NUS Commencement 2026
Commencement Dinner Speech by Professor Tan Eng Chye, NUS President
Friday, 24 July 2026, Dining Hall, Acacia College and Tembusu College

A Closing Chapter, An Opening World

NUS Pro-Chancellors Mr Po'ad Mattar and Mrs Mattar; Mrs Theresa Foo

NUS Chairman Mr Hsieh Fu Hua

Graduates of the Class of 2026

Distinguished Guests

Fellow Colleagues

A very good evening to everyone.

We've just heard two fantastic speeches. Now it's very clear to us why you were all elected NUSSU presidents.

Over the past two weeks, we have conferred degrees on nearly 18,000 graduates across 39 ceremonies. Some of you ask: "Is this the maximum?" Yes, so far. But this number is going to grow. Tonight, we gather for the finale of Commencement 2026. It has been a tradition to mark the close of Commencement season with a dinner celebration.

When we opened this season, I spoke of thresholds and liminal spaces – the transient passage between the closing of one chapter and the beginning of another. Tonight, you are no longer standing at that threshold. You have crossed it.

Through each of our 39 ceremonies, we have celebrated graduates of many disciplines and callings – who will go on to shape industries, uplift communities, impact nations, and write their own stories. And yet, for all their differences, every one of them has been shaped by the same conviction: that knowledge, rigorously pursued and applied with integrity and compassion, is among the most powerful forces for good that humans can possess.

The true meaning of higher education is to reflect and draw strength from our knowledge and wisdom, and bend it to the service of mankind. Indeed, it is this spirit that must be brought to bear on the disruptions and upheavals we now face — from AI, from a planet under strain, from global political uncertainties.

These are modern anxieties, and it would be easy to feel that the ground is shifting too quickly beneath us. But I want to be clear about where our footing comes from.

The antidote to anxiety is not certainty. It is character and willpower. Because we are human and curious, we innovate; yet because we are human and fallible, we also

make mistakes. This has been true of every generation before you, and it will be true of yours.

But if we approach our work with care, honesty and hard-earned knowledge, we give ourselves the best chance of doing better than those who came before us. These are the most enduring. In a world where technology can amplify both good and harm, these qualities — of judgment, of empathy, of intellectual honesty — matter more than any single skill you will ever acquire.

Ten years ago, NUS began evolving our curriculum to cross disciplines. Five years ago, we brought student life into the heart of the educational experience, because we believe that who you become is shaped by both your lessons in the classroom, and your experiences outside it. Tonight, I believe we can say with some confidence that these were the right decisions.

From here on, there are no more exams. There are no more straightforward answers. But there is something more enduring than a grade: there is the record of your actions and the impact you leave on the lives you touch.

Your time as students has ended, but your connection to this community has not. You leave as members of a global alumni family.

So, as we raise a glass tonight, we do so not only in celebration of what you have achieved, but in anticipation of what you will do next.

Congratulations to the Class of 2026.

Cheers!