

Social science researchers offering good solutions for nation's challenges to be recognised

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Social science researchers who offer good solutions for Singapore's challenges will be recognised by local universities and the public service, even if they do not get published in renowned academic journals, Education Minister Chan Chun Sing said.

"I know that many researchers feel hard-pressed because though you do so much good work, it is hard for you to get published in world-renowned journals as many people think that Singapore is some little place somewhere in Asia whose solutions may not be applicable to others," he said on March 20 at the National University of Singapore (NUS).

He was speaking at the launch event of the inaugural Social Science and Humanities Ideas Festival, which runs from March 22 to April 19.

Researchers will share insights on topics like the impact of disruptive technologies on everyday life and mental health.

Mr Chan said the research community here must be able to work with practitioners, which would be a tremendous advantage.



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While Singapore has learnt from case studies in other countries, it has always prided itself in being able to come up with its own innovative solutions for its unique problems, Mr Chan said.

Citing examples such as the Housing Board's Ethnic Integration Policy, Singapore's management of the pricing of the public transport system, and SkillsFuture Singapore, he said these policy innovations bear testament to the importance of the social science and humanities research community.

"Our job is to study what we need, what other people have done, and come up with new solutions that can even inspire."

He added that collaborative efforts have to go beyond just the academic community to include practitioners, such as government agencies, to take Singapore forward.

"Our competition is not within but, rather, beyond Singapore, and

these challenges are beyond what any one particular institution can overcome."

The minister assured the social science research community that the Ministry of Education and the Government will continue to support their work.

For example, the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) has been awarding grants and fellowships to researchers whose work shows potential for impact.

Professor Lim Sun Sun, vice-president of partnerships and engagement and professor of communication and technology at Singapore Management University, was awarded a grant in 2019 by SSRC to undertake a project in collaboration with NUS and the Singapore University of Technology and Design.

Prof Lim told *The Straits Times* that the project's aim is to understand how digital transformation has challenged the skills of workers by looking at practices in several large multinational companies and small and medium-sized enterprises.

Prof Lim said social science research is vital to get rich insights on how people's lives are influenced by emerging technologies.

"Social science insights that shed light on the human dimension is so critical for understanding how to

make these technologies work much better, in accordance with our social norms, our cultural values, as well as our sense of well-being," she said.

Associate Professor Emily Ortega, who heads the psychology undergraduate programme at the Singapore University of Social Sciences, has been conducting a five-year study since 2021 to explore how 3,000 Singaporeans spend their time and whether the Covid-19 pandemic had affected their routines.

With this study, the first in Singapore that tracks how entire households spend their time, Prof Ortega hopes to shed light on the dynamics of Singaporean families and how they adapt to changes.

The data collected could be analysed in various ways, she said. Comparative studies could be done across the different genders, age groups and housing types, to name a few.

"Do we maybe spend less time during leisure because we are not given the flexibility of time any more, as compared with during the pandemic? What are the implications with that? So I think it's very interesting to see the trends, and I hope to be able to capture some of that information."

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