

**Speech by NUS President Professor Tan Eng Chye  
at the NUS115 Distinguished Speaker Series  
Thursday, 3 December 2020  
Shaw Foundation Alumni House**

Mr Lawrence Wong, Minister for Education

Students, colleagues and alumni

Welcome to the NUS115 Distinguished Speaker Series event. I would especially like to thank Minister Wong for taking time off his busy schedule to grace the occasion as our inaugural Speaker.

2020 has been a tumultuous year for Singapore and the world, as we grapple with the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

For NUS, 2020 is especially significant, because it marks the 115<sup>th</sup> year of our founding in 1905. Unfortunately, this unprecedented pandemic has affected the series of celebratory events we had planned. The NUS115 Distinguished Speaker Series, was supposed to have commenced in the early part of the year.

Because of the stellar leadership, gumption and resolve of Singapore's Multi-Ministry Taskforce on COVID-19, the local situation is under good control, and some activities can now resume. And so, the NUS115 Distinguished Speaker Series can take off today - just in time in the final month of 2020.

On this note, I would like to express our gratitude to Minister Wong, Co-Chair of the Multi-Ministry Taskforce. We have all witnessed how intensely and tirelessly he has worked to keep us safe, and to preserve lives and livelihoods. All this, on top of a sizable National Development, and then Education portfolio. So thank you Minister Wong, we continue to depend on your good work!

The theme of NUS115 is “Shaping the Future”, which comes from the University’s’ vision statement – to be ‘a leading global university, shaping the future’

Throughout modern history, universities are regarded as esteemed institutions, and revered as beacons of knowledge and light. But the advent of ubiquitous content on the internet and the proliferation of online learning are game changers for higher education. Furthermore, COVID-19 has propelled an irreversible leap towards adopting digital technology in every aspect of our lives.

This has led to discourses on the role and value of university education in preparing graduates for the future. What and how should universities deliver education in an era where the shelf life of knowledge and skills is getting shorter? What are the pedagogies that can bring about the greatest learning value? What sort of learning environment motivates and challenges learners? What are the character traits and attributes we want to imbue in our students, so that they can seek and take on challenges, amidst change and complexity? What are the networking and social opportunities that universities should create?

Here at NUS, we do not have definitive answers to the questions. And this is a reflection of the complex world we are living in – multiple stakeholders, competing demands, and sometimes, inherent tensions. Nevertheless, as Singapore’s flagship university, NUS is committed to our role in nurturing graduates to their fullest potential, so that they are well-placed to advance in their careers and lead fulfilling lives, contributing to community, economy and society.

NUS has and will continue to be bold in educational innovations. Yale-NUS College for example, is the first liberal arts college in Singapore, offering a distinctive education that introduces students to the intellectual traditions and cultures of Asia and the world. The NUS Overseas College Programme is another example. The NOC programme gives budding student entrepreneurs the unique opportunity to be immersed in a dynamic entrepreneurial hub such as Shenzhen or Silicon Valley; students intern at a start-up, and take entrepreneurship courses at a partner university. There are now many pathways and possibilities at NUS.

Still, NUS will continue to push the boundaries; and I mean, the boundaries of disciplines. to take the lead in spearheading integrative, interdisciplinary education. Through interdisciplinary education, students will learn to harness and integrate knowledge, insights, skills and experiences across disciplines and environments. This expands the range of possibilities for perspectives and contributions that can come together; our students will then be able to shape richer, better and more informed solutions to complex problems.

“Shaping the Future of Education” is indeed, a timely and pertinent topic in this rapidly evolving education and economic landscape. Today, we are privileged to hear from the Minister for Education himself, who will be sharing his take on the future of education in Singapore, and perhaps, provide us with some aspirational pointers. Once again, thank you Minister Wong for your time, and I look forward to a lively session ahead. Thank you.