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# Defending our way of life

COL Yong Wei Hsiung shares how a military profession is more than a job



Growing up, Colonel (COL) Yong Wei Hsiung did not initially plan on joining the Republic of Singapore Navy (RSN).

But all that changed when he was undergoing Basic Military Training as part of his National Service.

Recalling a sleepless night during field camp, COL Yong, 38, says: "I started to ask myself what it meant to be serving National Service, and correspondingly, what it meant to be Singaporean."

"The more I probed, the more I realised how much I was grateful for, how much there was worth defending."

"I remember thinking about my platoon mates and deciding that there would be enough doctors, lawyers, engineers and bankers among them."

"That night, I decided that I would serve my country in uniform."

## Securing the future

Under The Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) Scholarship (previously known as the SAF Overseas Scholarship), COL Yong pursued Science, Technology and International Affairs at Georgetown University in the United States.

His education — coupled with Master's degrees in international policy studies and in management from Stanford University — and experience gained from myriad roles he has undertaken enabled him to take on senior leadership roles and chart the future of the RSN.

Previously, as Head of Naval Plans Department, he oversaw the development and delivery of future warfighting concepts and capabilities for the RSN.

"You really need to be able to think long-term and build enough future growth potential in our systems to enable the Navy to stay relevant to Singapore's current and future defence needs," COL Yong explains.

Today, as Deputy Commander of the Maritime Security Task Force (MSTF), he oversees the RSN's daily operations to safeguard Singapore's sovereignty and ensure our waters are safe for the free flow of trade that sustains Singapore's economy and our way of life.

## Multifaceted career

A career in the SAF is not meant to be a cushy one — you get different roles that will push you out of your comfort zone and help you grow.

"The highlight of my career was when I was the Commanding Officer of RSS *Intrepid*, one of our stealth frigates."

"The sense of independence and satisfaction commanding 3,000 tons of fighting fury and sailing over the horizon

for various missions and exercises with a crew of highly trained young men and women is indescribable," says COL Yong.

Besides shipboard experiences, he has also previously served in MINDEF's Defence Policy Office, where he managed defence relations with other countries; and the Naval Operations Department, where he was responsible for the Navy's day-to-day operations.

He also had the opportunity to be deployed to Iraq, in support of post-war multinational reconstruction efforts.

"It never gets dull as you move through different appointments, managing different aspects of Singapore's defence needs."

"It can be challenging being always thrown into unfamiliar environments, but I overcame these often steep learning curves by being humble — to always be willing to learn, listen and ask questions," he says.

## More than a job

The peace and security of Singapore can never be taken for granted — a point that COL Yong knows all too well.

He remembers an occasion where Singapore's maritime rights were being challenged, and his ship had to face off against three foreign warships in the area.

He says: "As a small country, these are the odds we will always face. We must be exceptional every day — so Singaporeans can rely on us and sleep soundly knowing the SAF will always be there for them."

For him, being part of the SAF is more than a job.

"This is our home. This unique jewel by the sea deserves defending so that Singaporeans from all walks of life can live, not in fear or uncertainty, but in confidence of their place and ability in the world to fulfil their dreams, whatever they may be," he says.

# Leadership powered by purpose

LTC Muhammad Helmi's philosophy is to make his men not just better soldiers, but better fathers, brothers and sons too

Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) Muhammad Helmi has two families.

The first is his family bound by blood; the one that loves and supports him unconditionally, even when his profession requires him to be away from them, for prolonged durations at times.

The other is his family bound by brotherhood; the one he was sworn into when he enlisted in the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF).

As the Commanding Officer (CO) of the 4th Battalion, Singapore Infantry Regiment (4 SIR), he relishes the responsibility for the training and well-being of almost 600 soldiers.

No two days are ever alike: LTC Helmi's experiences range from leading men in physical training, orchestrating complex manoeuvres

in harsh jungle terrain; keeping the men sharp and ready for operational duties.

Beyond the daily grind of soldiering, he has also led the unit to organise large-scale operations such as the ASEAN Defence Senior Officials' Meeting and National Day Parade.

But the best part of his job is being able to exert a positive influence on his soldiers. Even witnessing small changes like his soldiers learning to care about one another's welfare before their own fills the 35-year-old with pride.

The 4 SIR command team collectively believe in their shared vision of not just producing a fighting unit of operationally capable soldiers, but also to imbue them with values that will make them good citizens, sons, husbands and fathers.

LTC Helmi stresses: "The military profession is one that is bound by duty; a yearning to serve the nation and to defend this island of ours and our loved ones at all costs."

