NUS Announces
New Leadership Team
New Leadership for NUS

Prof Tan Eng Chye

Top academic leader Professor Tan Eng Chye, who has been the University’s Provost for the past 10 years, has been appointed the next NUS President. A mathematician and alumnus of the University, Prof Tan has played a critical role in steering NUS’ progress over the decade, and is widely acknowledged for being instrumental in transforming NUS into a leading global university. On 1 January 2018, he will succeed current NUS President Professor Tan Chorh Chuan, who will be seconded to Singapore’s Ministry of Health at the end of 2017.

The leadership transition included the appointment of Professor Ho Teck Hua as NUS’ new Senior Deputy President and Provost from 1 January next year. A preeminent behavioural scientist, and Provost from 1 January next year. A preeminent behavioural scientist, and Provost for the past 10 years, has been appointed NUS President Professor Tan Chorh Chuan, who will be seconded to Singapore’s Ministry of Health at the end of 2017.

Under his stewardship, the proportion of NUS undergraduates with overseas educational experiences grew to over 80 per cent in 2016. He also led a comprehensive revamp of the NUS General Education curriculum, and introduced the grade-free scheme for NUS freshmen, to promote exploration, curiosity and critical thinking among students.

Mr Hsieh Fu Hua, NUS Chairman who chaired the search for the new president, warmly welcomed Prof Tan Eng Chye as the next NUS President. “Eng Chye is a deeply respected academic, and a steadfast, open and decisive leader, who has a strong passion for our University. He is a man of great integrity. Eng Chye has a wide following based on the trust he engenders, and his exceptional ability to inspire people to work together. Eng Chye has been absolutely pivotal to NUS’ rapid rise to be among the best universities in the world. He will continue to lead the University with a clear vision and a fierce commitment to excellence,” he said.

On Prof Ho’s appointment, Mr Hsieh added, “A world-renowned scholar with deep industry ties, Teck Hua is an outstanding leader with bold and creative ideas. He has been remarkably effective in recruiting top talent to NUS, and building several world-class research institutes and programmes over a short period of time. With these two appointments, NUS will have a truly outstanding leadership team.”

NUS President Designate Prof Tan Eng Chye is an experienced academic leader and the chief architect of the University’s pioneering educational and academic programmes, including the University Town Residential College Programme, the Centre for Future-ready Graduates, the School of Continuing and Lifelong Education, and NUS (Suzhou) Research Institute, the Institute for Application of Learning Science and Educational Technology, as well as technology-enhanced education initiatives.

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Prof Tan Eng Chye said, “I am deeply honoured to be appointed the next President of this exceptional university. Under Chorh Chuan’s leadership, NUS has affirmed its status as a leading global university that strives to contribute to Singapore, and the wider community.”

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Prof Tan Eng Chye will be NUS’ fifth President, and the 23rd head of Singapore’s oldest higher education institution founded in 1905. The homegrown leader has been with NUS for 32 years, starting out as a Senior Tutor with the Department of Mathematics in 1985.

Senior Deputy President and Provost Designate Prof Ho Teck Hua, who is also an NUS alumnus, returned from the University of California, Berkeley in 2015, after more than two decades overseas, to serve as NUS’ research chief, raising the global profile of the University’s research. He recruited top returning Singaporean and global researchers, created the country’s first Smart Nation Research Cluster at NUS, and established corporate labs with industry giants. The Tan Chin Tuan Centennial Professor also initiated the popular Lifelong Learning Initiative for NUS Alumni.

Mr Hsieh paid tribute to Prof Tan Chorh Chuan for his stellar stewardship of NUS since 2008, transforming the University along an extraordinary trajectory of excellence. “We are particularly grateful that he has developed a deep bench of talent with outstanding individuals for the next leadership team. We greatly appreciate Chorh Chuan for his many contributions.”

