

Academy Matters

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By June 2011, the NUS Teaching Academy (TA) will be 2 years old. Established in April 2009 to serve as a think tank for educational matters for the university, the TA expanded from 18 fellows in 2009 to a total of 27 in 2010. In July 2011, we will be welcoming 7 new fellows. They are Mr Cheah Kok Ming, Prof Koh Khee Meng, A/P Joel Lee Tye Beng, A/P Alice Christudason, A/P Teofilo C Daquila, A/P Yap Von Bing and Prof Zhou Weibiao; making a total of 34 fellows.

The 2nd Executive Council members for AY 2010/2011 are:

Chair

A/P Erle CH Lim

Vice Chair

A/P Victor Tan

Members

A/P Helmer Aslaksen

Dr Johan Geertsema

Prof Seah Kar Heng

Ex-officio Members

Prof Tan Thiam Soon

Vice-Provost, Education

A/P Chng Huang Hoon

Director, CDTL

The TA, through its various platforms, shared expertise with colleagues; mentored and guided students; and conducted exchanges with the community on all kinds of educational issues. In this online issue of the *Academy Matters*, we would like to highlight some of the projects undertaken by fellows throughout this academic year.

Key Aspects of This Project

The Teaching and Learning Club (TLC) is an Outreach initiative of the Teaching Academy (TA). Some of our main aims are:

1. To discuss issues concerning Teaching and Learning in an open forum or in focus groups involving both faculty and students
2. Mentoring new faculty
3. Bringing the projects done by the Academy to the attention of the NUS community
4. Involving NUS faculty and students with the Academy

On the meeting involving faculty, thus far we have focused on the first of these aims in arranging discussions on technology-assisted learning. Our next meeting for faculty focused on the revisions to the teaching peer review procedures being proposed by the Peer Review sub-committee.

On the meeting involving students, we have organized a session on grading. Prior to that we have organized one on student feedback, the topic of the Student Feedback sub-committee, to seek students' views and pass them on to this sub-committee.

We have sought to involve NUS faculty and the students with the work being done by the Academy not only through these events, but also through a visit to the USP.

Notes of meetings held are posted on the TA website at <http://www.nus.edu.sg/teachingacademy/outreach.htm>

Project milestones and timelines

Date	Where
16 Sep 2010	TLC session for faculty: visit to USP
1 Oct 2010	TLC session for students focusing on student feedback (Yusof Ishak House, NUSSU Lounge)
18 Nov 2010	TLC session for faculty, focusing on technology-assisted learning (Physics Conference Room)
17 Feb 2011	TLC session for students, focusing on grading (Alumni House)
24 Mar 2011	TLC session for faculty to get feedback on the Teaching Academy Peer Review Sub-Committee's work (Physics Conference Room)

Sub-committee members

1. Sow Chorng Haur
2. Johan Geertsema



TLC student dialogue session at Alumni House on 17 Feb 2011.



TLC student dialogue session at YIH Plaza on 5 May 2010.



*TLC student dialogue session at NUS
Students' Lounge, YIH on 1 Oct 2010.*



What's Next?

1. We are considering setting up a Facebook group and making use of IVLE to disseminate information and advertise events more widely.
2. Organise a visit to Duke-NUS to learn more about problem-based learning.



*TLC student dialogue session at
Alumni House on 17 Feb 2011.*



Key Aspects of This Project

The *Journal of the NUS Teaching Academy* (JNUSTA) is a new international online journal expected to be launched in October 2011. JNUSTA seeks to **create and nurture a global network of academics and educators** who will discuss ongoing changes and future trends in tertiary education.

Objectives include:

1. Provision of a forum for educators from across the disciplines to showcase pedagogical innovations, present original research in teaching, assessment, and methodologies.
2. Showcasing pedagogical initiatives from NUS academics on an international stage.
3. Discussion of the teaching of core or life skills (such as critical thinking and communication skills; and issues of ethics and professionalism for example) that characterize a competent university graduate in a global economy.
4. Encouragement of dialogue between, and the interaction of, discipline-specific needs and approaches even as contributors pay attention to overarching debates in education today.
5. Provision of a platform for work resulting from academia-industry collaborations, where appropriate.



