reimagine learning experiences, innovate teaching methods and unlock new ways of understanding complex subjects.

One example is ScholAIstic, an AI-powered platform by NUS' AI Centre for Educational Technologies. Currently, it is being used by over 1,700 students across nine faculties and 20 courses. It serves as an educational tool for teachers to make learning more immersive, such as through building role-playing chatbots. An example would be creating AI patients to help our nursing students practise difficult conversations while chatbots simulating different stages of a trial can help our law students sharpen their arguments in the courtroom.

At the same time, it is critically important for our students to remain human, and to sharpen the very faculties and skills that set them apart. The NUS education will be human-centric, where critical thinking, metacognitive awareness, and sense-making are augmented by AI, not substituted by it. Our students will be taught to use AI responsibly to amplify their competencies and effectiveness, while fostering their problem solving and critical thinking skills.

Acacia College, the university's first AI-themed residential college, seeks not only to teach AI, but to explore the intersections of AI and human intelligence. Students begin by discovering the tensions and conflicts between AI and humans and later go on to study and understand how the two can co-exist.

Minister Lee recently mentioned this: “While grades might be the boat that gets you out to sea, it is resilience that keeps you afloat when storms hit. It is adaptability that helps you navigate changing currents. It is creativity that helps you spot new horizons, and it is interpersonal skills that will bring others with you in your journey.”

This deeply resonates with what a university education should achieve. As we chart a course for the future, we need to hold on to our north star, the values that keep us grounded: imagination and dedication, courage and curiosity.

On that note, I invite you to join me in welcoming Education Minister Mr Desmond Lee.

Thank you.