

**SPEECH BY PROF SHIH CHOON FONG,
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UNIVERSITY CULTURAL CENTRE**

Our Journey: Learn, Discover, and Serve

Award recipients

Guests

Colleagues and Friends

All in our community

Good evening and welcome to our inaugural University Awards.

A great university is measured by the contribution of members of its community to society, country and the world. This evening, we celebrate the achievements of award recipients from our community. We recognize and honor some among you – who have pursued and achieved excellence in education, research or service – with Outstanding Awards. We also present Young Researcher Awards to some colleagues who have made promising starts in their academic career. On behalf of the NUS community, I extend our heartfelt congratulations to all award recipients. We take pride in your perseverance, dedication and spirit to excel.

You inspire all of us.

Community of Scholars

Now, I would like to speak on our journey: to learn, to discover and to serve.

When you first began your academic career as a graduate student, you were driven by the desire to learn and to discover. Along the way, you affirmed your interests and strengths in the pursuit of knowledge. You then made a commitment to be part of a community of scholars on a lifelong journey of learning and discovery.

Why belong to a community? Here, I like to quote the former President of Cornell University, Frank Rhodes: “Without community, knowledge becomes idiosyncratic: the lone learner, studying in isolation, is vulnerable to narrowness, dogmatism, and untested assumptions, and learning misses out on being expansive and informed, contested by opposing interpretations, leavened by differing experience, and refined by alternative viewpoints. Without community, personal discovery is limited, not because the individual inquirer is any less creative or original than the group, but because his or her conclusions remain unchallenged and untested; private knowledge is knowledge lost.”

This observation is increasingly relevant in an era where knowledge has become a critical global commodity. Because talent creates knowledge, talent has become the foremost resource in today’s innovation-driven global economy. Talent begets talent. The recruitment and retention of talent is crucial to NUS in its mission to educate and develop even more talent, and to produce and utilize knowledge. Talent is highly mobile and

highly sought. Within this global talent pool, NUS competes for top talent along with other knowledge enterprises. The worldwide competitive recruitment and retention of talent is the hallmark of a global knowledge enterprise.

In order to recruit and retain top talent, NUS needs the support of the society in which it serves. In turn, the NUS community has the responsibility to serve country and society by training intelligent manpower and nurturing innovators and entrepreneurs. They will contribute towards wealth creation and economic growth. At the same time, NUS aims to be a wellspring of talent and expertise for country and society. By pursuing excellence in your respective areas of education, research and service, you – our award winners – are helping NUS fulfill its national and societal roles.

What distinguishes an award winner?

Let me begin with two observations. First, education and research are inherently reinforcing. Next, the opportunity to serve the community and society is a privilege.

Unity of Education and Research

Scholarship embodies the unity of education and research.

I believe that university education should go beyond the pursuit of established subject knowledge and examination grades. It is more than acquiring knowledge fragmented by disciplinary boundaries that limit intellectual development and place walls around the mind. Education

should combine rigorous academic study with the excitement of discovery. Learning should integrate theory, experimental/empirical tests, and applications. Just as important, learning must stimulate discourse across disciplinary boundaries and broaden intellectual horizons.

Dr Morris Chang, Chairman and CEO of Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC) spoke at this very venue in January 2002. He stressed the need for education to move away from a “stuffed-duck process” of forcing in content. Rather, education should involve the drawing out and nurturing of certain essential qualities: curiosity and creativity, critical and independent thinking, initiative and enterprising spirit. Education should also instill graduates with the confidence and stamina to meet challenges and rapidly changing situations in their lifelong journey of learning and discovery.

A university community naturally places a premium on discovery and creation of knowledge. Quoting Frank Rhodes: “Because as humans we need to know, we are driven to explore: we cannot tolerate the constraint of ignorance Creativity, scholarship, and research also provides: insight, experience, perspective, understanding ... a sense of linkage to things beyond ourselves and to reality beyond our immediate surroundings.”

Throughout history, research has expanded the boundary of knowledge and brought forth great practical benefits to society. As we enter this knowledge intensive era, the pursuit of scholarship promises to play an even larger role in creating wealth and opportunities, and improving the quality of life.

What I have just said provides the perspective for assessing education and research. Research excellence should have impact. Scholarly impact can be measured in terms of publications in journals, books, and other academic channels. As practiced in leading research universities, NUS's assessment of research impact incorporates external reviews by reputable scholars. Impact can also be measured by innovations and applications that advance technology, promote the professions and benefit society.

When imparting knowledge, university educators draw on their expertise and cumulative experience to foster the growth of students' intellect and the development of their abilities. Outstanding educators go beyond. They inspire students as well as help them develop their capabilities to the highest levels. Outstanding educators also influence and challenge peers in NUS and beyond on both curricular development and pedagogical methodology.

Ever so often, the finest scholarship pioneers uncharted domains, builds intellectual linkages across established disciplines and redefines the way of discovering and imparting knowledge. Learning can spark off new ideas for research, and in turn research can inject new insights into the learning experience. This is the unity of education and research.

Service as Societal Obligation

As we traverse this journey of learning and discovery, it is incumbent upon us to give something that is of value back to the community and society.

Service begins at home. Each of us has the responsibility to serve our community through active participation in its diverse range of activities. You add value to this endeavor through your specialized knowledge. Some among you may be called upon to serve in university management and academic governance. Some of our more distinguished colleagues may be called upon to serve our country and society.

Outstanding service draws upon one's expert knowledge and wide experience and goes beyond the call of duty. Such high level of service impacts the lives of many. Ultimately, outstanding service is driven by one's passion in the humane application of knowledge and professional expertise to address national and societal needs.

Community towards Excellence

What bonds us? I believe the pursuit of excellence and the desire to realize our full potential bond us as a community. But first, you need to identify your interests and strengths and develop your personal competitive advantage.

Some among you possess the gift to communicate ideas and concepts to students and the larger community in imaginative and compelling ways. Some have the talent to create new knowledge that could profoundly influence scholarship and society. Others have the ability to invent, innovate and take an idea to its fruition. Yet some among you have so distinguished yourselves in scholarship or in innovative

application of knowledge that you are also serving our country and beyond.

When each of you pursues excellence in your area of strength – education, research or service – you create the opportunity to realize your potential and to add value to NUS. Through the NUS community, your added value will be multiplied and, over time, extended to society. When every one of us adds value, the sum of our efforts propels this community to broader and higher levels of excellence in education, research and service.

Celebration

Members and friends of NUS, we gather here tonight to honor and celebrate the achievements of our award winners. Each award winner is an inspiration to us. Together, we share the responsibility to move this university forward. With vigor, imagination and an enterprising spirit, we strive towards building a great university.