

RIGHT ATTITUDE

**No one really chooses to graduate in a pandemic, but what we can choose is our mindset.**



**MR SCOTT LEE CHUA** (right), 22, a Yale-NUS College graduand who will be the student speaker for the college's graduation ceremony.



PHOTO: COURTESY OF TAESUN SHIM



PHOTO: COURTESY OF LOUIS NGIA

# 'More authentic, personal' with Yale-NUS online graduation

College to be first among local universities to hold virtual ceremony after pandemic derails traditional plans

**Amelia Teng**  
Education Correspondent

Mr Scott Lee Chua was all set to deliver a speech on stage on behalf of the Class of 2020 at their Yale-NUS College graduation ceremony this month.

Instead, his batchmates will now listen to his speech as part of an hour-long virtual ceremony planned for them.

The coronavirus pandemic has derailed plans for the 183 graduands' graduation ceremony – which was to be held at the University Cultural Centre at the National University of Singapore (NUS) next Tuesday – just as it has for many such ceremonies globally.

So Yale-NUS, an autonomous college of NUS, has decided to push

through an online version of the occasion next Monday.

It will be the first among the local universities to hold a graduation ceremony online. NUS has postponed its ceremonies until January next year, while Singapore Management University intends to have a virtual commemoration too.

The Yale-NUS ceremony, which has been pre-recorded, will include speeches from its president Tan Tai Yong and Education Minister Ong Ye Kung.

Around 43 per cent of the graduands are international students and the rest are Singaporeans. About 60 per cent of the international students are staying on campus, while the rest have relocated off campus or returned to their home countries since early last month.

Mr Chua, 22, a Filipino student

who majored in economics, said: "No one really chooses to graduate in a pandemic, but what we can choose is our mindset."

One silver lining with the online session is having less distance between speakers and the audience, he said, as his batchmates will be watching him from close up through their own screens.

"I can afford to be a bit more authentic and personal," he added.

Using a camera, with a shelf as a makeshift tripod, he recorded himself making his five-minute speech in his dormitory room at the Yale-NUS campus. He dressed up – all the way down to his shoes – to get himself in the right frame of mind.

He even resorted to putting temporary adhesive at the sides of his spectacles so they would stay in a position with the least glare from the sunlight.

"Initially, the speech was more about the past four years. But as the context changed, it had to acknowledge the situation, looking towards

the future and remaining positive," said Mr Chua, who will be taking a master's programme in quantitative economics at NUS in August.

Ms Alyson Rozells, Yale-NUS College's associate director of alumni affairs and strategic events, added: "We wanted to film the people giving the speeches to have high-quality recordings, but with the circuit breaker, they had to record themselves on their own."

"The end result is very raw; the quality is inconsistent. But it's also nice to see the differences."

She said the planning committee of 12 staff members tried to retain as many traditional ceremonial elements as possible. For instance, they managed to get a video recording of Madam Kay Kuok, the chair of the college's governing board, opening and closing the ceremony as the presiding officer. She was also the presiding officer in 2018.

Dr Trisha Craig, vice-president (engagement) of Yale-NUS College, said: "There's formality and inti-

CLOSURE BEFORE NEXT STEP

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**MR LOUIS NGIA** (above), 26, who is graduating with a double degree in law and liberal arts from Yale-NUS and NUS.

macy at the same time. Typically, the minister would be far away on stage, but now it feels like he's having a conversation with you."

The online session will also show individual photographs of the graduands as the college's two rectors read out their names.

Mr Louis Ngia, 26, who is graduating with a double degree in law and liberal arts from Yale-NUS and NUS, said: "Initially, I didn't think the ceremony was very important, but after it was taken away, it felt like there was something missing. Having the digital graduation allows some sort of closure for us to move along from this undergraduate journey."

ateng@sph.com.sg