Prof Tan Chorh Chuan said, “Eng Chye is a highly motivated and inspiring leader. He has a deep passion for higher education, and is driven by the desire to excel and create distinctive impact, for NUS and the broader community, at the highest international levels.”

BLOCK71 Jakarta Takes off

BLOCK71 Jakarta, NUS Enterprise’s newest start-up incubation space in partnership with Indonesia’s Salim Group, was launched on 28 July. The launch was officiated by Mr Lim Hng Kiang, Singapore’s Minister for Trade and Industry, and Mr Enggartiasto Lukita, Indonesia’s Minister of Trade.

Open since March this year, the 1,500m² facility in Jakarta supports innovation and entrepreneurship development for both Singapore and Indonesian companies. It already houses more than 20 start-ups, half of them from Singapore.

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NUS Enterprise is a global connector, linking investors, entrepreneurs and business partners into a network, in the process creating a richer ecosystem and business opportunities for the start-up community in Southeast Asia and elsewhere.”

Salim Group provided the facility in Kuningan, an area popular with Jakarta’s burgeoning technology community. NUS Enterprise contributed the “software” — its experience and expertise in organising start-up activities, as well as support programmes for entrepreneurs.
President underscored in his
Professor Tan Chorh Chuan, NUS
Letters.
Both received the Honorary Doctor of
of Singapore Chartered Accountants.
Alliance and President of the Institute
Council, Chairman of Eastern Health
Mr Gerard Ee, Chairman of Charity
Founder and Executive Chairman of the
individuals: Professor Klaus Schwab,
President, on two extraordinary
Yam, NUS Chancellor and Singapore
The University's highest accolade was
the main ceremony on 6 July.
230 graduates from NUS Business, NUS
programme.
Arbitration and Dispute Resolution)
the Master of Laws (International
(Business Analytics) programme and
class of Yale-NUS College, as well as
They included the pioneer graduating
class of 2017!
Congratulations
Class of 2017!
NUS Commencement 2017 saw 10,654
graduates receive their degrees
— 6,622 bachelor degrees and
4,032 graduate degrees — over 24
ceremonies from 6 to 13 July at the
University Cultural Centre.
They included the pioneer graduating
class of Yale-NUS College, as well as
students from the Bachelor of Science
(Business Analytics) programme and
the Master of Laws (International
Arbitration and Dispute Resolution) programe.
Kicking off the celebrations were some
230 graduates from NUS Business, NUS
Computing and Yale-NUS College at
the main ceremony on 6 July.
The University's highest accolade was
also bestowed by Dr Tony Tan Keng
Yam, NUS Chancellor and Singapore
President, on two extraordinary
individuals: Professor Klaus Schwab,
Founder and Executive Chairman of the
World Economic Forum (WEF); and
Mr Gerard Ee, Chair of Charity
Council, Chairman of Eastern Health
Service, and President of the
University Cultural Centre.

In addition, he was advisor to the Ee
Nathan Professorship in Social Work.
At NUS, Mr Ee was part of the
fundraising committee for the S R
Nathan Professorship in Social Work.
In addition, he was advisor to the Ee
Peng Liang Memorial Fund and sat on
the Resource Committee for the NUS
Centre for Social Development Asia.
Zi Heng shared his outlook, “We can’t
control the circumstances that we are
in, but we can choose how we respond
to it... we can choose to focus on what
we can do and continue to contribute
in ways that we can.”

A practising auditor, Mr Ee was a
Board Member of the Accounting and
Corporate Regulatory Authority and
Council Member of the Accounting
Standards Council. He was also a
Nominated Member of Parliament,
President of the National Council of
Social Service, and President of the
National Kidney Foundation. He had
served as Chairman of the Assisi Home
and Hospice, as well as Bizlink Centre,
an employment programme for the
disabled.