Project milestones and timelines

Date	Detail
Apr to Sep 2010	<p>The Editor in Chief, A/P Erle Lim (Department of Medicine), and his core group members held a couple of meetings to discuss the setting up of JNUSTA.</p> <p>Among the issues discussed were: the philosophy of the journal, the instructions to authors, themes for forthcoming issues and also identified people to serve on the Editorial Board and the Advisory Panel.</p>
Oct 2010	<p>The themes for the first four issues were identified:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Global citizenship • Communication skills • Innovations in education • Liberal arts education
Nov 2010	<p>JNUSTA's website was created @ http://www.nus.edu.sg/teachingacademy/jnusta</p> <p>The Editorial Board was expanded. The following members joined the Editorial Board: A/P Wu Siew Mei, A/P Cecilia Lim, A/P Rani Rubdy (NIE) and A/P Peter Looker (NTU).</p> <p>The Advisory Panel was set up. The following agreed to be on the Advisory Panel:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prof MS Ananth, Indian Institute of Technology, India • Prof Daniel J Bernstein, University of Kansas, USA • Prof Charles Graham, Brigham Young University, USA • Prof Ronald Harden, University of Dundee, UK • Prof Jonathan Jansen, University of the Free State, South Africa • Prof Carmel McNaught, The Chinese University of Hong Kong • Prof Ron Oliver, Edith Cowan University, Australia • Prof Leo Tan Wee Hin, NUS
Dec 2010	<p>Began receiving and reviewing submissions to the journal.</p>

Editorial Board

Editor in Chief

Erle CH Lim
Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, NUS

Deputy Editor

Johan Geertsema
University Scholars Programme, NUS

Members

Chng Huang Hoon
*Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, NUS
and Director, Centre for Development of
Teaching and Learning (CDTL), NUS*

Lakshminarayanan Samavedham
*Faculty of Engineering, NUS and
Deputy Director, CDTL, NUS*

Cecilia Lim
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, NUS

Peter Looker
*Centre for Excellence in Learning and
Teaching, NTU*

Rani Rubdy
National Institute of Education, NTU

Sow Chorng Haur
Faculty of Science, NUS

Wu Siew Mei
*Centre for English Language Communica-
tion, NUS*



What's Next?

The inaugural issue of JNUSTA is expected to be launched in October 2011. We will identify more themes for future issues, and with the inclusion of interesting, thought provoking, citeable articles – JNUSTA will continue to provide a forum for local and international articles that highlight pedagogical initiatives to drive improvements in teaching.

Goals

At the NUS, student feedback is used for both summative purposes (to assess the teacher) and formative purposes (to improve the teacher). Student feedback remains controversial. Some believe that it has limited value and is just a superficial popularity contest. Others believe that it is valuable, but that it depends on factors such as class size and level. In order to capture as much information as possible, it is important that we ask the right questions, and in order to derive as much information as possible, it is important that we have the right tools to analyse the data.

It is not realistic to expect that we can come up with a system that pleases everybody, but we have the following goals.

1. There has been a lot of research done on various aspects of student feedback. At the NUS there have for instance been careful studies of how to analyse the quantitative part (the written comments) and how to adjust for class size. We would like to point people to some of these studies and show them how they can use the tools and methods developed.
2. We would like the TA to help facilitate discussion of student feedback and to formulate proposals on how to improve it.
3. If the student feedback contained more information about the students, such as CAP, grade in the class, or estimated attendance rate, we could get a clearer picture of how different types of students perceive the instructor. This could be extremely valuable. It obviously raises privacy issues, but



at least for larger classes, it should be able to implement some such facilities.

4. It would be helpful if it was possible to access the raw data and do simple things such as removing outliers through a convenient user interface.

Framework

We believe that it will be beneficial to use the following framework when discussing student feedback.