"I believe strongly in that notion. Each day, we must endeavour to realise that vision."

## Honour-bound, duty-bound

Becoming a regular in the SAF was LTC Helmi's way of answering a calling that he had since young — that of joining the public service.

With the SAF Merit Scholarship, he pursued a Bachelor of Science in Chemical



Engineering at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign in the United States, and later a Master of Philosophy in Advanced Chemical Engineering at Cambridge University in the United Kingdom.

Since his return to the SAF, he was rotated through a number of appointments — including Platoon Commander in Officer Cadet School, Officer Commanding in 4 SIR, and Head of Training Plans in Army Headquarters — before enrolling in a one-year Master's programme at the US Marine Corps Command and Staff College in the Marine Corps University.

With his Master of Military Studies in hand, he returned to 4 SIR as its CO, with an even

stronger sense of his mission.

He says: "As a recipient of the SAF Merit Scholarship, I must embody the ideals and values of a military professional — to lead by example, to demonstrate fighting spirit, courage and resilience in the face of challenges, to care for the people I lead, and to transmit these values to them."

"The soldiers we lead, the peers and superiors we work with — I see them as an extension of my family," says LTC Helmi. "As such, I do not see my duties as work; I am always surrounded by my family."

And who would not want the best for his family?

# Not every hero wears a cape

ME5 Kok Khew Fai shares how the SAF Engineering Scholarship presents an opportunity to be both a leader and an engineer

For Military Expert 5 (ME5) Kok Khew Fai, 30, his experience during his full-time National Service (NS) motivated him to join the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF).

In 2007, as a Platoon Commander in Basic Military Training Centre, one of his trainees accidentally released a grenade too early during a live throw.

As the grenade landed behind them, ME5 Kok instinctively pushed his trainee down and shielded him from the grenade blast. His actions earned him the SAF Medal for Distinguished Act.

"I enjoyed the strong sense of camaraderie in the SAF — going through challenges with my peers and helping one another. I am also inspired by the officers whose professionalism and leadership helped to bring out the best in me," he says.



ME5 Kok (far right) is responsible for the maintenance of the F-16 aircraft to meet the Air Force's operational and training requirements.

## Safe flights, safe skies

A love for aviation and his interest in mathematics and physics spurred him to join the Republic of Singapore Air Force (RSAF) as an Air Force Engineer.

With the SAF Engineering Scholarship, he went on to pursue a Master of Engineering in Aeronautical Engineering from Imperial College London in the United Kingdom.

Upon his return from studies, he was offered

plenty of opportunities to interact and work with colleagues from different parts of the SAF.

"This broadened my horizons to understand strategic challenges that Singapore and the SAF face," he says.

He has served in various appointments including a staff role in RSAF Headquarters where he was involved in the long-term strategic planning for the Air Force's engineering capabilities. He was also the

Officer-In-Charge in a squadron, where he led a team to maintain the F-16 fighter aircraft's propulsion system.

Now, ME5 Kok is the Officer Commanding of the Integrated Maintenance Flight in his squadron, responsible for the servicing and maintenance of the F-16 aircraft to meet the Air Force's operational and training requirements.

"It is a role where we are constantly challenged to solve engineering problems, to prioritise and reallocate resources in a timely manner to ensure that the aircraft is safe to fly," he says.

There were times he had doubts when the tasks were daunting. But he found strength in his team, knowing that they always had one another's backs and that he would not face his challenges alone.

He says the most important aspect of his job is the people.

"People are at the heart of the organisation. Once you take good care of them and ensure they are well-trained, competent and committed, they will take care of the mission," he adds.

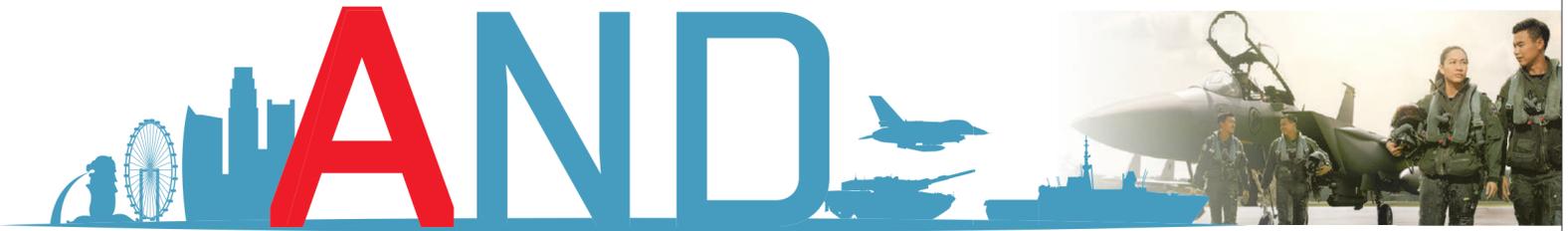
In his view, this focus on leading and developing the people under his charge is what sets the career of an Air Force Engineer apart from other engineering jobs.