Even though paralysed in most parts of
his body, NUS Science graduate Wong
Zi Heng has achieved much more in his
four years as an undergraduate than
most able-bodied people.
On 9 July 2017, the valedictorian
proudly received his Bachelor of
Science (Physics) degree with a Minor
in Nanoscience.
During his first year at NUS, Zi Heng
suffered a spinal cord injury while
diving. The accident paralysed him
from the chest down and confined him
to a wheelchair.
Overnight, everyday tasks became
impossible. But instead of despairing,
Zi Heng took a gap year for rehabilitative
therapy. The Ministry of Education
Teaching Award recipient returned to
university after a year to complete
his studies.
Despite his disability, the gung ho
student stayed on campus and actively
took part in programmes and activities,
including a school trip to Germany.
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Positivity

First Graduation

Dr Tony Tan (right) interacting with students after the ceremony

Dr Tony Tan called the occasion a significant
development in Singapore's tertiary
education. "With broad-based and
multidisciplinary learning at the
core of its four-year programme, the
Yale-NUS curriculum offers a unique
educational experience for its students.
I am confident that these Yale-NUS
graduands will bring rich skills in
critical thinking and adaptability into
the workforce," he said.

A total of 119 students in the
pioneer graduating cohort of
Yale-NUS College were presented to
Dr Tony Tan Keng Yam, NUS Chancellor
and Singapore President, on 29 May
2107 at the College’s inaugural
ceremony. Among them,
300 guests attended the event,
including NUS Pro-Chancellors
Mr Po’ad Mattar and
Mr Chan Sek Keong; NUS Chairman
Mr Hsieh Fu Hua; current and former
Board of Trustee members; NUS senior
administrators, as well as faculty, staff,
students and alumni.

Yale-NUS
First Graduation

Power of
Positivity
IN THE NEWS

Building on the Future

NUS Students’ Union (NUSSU) Rag and Flag’s annual tradition of contributing towards the less privileged raised more than $400,000 this year.

Rag Day 2017, themed “Reminisce and Flourish”, wowed some 8,000 spectators with its colourful and spectacular display on 12 August at NUS University Town.

Guest-of Honour Mr Ong Ye Kung, Minister for Defence, graced the occasion, together with Professor Tan Chorh Chuan, NUS President; Professor Tan Eng Chye, NUS Deputy President (Academic Affairs) and Provost; Professor Ho Teck Hua, NUS Deputy President (Education and Skills) and Second Minister for Education (Higher Education and Skills); and other NUS senior management.

Prof Tan Chorh Chuan (2nd from right) and Prof Tan Eng Chye (2nd from left) with students at the cheque presentation

IN THE NEWS

Sensitive Designs, Holistic Solutions

Recently graduated students at NUS Division of Industrial Design (DID) showed off a sensitive side of their creativity at the NUS DID Grad Show 2017 in June.

Their thoughtful creations included kitchen tools that help the visually impaired to prepare meals safely, a smartphone app which improves readability and facilitates keyboard usage, as well as a lamp and speaker that increase in luminance and volume, respectively, upon squeezing.

Fresh graduate Kevin Chiam was inspired to develop Folks Kitchenware for the visually impaired after volunteering at Touch Homecare Services.

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Fresh graduate Kevin Chiam was inspired to develop Folks Kitchenware for the visually impaired after volunteering at Touch Homecare Services.

His solution — which won the NUS Enterprise Practicum Award in 2016 — is a series of five kitchen tools comprising knife, chopping board, stove ring, pot lid and teaspoon.

The knife, for instance, sports a magnification of the keyboard, while the stove ring alerts the user of the burner’s boundaries and secures the cookware. Kevin is currently exploring with interested parties to commercialise the project.

Long-sighted baby boomers often have difficulty using their smartphones, observed fellow graduate Lim Xin Yuan. She developed three solutions dealing with readability and hit area of small interfaces, eliminating the multiple steps typically required to activate assistive features.

The “tilt to zoom” feature taps a smartphone’s built-in gyroscope and accelerometer to achieve single-step magnification of the keyboard, while “tilt to focus” allows users to control text size by tilting the smartphone forward or backward. By magnifying a portion of the screen, the “scroll to focus” functionality enables users to concentrate on a particular text message.

