

**SPEECH BY PROF TAN CHORH CHUAN
NUS PRESIDENT
NUS HOMECOMING 2009
SHAW FOUNDATION ALUMNI HOUSE
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Fellow alumni,

Colleagues,

Students and friends,

When I was a student in the NUS School of Medicine, “homecoming” had a much more literal meaning. Most weekends, the Singaporean students who lived in the King Edward VII Hall would go home. We did so of course to re-connect with our families – the fact that we also got nice home-cooked meals and the laundry done were quite peripheral considerations.

Today of course, Homecoming has a completely different meaning. Yet its spirit and intent remain the same – to reaffirm and further strengthen the bonds between the alumni, students, faculty and staff that make up the NUS family.

Homecoming is therefore about meeting old friends while making new ones.

It is about recalling “the old times” in university, while catching up with new developments.

It is about being fired up by the growth and aspirations of our university, while contributing fresh ideas to your alma mater.

I am therefore delighted that so many of you are able to join us for NUS Homecoming 2009. I would like to welcome you warmly and to thank you for enriching this event with your presence!

Its always a bit tricky to find something engaging and meaningful to say in a speech just before lunch. My colleagues who study human nutrition advised me that positive thoughts help improve digestion. So, this morning, allow me to share with you 3 positive things which our University community is really excited about.

First, TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION. I am pleased to report that we are making excellent progress towards our goal of providing a transformative education for our students – an educational experience which nurtures curiosity and the zest for discovery, that enables our students to “learn how to learn”, and which promotes multi-disciplinary team learning.

Let me give 2 quick examples to illustrate.

This year, the NUS Faculty of Engineering will be phasing in a new and innovative Design-centric curriculum. This will be built around design projects in 3 thematic areas namely Future Transportation systems, Engineering in Medicine and Smart cities. Students will work in teams on complex, multidisciplinary projects and through these, will be challenged to identify and frame the key problems and to devise creative solutions based on a strong understanding of the basic sciences.

Over at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, we are developing new and exciting teaching and research programmes with an Asian focus. In July this year, FASS will be launching an International Alliance of Research Universities Summer School on the theme of “Asia Now”. This programme will allow NUS students to study with and learn from students from our IARU partner universities namely Australian National University, Berkeley, Cambridge, Copenhagen, ETH Zurich, Oxford, Tokyo, Peking and Yale.

Second, we were thrilled to win our third Research Centre of Excellence award from MOE and the National Research Foundation. This underscores the continuing and dramatic growth in our research capabilities and strengths. Many of our own “home-grown” faculty are making waves as scholars internationally. They complement nicely the many outstanding faculty that we

have been recruiting from overseas. While our research strengths are broad-based, we also have several clusters that are gaining high international prominence. These clusters include energy and the environment, biomedical sciences, finance and risk management, Asian studies as well as several exciting areas of ground-breaking basic science such as Quantum technology and Mechanobiology.

Third, this Alumni Complex. It stands as the most visible sign of NUS' strong commitment to ever deeper and stronger ties with our alumni. It also symbolizes the outstanding partnership between NUS and the NUS Society. Our wish is for the Alumni Complex to be bustling with activity, with many programmes that bring alumni, students, staff and friends of NUS together. I also personally hope that the Alumni Complex will not just be a place for interaction, but will also serve as a portal and a bridge that connects our alumni to the wider NUS community.

Today, we are in the midst of a global financial and economic crisis of unprecedented depth and severity. Fortunately, the crisis has not impacted NUS' funding for our academic programmes. Nevertheless, over the past few months, the University has done its best to cut costs, so as to reallocate more of our resources to high priority areas, such as further enhancing the quality of our faculty, staff and students, and the level of excellence of our academic programmes. The crisis will also create new opportunities to grow our strengths and to develop fresh peaks of excellence. We are positioning ourselves to be alert to these openings and to seize them. For us to do so successfully, we will need your support and help. During this period, perhaps more than any other before, we look to our alumni and friends for your ideas and support.

How might our alumni and friends further enhance their support for our university?

I suggest 3 dimensions for your consideration, summarized in the acronym AIM.

Aspiration – We hope and trust that our alumni will share and believe in our University’s aspirations, in our vision to be a leading global university centred in Asia.

Involvement – We invite you to be engaged and involved in helping our university realize these aspirations. There are many many ways in which our alumni are already helping, which would further benefit from your involvement. For example, you could mentor our students and in these difficult times, you can connect them to jobs or internships. Your experience would be invaluable in our advisory committees at faculties or research centres. The alumni’s active volunteerism could take the form of organising key events such as reunions. Many of our alumni have made generous gifts which have enabled our University to pursue excellence. Your overseas networks can open doors for NUS to foster new research and entrepreneurial collaborations. Many alumni have gone on to serve with distinction in a myriad of important positions and ways in Singapore and beyond – you can be our advocate in advancing the cause for NUS. Indeed, there are numerous ways that our alumni can support our university, while at the same time finding fulfillment, excitement and enjoyment.

Mission – Through your active involvement, you would also play a critical part in helping NUS create value and impact for Singapore, by fulfilling our mission, which is to “transform the way people think and do things through education, research and service”.

Closing

In closing, thank you once again for joining us today. As an alumnus of NUS, I am delighted to have the opportunity to get to know you even better as fellow alumni and valued members of the NUS family. I look forward to your continuing support for NUS. Thank you and please have a very enjoyable lunch and day with us.