For those considering a career with the SAF, he advises: "If you are looking for an enriching, challenging career in a dynamic environment, for a higher purpose like protecting your loved ones, then you should consider joining the SAF."

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# L SERVE AND DEFEND



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# It's not only 'Police and Thief'

For DSP Wong Keng Hoe, a police officer's multi-faceted role ranges from investigating crime to saving lives and offering solace



When he was young, he never thought of becoming a police officer, says Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP) Wong Keng Hoe, 28.

"My only impression of the police was based on TV shows and movies," he recalls.

It was only after he won a Singapore Police Force (SPF) Book Prize in junior college (JC) in 2008 that he found his calling.

The prize was awarded to outstanding JC2 students in recognition of their excellent academic and co-curricular activity achievements, and the rewards included visits to various Police and Home Team units.

DSP Wong says: "During the visits, I learnt about the seedier underbelly of our country and was particularly impressed with the dedication of SPF officers in maintaining Singapore's high standards of safety and security."

"I decided that few careers would offer as much meaning and challenge as the SPF and applied for the scholarship after that."

## Honing multi-disciplinary skills

With the SPF Scholarship (SPFS), he pursued a Bachelor of Arts in Economics from the University of Chicago and a Master of Science in Operations Research from Columbia University.

He chose to study economics and statistics as he could foresee the applications of data analytics in the SPF, especially in optimising routes for police patrols and in predictive policing.

After graduating in 2013, he began his training at the Home Team Academy before being posted to Tanglin Division as a patrol officer and Investigation Officer (IO) to learn the ropes.

Two years later, he served as a staff officer in the SPF Operations Department, helping to develop policies on the use of force and the equipping of ground officers.

Currently, he is the Commanding Officer of Marine Parade Neighbourhood Police Centre (NPC), where he leads a team of about 100 officers to ensure the safety and security of the residents.

"My duties include deploying patrol officers on the ground, investigating crimes and working with the community to develop preventive measures."

"I am also responsible for leading joint operations and managing sensitive incidents within the jurisdiction," DSP Wong explains.

## Adding a human touch

In the course of his career, DSP Wong discovered that the role of the Police was not just about putting criminals behind bars.

He recalls: "A very significant case I experienced as an IO was dealing with the accidental drowning of a foreign worker along Clarke Quay."

"Through the investigations, I discovered that the worker had only recently started working in Singapore to seek a better life for his family and newborn son back home."

"The news of his drowning devastated my family. After the investigations were completed, I worked with his country's embassy for his family members to travel here and take his body home."

The incident taught him that the police also play an important role in providing closure and solace to families and victims.

Although police officers have the challenging duty of being on call for urgent incidents at any time, DSP Wong is motivated by the tangible impact of the SPF's work on the community, and the camaraderie among his team.

"For me, the meaning and satisfaction of bringing a perpetrator to justice or saving a life is unrivalled. The opportunity to make a difference in the lives of others is very important to me."

"Our officers also have strong camaraderie and genuine concern for each other, which have been vital in pulling through long operations and deployments together," he says.

# Keeping the streets safe

A mid-term scholarship with the Singapore Police Force enabled environmental engineering undergraduate Boh Ping Hui to embark on a career in law enforcement

Finding your true calling in life can come in the most unexpected of ways.

For Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP) Boh Ping Hui, 31, his stint as a Neighbourhood Police Centre (NPC) officer made him realise his passion was in law enforcement.

He says: "I served my National Service in the Singapore Police Force (SPF), as an NPC officer in Clementi NPC."

"During my reservist duty, I spoke with my NPC's Commanding Officer Tan Mei Fer, who encouraged me to join the Singapore Police Force. She also provided me with a clearer picture of what a career in the SPF would be like."

Thanks to the additional advice from his former team leader from Clementi NPC, he applied for a scholarship with the SPF while he was pursuing a degree in environmental engineering at the National University of Singapore.

Using his university results to apply for the scholarship as a mid-term scholar, he was awarded the Home Affairs Uniformed Services Local Merit Scholarship.