Most of the baby boomer testers found her solutions intuitive and beneficial, locating their desired text message 40 per cent faster when using the “scroll to focus” feature.

Edmund Zhang adopted a fresh approach to interacting with everyday objects. Instead of tapping and sliding, he proposed squeezing, which he noted seemed to be relatively undertapped as a product interaction.

Edmund built a table lamp which glows brighter the more it is squeezed, and dims when a plug at the rear is pulled out. He also designed a portable speaker which goes up in volume when increasingly squeezed, and gradually softens when set upright.

A combination of materials was exploited to provide “squishiness” and comfort. Edmund hopes to apply the concept to a wider range of products.
NUS’ Contribution to Singapore’s Smart Nation Initiative

WHAT IS AI.SG?
Artificial Intelligence (AI) can help create solutions and improve our lives in healthcare, finance and security, among other areas. AI.SG is a nationwide initiative to nurture talents in AI, increase AI industry translation and commercialisation, drive innovation, and position Singapore at the forefront of the global AI industry.
Innovative Device Treats ‘Glue Ear’

NUS engineers have heard the cry for help of more than 700 million people worldwide threatened by impaired hearing annually, by inventing a device that quickly and effectively treats “glue ear” or Otitis Media with Effusion (OME).

The leading cause of hearing loss in children, OME is a condition where the middle ear becomes filled with fluid instead of air, due to causes such as genetics, allergies or a bout of flu.

Headed by Associate Professor Tan Kok Kiong, a team from NUS Electrical and Computer Engineering designed CLiKX, in collaboration with Adjunct Associate Professor Lyne Lim from NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, to improve current surgical treatment of OME.

The simple handheld device uses a sensor to safely insert almost any commercially available grommet into the patient’s ear with a single click in less than a second, minimising contact with the eardrum and reducing discomfort. The procedure requires only moderate sedation or local anaesthesia.

At a light 185g, the battery-powered gadget could also make grommet-placing surgeries more accessible for patients in underdeveloped regions.

The team plans to conduct the first clinical trial in Singapore in 2018.

Butterfly Colours Decoded

NUS scientists discovered that a butterfly has added red to its palette of wing colours in a bid to stave off possible enemies.

A team from NUS Biological Sciences has determined that the warning hue, potentially more effective in keeping predators at bay, is a new addition to the vibrant colours of the Painted Jezebel butterfly. Red originated within this group of butterflies.

Jocelyn Wee, a PhD candidate, and Associate Professor Antónia Monteiro conducted field experiments of the Painted Jezebel in Singapore.

Jocelyn created more than 300 artificial paper models depicting the Painted Jezebel with its wings held vertically over its body. She designed five variants of the paper models: a faithful colour replica of the butterfly, a greyscale model, as well as three more highlighting the red, yellow and black, respectively. These paper models were then placed at three sites and observed for signs of attacks from predators like birds.

The researchers noted that paper models emulating the real colours of the Painted Jezebel suffered the least number of attacks, followed by models with unaltered red patches, and models with unaltered yellow patches.

Jocelyn explained that red and yellow on the ventral wings of the Painted Jezebel serve as warning signals to predators, and “demonstrated how predators can play a critical role in affecting the evolution of warning colours within this particular butterfly genus”.

Age without Frailty

Half of older persons above the age of 55 living at home are frail, revealed the Singapore Longitudinal Ageing Studies, an ongoing long-term observational study which examines the overall health and ageing of a cohort of people above 55. Compared to their robust counterparts, the physically frail elderly had a much higher likelihood of becoming depressed or cognitively impaired, functionally disabled, hospitalised or dying prematurely.

However, the four-year Singapore Frailty Intervention Trial (FIT) by Associate Professor Ng Tze Pin from NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, revealed that a combination of nutritional, physical and cognitive interventions was able to reverse physical frailty in older people.