1. The expectations and attitudes of the students.

In order for the student feedback to be useful, it is important that we understand what the students expect to come out of the feedback and that the students understand what we are looking for in the feedback and how we will use it.

2. The student feedback instrument.

There are many possible ways to improve the student feedback data.

- a. Do we want fewer or more questions? Some people feel that we only need one question, and that the specific questions just lead to survey fatigue, while others believe that the specific questions give more detailed information. However, in order for the average of the specific questions to give meaningful information, they have to be chosen in a careful way with careful weightage.
- b. Ask the students to indicate their level of attendance. In order to use this information properly, we would of course need to know why

some students are not attending, but it could still be interesting to know if there was any relationship between the level of attendance and the numerical score.

- c. Can we link to student grades and CAP? This raises some obvious confidentiality issues, but we could possibly implement a software that does not allow queries that could identify a group of less than for example five students.
 - d. Allow for more than one nomination for the best teacher. Presently it is hard to get nominations if you teach the same group of students as a great teacher.
 - e. Collect responses from alumni and senior students. The attitudes of the students may change over the years, and it would be interesting to see who they liked best at the end of their studies. Maybe they change their view of the lecturers from their first years? A simple thing would be to ask for nominations for the best teachers the student has had while at NUS.
3. **Analysis of the data.** There is software available to analyse and profile the written comments. It may be possible to introduce a program for performing more detailed analysis of the raw numerical scores. This could make it possible to perform tasks such as removing outliers and relating scores with grades, CAP and attendance.
 4. **Use of student feedback.** The student feedback is supposed to serve both summative and formative purposes. Most teachers only read their own Student Feedback, and may not really know how they compare and what to expect. It could be useful to have samples of comments for various types of teachers available. Many teachers also do now know what the people involved in promotions and tenure and teaching awards look for, and it could be useful to make this available.

A recurring question is how to compare student feedback from small and large classes. Statistical studies have been done to analyse the relationship between class size and numerical scores, but this is a complex issue and related to how the feedback is used for assessment.

Sub-committee members

1. Helmer Aslaksen (Chair)
2. Goh Say Song
3. Alex Ip Yuen Kwong
4. Daphne Pan
5. Seah Kar Heng
6. Sow Chorng Haur
7. Victor Tan



What's Next?

1. Meet with CIT to discuss whether the changes indicated here can technically be implemented.
2. Organise feedback sessions with FTECs, staff and students to find out what their expectations and concerns are.
3. Make some of the relevant studies available to the NUS community.
4. Formulate a proposal to the Teaching Academy, and eventually to the PVO.



Key Aspects of This Project

It has been observed that Teaching Peer Reviews (PRs) conducted at the NUS have not in general met the objective of distinguishing between average and truly excellent teachers for the purpose of promotion and tenure, teaching awards and re-appointment. Quantitative scores for the vast majority of PRs conducted at the University tended to be 4 and above, and qualitative comments have been found to be generally lacking or not sufficiently insightful.

Objectives include:

1. To review and improve the current PR procedure
2. To review and improve the current PR form
3. To look into the feasibility of separating summative and formative PR



What's Next?

1. After gathering feedback from the teaching community, the sub-committee will have further meetings and discussions to propose options for the revision of the current PR procedure.
2. Paper on review and proposed changes to the PR procedure to be submitted to the PVO.

Sub-committee members

1. Chan Wai Meng (Chair)
2. Victor Tan (Co-Chair)
3. Farooq Shamsuzzaman
4. Johan Geertsema
5. Narayanan Ganapathy
6. Lim Lum Peng
7. Tan Kay Chen

Project milestones and timelines

Date	Detail
Mar 2010	The Peer Review sub-committee was formed
24 May 2010	Convened a meeting with FTEC members from various faculties
11 Oct 2010	Held a dialogue session with Prof Dan Bernstein (CDTL's Educator-in-Residence 2010)
Jan 2011	Completed the first draft of a revised PR form
Feb 2011	Completed the first draft of a revised PR procedure
21 Mar 2011	Launched an anonymous online survey directed at the NUS teaching community
24 Mar 2011	Hosted a TLC meeting dedicated to discussion of the proposed revisions to PR

Key Aspects of This Project

This new initiative was launched in late 2010. The objectives include:

- To seek and identify ways in which IT can be used to improve teaching and learning in NUS.
- To study trends in IT or current and future technologies that may be harnessed or developed for future pedagogical innovations in NUS.
- To craft a position paper for IT-based learning at NUS and UTown for enhanced learning.



