



The NUS Indian Dance group working on the performance Maya Yatra. Geography students at the National University of Singapore could write a review of the dance analysing bodies as space and bodies moving through space.
PHOTO: FOTOGRAFHY

Dance during a geography lecture?

Tie-ups between academia and the arts on the rise at the National University of Singapore

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Geographer Kamalini Ramdas has found a new way to expose her students to the concept of space – through dance.

The lecturer in the department of geography at the National University of Singapore (NUS) says that while many see space as something that is fixed, it is also constantly transforming.

“What better way to show how space is alive than through the medium of dance,” says Dr Kamalini.

She worked with Cultural Medalion winner Santha Bhaskar and the NUS Indian Dance group on Maya Yatra, a performance which explores gender relations and gender politics and was part of the NUS Arts Festival 2018 last Saturday.

After the performance, students from Dr Kamalini’s social and cultural geography course could choose to write a review from the perspective of a geographer, analysing bodies as space and bodies moving through space.

Science graduate Janani Krishnan, 24, who performed in Maya Yatra, says her challenge was “understanding how feminism impacts the geographical space that we live in and vice versa”.

Such collaborations between the NUS Centre for the Arts – which organises the arts festival – and faculty at the university are becoming increasingly common, says Ms Sharon Tan, director of the NUS Centre for the Arts.

In the last 12 months, the centre

has worked with five faculties or schools in the university, including the faculty of science and the NUS Business School, and the programmes have benefited more than 2,000 students.

The centre, which celebrates its 25th anniversary this year, includes the NUS Museum, NUS Baba House, and a talent development and programming unit that oversees 22 student arts groups. It also manages the University Cultural Centre.

Faculty collaborations with the centre’s museums alone have risen to about 60 a year, from about 10 in 2010, and more are on the cards, says Ms Tan.

Late last year, the centre moved from the university’s administrative cluster to the academic cluster, giving it more opportunities to work with faculty.

In a course offered by the physics department, called The Art Of Science; The Science Of Art, for example, students explore the impact of the arts on science and vice versa.

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MS SHARON TAN, director of the NUS Centre for the Arts

One part of the course looks at the chemistry of porcelain glaze and includes visits to the centre’s museum to look at ceramics from different periods.

Next month, medical students will get the chance to attend a 10-minute play-writing workshop.

Director of the Centre for Medical Education at NUS Dujeeva D. Samarasekera says that studies have shown that medical students with greater exposure to the arts and humanities tend to have significantly better empathy and are less likely to develop symptoms of burnout.

There are also plans to take the medical students through the museums to observe art objects and describe them to improve their powers of observation.

Says Ms Tan: “We can no longer educate students in silos. They have to broaden their perspectives and the arts is one way to do that.”

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