FIT looked at some 250 community-living people aged 65 and above in Singapore, who exhibited signs of physical frailty. Each participant was randomly allocated into one of five groups.

Four of the groups received lifestyle interventions — physical training, nutritional enhancement or cognitive training, and a combination of all three. The last group did not receive any interventions.

The frailty of each participant was assessed before the start of the intervention, and at three months, six months and one year later.

The researchers found that better nutrition, physical training and mental exercises can reverse frailty, enhance muscle strength and gait speed, reduce depressive symptoms and improve cognitive functioning.

Based on the findings, Assoc Prof Ng’s team is working with the Geriatric Education and Research Institution and social service organisations to develop frailty screening and community intervention programmes that can help improve the well-being of senior citizens.
A Toast to Gut Health!

Beer lovers may soon be able to have their favourite tipple and drink a toast to healthier guts at the same time.

A probiotic beer specially crafted by NUS food technologists incorporates a probiotic strain — Lactobacillus paracasei L26 (L26) — which can neutralise toxins and viruses, as well as enhance gut health and immune system function.

Studies have shown the health benefits of consuming probiotics, including boosting the immune system and improving digestive systems. However, such dietary supplements containing beneficial bacteria usually come in dairy products, which have raised concerns related to cholesterol, allergens and lactose intolerance.

Aline Chan, a recent graduate of NUS Food Science and Technology (FST), is a firm believer in the consumption of probiotics as part of a healthy diet. She decided to explore expanding the modes of probiotic delivery for her final-year project. Working closely with her supervisor Associate Professor Liu Shao-Quan from NUS FST, Aline managed to achieve the perfect recipe for the beer-brewing process. After optimising factors such as temperature, time and ingredients, the team succeeded in enhancing the L26 strain to sustain its growth in the beer.

Developing sufficient counts of live probiotics in beer is a challenging feat as beers contain hop acids that prevent the growth and survival of probiotics. Every 100ml of the probiotic beer contains one billion units of probiotics, the daily recommended intake by the International Scientific Association for Probiotics and Prebiotics.

The beer, which is unfiltered and unpasteurised to accommodate the live probiotics, has 3.5 per cent alcohol content and features a sharp, tart flavour. The researchers have filed a patent for the beer-brewing.

Pirated Software: Exacts Cost

A Microsoft-commissioned study led by Associate Professor Bipali Sikdar from NUS Electrical and Computer Engineering has revealed that cybercriminals are compromising computers by embedding malware in pirated software and online channels which offer them.

The findings of the “Cybersecurity Risks from Non-Genuine Software” project were released on 21 June. Valued at $16 billion (US$19 billion) in 2016, Asia Pacific has the highest software piracy rate in the world, with three in five personal computers using non-genuine software. Cybercrime is expected to cost the global economy an estimated $1 trillion (US$6 trillion) by 2021.

The study analysed 458 samples from eight Asia Pacific countries, which covered pirated software downloads, new computers and laptops with pirated software, as well as CDs or DVDs with pirated software.

The researchers discovered that all tested websites offering pirated software downloads exposed users to multiple security risks in the form of popups, suspicious advertisements and objectionable content. Moreover, about one in three of the downloaded pirated software harboured malware and close to a quarter of the malicious software had deactivated the computer’s anti-malware. Pirated productivity tools and operating systems had the highest infection rates.

“Although the risk of contracting malware through all sources of pirated software is high, the online medium is turning out to be a more potent infection vector,” explained Alistor Prof Sikdar. For brand new computers installed with non-genuine software, a whopping 92 per cent were infected with malware. Of the CDs and DVDs, 61 per cent contained between five and 38 pieces of malware.

The research team recommends that users follow safe cyber practices such as using only genuine software, buying hardware from reputable vendors, keeping software up-to-date, using multifactor authentication mechanisms, and backing up data on trusted cloud storage services.