What's Next?

Identified mobile technology as a possible innovation to focus on. As people are accessing the Internet from mobile devices and using them as their first choice for online access, mobile technology merits close attention as an emerging technology for teaching and learning – the group will examine the feasibility of using mobile devices to develop teaching and assessment tools.

Sub-committee members

- Erle Lim Chuen Hian (Chair)
- Farooq Shamsuzzaman
- Lakshminarayanan Samavedham
- Bernard Tan
- Victor Tan
- Ravi Chandran
- Ong Chin Hwa

Project milestones and timelines

Date	Detail
23 Nov 2010	The core group comprising A/P Erle CH Lim (Group Leader), Prof Bernard Tan, Prof Farooq Shamsuzzaman, A/P Victor Tan, and A/P Laksh Samavedham held their first meeting to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Explore what is available in NUS and what other universities around the world are doing in terms of IT. Identify more like-minded people to serve on the committee.
Mar 2011	Invited Mr Ravi Chandran, Director of CIT and Mr Ong Chin Hwa, Senior Associate Director, Computer Centre to join the committee
	To explore and develop mobile technology (iphone, ipad and symbian) to improve teaching and assessment in NUS.

— Masterclass Speaker Series —

In September 2011, the Teaching Academy will launch its *Masterclass Speaker Series*, starting with Educational Psychologist and Emeritus Professor from Stanford University, Professor Lee Shulman. Prof Shulman, former President of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, will be visiting the Academy and NUS for a week. The Academy will be announcing the details of his visit closer to the time of the visit.

“Research begins in wonder and curiosity but ends in teaching” - Lee Shulman



Key Aspects of This Project

This series of case studies aims to provide concrete accounts of how different NUS academics have encountered and overcome challenges in the course of their careers, and how they have dealt with the mistakes that they have made. What decisions and actions did they take when confronted with difficult situations and dilemmas? What opportunities were they able to seize? How aware were they of their strengths and weaknesses? Would they have done things differently with the benefit of hindsight? These case studies do not, of course, aim to provide the only right answers to questions and dilemmas that typically confront the NUS academic. What they do is to give examples of how various academics at NUS have navigated their careers through often difficult situations. Their aim is to provoke new academics to reflect on their own values, where they would like to go, and how to get there; and more experienced academics to reflect on where they have been, where they should be going next, and how they can be of service to their less experienced colleagues.

Sub-committee members

1. Kenneth Paul Tan (Leader)
2. Daphne Pan
3. Lakshminarayanan Samavedham

This 3-member sub-committee completed two case studies in January 2011, showcasing two senior NUS academicians — Prof Andy Hor and Prof Bernard Tan. The series is called the *Academic Journeys*.

Case Studies

Osmosis and Balance in the Professorial Vocation: A Profile of Professor Andy Hor

Academic Journeys, no. 1, January 2011

Written by Kenneth Paul Tan

Interviewed by Chng Huang Hoon, Lakshminarayanan Samavedham, and Kenneth Paul Tan

Available at: <http://www.nus.edu.sg/teachingacademy/acadjourneys/AcadJourney-1-AndyHor.pdf>

Running The Professorial Marathon, Taking Risks Along The Way: A Profile of Professor Bernard Tan

Academic Journeys, no. 2, January 2011

Written by Kenneth Paul Tan

Interviewed by Chng Huang Hoon, Lakshminarayanan Samavedham, and Kenneth Paul Tan

Available at: <http://www.nus.edu.sg/teachingacademy/acadjourneys/AcadJourney-2-BernardTan.pdf>