Gold at World Music Contest

NUS Wind Symphony has struck gold at this year’s World Music Contest Kerkrade, the most prestigious international festival of wind music.

Held every four years, the contest is known not only for its high quality education and research to the outstanding work by NUS faculty, researchers and students.

No. 1 in Asia Pacific

NUS has secured the first spot in the inaugural Times Higher Education (THE) Asia Pacific Rankings 2017. This achievement came after the university topped THE’s Asia University Rankings in March this year for the second consecutive year.

The new analysis ranks 243 universities in the Asia Pacific region, using the same 13 calibrated performance indicators as the THE World University Rankings, but with a special focus on the mission and priorities of institutions in Asia Pacific.

The performance indicators are grouped into seven categories: teaching, research, citation, international outlook and industry income.

NUS President Professor Tan Chorh Chuan said, “This accolade, together with the THE Asia University Rankings released earlier this year, strongly affirms our vision and long-term strategy of building broad-based excellence across a comprehensive range of disciplines.

Prof Tan also attributed the impact of NUS’ high quality education and research to the outstanding work by NUS faculty, researchers and students.

“It is particularly impressive to see that NUS is also now more highly ranked than much more mature and established institutions from Australia too.” – Mr Phil Baty, Editorial Director, THE Global Rankings

Private Law Moot Win

A team from NUS Law beat 12 other groups from around the world to win the prestigious Allen & Overy Private Law Moot Competition, a first for Singapore.

Held from 20 to 22 May at University of New South Wales in Sydney, the competition is Australia’s only intervarsity mooting competition focusing on private law. Contestants have to demonstrate commerciality and a deep interest in the subject over four preliminary rounds of mooting, followed by two knockout rounds for the finals.

The NUS winning team — consisting of undergraduates Nicholas Ng Wei Jie, Kiu Yan Yu, Joshua Foo and Joshua Fang — impressed the judges with their compelling arguments pertaining to equity and fiduciary law in Australia. They edged out rival University of Otago in the Grand Final and clinched the championship.

Joshua Fang was also declared the best speaker in the Grand Final.

The NUS Wind Symphony secured a gold award at World Music Contest Kerkrade...
The Fourth Industrial Revolution

The Fourth Industrial Revolution is commonly associated with the convergence of the physical, biological and digital spheres, blurring the distinct lines between each. Advances in artificial intelligence (AI), genetic engineering and autonomous vehicles that enable the interaction between human and technology are some examples of this ongoing revolution.

“The Fourth Industrial Revolution is not just happening, we can shape it in a positive way or we may miss the opportunity and thus the Fourth Industrial Revolution will shape us,” stressed Professor Klaus Schwab, Founder and Executive Chairman of the World Economic Forum (WEF), when he gave his talk at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy (LKYSchool) at NUS on 5 July.

The dialogue session titled “Leadership in a World of Changing Geopolitics” was moderated by Professor Kishore Mahbubani, Dean of LKY School. The theme revolved around the possible impact and strategies to successfully adapt in this climate.

The speed of change and rapid rise of technologies characteristic of this current revolution may be hard for the governments of today to grapple with, Prof Schawb noted.

“We have a technology before us which takes place outside the normal government norms and capabilities to create the necessary framework to harness them. With the speed of those technologies, you cannot create rules or laws in the old-fashioned way, you have to create a platform where you always update protocols,” he said.

“Today’s dividing line is no longer left and right. The dividing line is to be open for change and open to the world, or to close down.”

– Prof Klaus Schwab, Founder and Executive Chairman of the World Economic Forum

At the opening of the Seventh International Meeting on Synthetic Biology (SB7.0) on 13 June at NUS attended by some 300 participants, Mr Randal J Kirk, Chairman and CEO of synthetic biology company Intrexon Corp, said in his visionary lecture, “If you think about the number of organisms on the planet, which may indeed exceed the number of stars in the universe, you’ll realise that we’re all running on the same software language.”

Prof Schoof highlighted the rise of AI and robotics, which could potentially cause alarm in the population.

He underscored another more intrinsic impact that affects the psychological state of the people. “It creates a new class of society who are not sure if at any moment they will lose their jobs,” he explained.

Questions from the audience keen to pick the brain of the bestselling author ranged from the impact of the current revolution to grapple with, learn and debate on the latest efforts in the field, and to build partnerships and collaborations.

Co-organised by NUS Synthetic Biology for Clinical and Technological Innovation (SynCTI), the four-day conference brought together global practitioners of synthetic biology to share, learn and debate on the latest efforts in the field, and to build partnerships and collaborations.

As Guest-of-Honour Mr Desmond Lee, Minister in Prime Minister’s Office and Second Minister for Home Affairs and National Development said in his opening speech, “The central idea of synthetic biology is that living cells can be programmed in much the same way we programme computers.”

Synthetic biology manipulates the genetic code and DNA to design and construct biological systems with the goal of improving existing functions or creating new purposes.

This conference series examined three themes: “Revolution 2.0,” “All People and the Planet” and “Diversity with Harmony”. It featured more than 100 speakers in 12 thematic sessions.

Prof Schoof was conferred the Honorary Doctor of Letters at NUS’ main commencement ceremony this year, for his outstanding and transformative leadership, and significant contributions to Singapore and the world.

Advancing Synthetic Biology

Gift for Chinese Studies

East Asian Institute Turns 20

“Mr father was a very busy man, yet he was always willing to help others. He didn’t do much for himself and he would not have dreamt that I would do this for him — to honour his love for knowledge and for the community with this scholarship.”

Ms Chen Teck Ching, the eldest daughter of prominent Chinese community leader Mr Chen Sing Wu, set up the Chen Sing Wu Chinese Studies Scholarship at the Department of Chinese Studies, NUS Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences to honour her late father. Ms Chen actively serves as the President of the NUS Chinese Studies Alumni Association and is a member of the NUS Management Committee. She is also the Secretary General of the Singapore Leong Khay Huay Kuan Education Trust Fund.

Ms Chen Teck Ching (72 Arts and Social Sciences)

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A dozen NUS students from various schools and faculties became fast friends after they lived and worked together for 11 days onboard a ship which ventured into the remote Anambas Islands of Indonesia.

The group set off from Batam island on 30 April on a 18m schooner with eight sails. Accompanying and guiding them were Associate Professor Martin Henz from NUS Computing, Assistant Professor Andrew Quitmeyer from NUS Communications and New Media, and Dr Matthias Hoffmann-Kuhnt from the Tropical Marine Science Institute and NUS Biological Sciences.

The Anambas Islands is a small archipelago in the South China Sea, with Malaysia to its west and Borneo to its east. The team traversed over 740km for their voyage, making stops at the little-known islands and rocky outcrops — covering Tokong Malangbiru, the southern-most point of the Anambas islands; Pulau Bawah; Telok Bakau; and Sagu Dampar — to explore the relatively untouched nature.

The students learnt the ropes on sailing and navigating. They would plot their course, keep a lookout for obstacles in the sea, help steer the ship and plan the itinerary on a daily basis.

One of the highlights was a rare sighting of a whale shark south of Telok Bakau, enthused second-year Engineering student Lim Qi Hao. "The ocean holds many surprises for people who travel across it, and we were very lucky to be able to see such a rare and magnificent creature up close and in the wild," he said. A playful pod of dolphins also swam alongside the ship during the journey.

For Rachel Oh, second-year undergraduate of NUS Science and University Scholars Programme, the expedition left her with a keener appreciation for nature and exploration by providing new "eyes" to understand this world.

The voyage is a pilot initiative to encourage experiential learning and cross-fertilisation of ideas and perspectives by engaging groups of students from various disciplines in the unique setting of sailing.