## Great progression path

After graduating, he went through a nine-month basic course in the Home Team Academy, which included physical training and learning essential knowledge of Singapore laws and procedures.

This equipped him with the skills needed for his subsequent posting for the next two years as an Investigation Officer (IO) in Clementi Division.

Following this, he was selected to be a team leader for the pioneer batch of the Emergency Response Team (ERT) in Jurong Division, a role he served in for another two years.

## Success through teamwork

DSP Boh found the physical aspects of the job a little tough at first, but his supportive team helped him to overcome this challenge.

He says: "After I was picked to be an ERT team leader, the training that I had to go through was physically demanding. My officers took me to the gym, trained with me and encouraged me."

In the process, he learnt to tap on the strengths of other people, identify and work on his weaknesses and to stay humble, knowing that there are always new things to learn from others.

He appreciates that the scholarship gave him the opportunity to experience a wide spectrum of job roles within the SPF.

He says: "Being a scholar, I was entrusted with projects that gave me the opportunities to work with external agencies and to also network with scholars from other departments. These projects and connections helped to develop me beyond my main role and job scope."

DSP Boh is currently on a staff posting as a Doctrine Officer in the Training and Capability Development Department of the SPF.

It is responsible for aligning the strategic directions of all training matters in SPF, and his duties include developing, maintaining and reviewing training-related knowledge documents.

He says: "Being a police officer is not an easy career to pursue. Hence, you must truly believe in the SPF's mission to prevent, deter and detect crime before embarking on this journey."

"However, the work can be rewarding in other ways, such as knowing that you are contributing to the world-class safety and security of Singapore."



# Crime scene investigator in action

Ensuring Singapore's safety is all in a day's work for Investigation Officer Esther Koh

Ms Esther Koh took a gap year after completing junior college to figure out what she wanted to do, although she was certain that she wanted to join the civil service.

She recalls: "I wanted to be able to perform a job that would allow me to interact with the community, give back to people and hopefully make life better for them. But I didn't want to do it from behind a desk."

"When I looked at all the options available during the gap year, the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Singapore Police Force (SPF) was a natural choice."

In 2013, she was awarded the Singapore Government Scholarship (Police).

Spurred by her interest in understanding human interaction and behaviour, she pursued a degree in psychology at University College London and graduated in 2016.

She believed that it would complement her service in the SPF by helping her gain a better understanding of the people around her.

The scholarship was fundamental in preparing her for her eventual roles in the SPF as she had the opportunity to be attached to different departments during her summer vacations and gain exposure to the different aspects of Police work.

## Having each other's backs

Now 25, Assistant Superintendent of Police (ASP) Koh is an Investigation Officer (IO) with the SPF.

Since joining the Force in 2016, she has undergone nine months of training in the Home Team Academy.

She became a Ground Response Force (GRF) officer at Toa Payoh Neighbourhood Police Centre (NPC) for six months before assuming the role of an IO at Tanglin Division.

ASP Koh quickly realised that ensuring

Singapore's safety and security is a team effort.

After an incident is reported and investigation is required, the work of an IO could involve visiting neighbours, examining the areas around the incident location for better spatial understanding, viewing closed-circuit television cameras and processing forensics with the help of crime scene specialists.

"Both GRF officers and IOs work in shifts," she says. "When a 999 call is received, the GRF officers will attend to the incident first and conduct the initial ground inquiries. If there is a need for further investigations, IOs take over from there."

Knowing that her individual efforts play a role in keeping Singapore safe fills her with pride. However, the sense of camaraderie and team spirit among officers is also a big part of her job in the SPF.

She recounts an occasion when a subject had been arrested for theft at 6pm on a Friday evening, just as her teammates were getting ready to leave for the day. As an IO, she would have to recover the stolen property.

"Without having to ask twice, my teammates just asked what time and where, and if I needed someone to drive. They only left the station at about 10.30pm that night."

ASP Koh holds this incident close to her heart. "It has taught me to pay it forward in whatever manner, whenever possible," she says.

No two days are ever alike for her, but she has never had second thoughts about her choice.

She says: "Deciding what to do after university can be intimidating, but the SPF scholarship provided me with so much support to prepare me for the job that I have never looked back and asked 'what if?'"



PHOTOS: SINGAPORE POLICE FORCE



**HOW KWANG HWEE**  
DIRECTOR OPERATIONS

**TAN YONG LIANG**  
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR  
(INVESTIGATION DEVELOPMENT),  
JOINT OPERATIONS GROUP, MHA

**JONATHAN AU YONG KOK KONG**  
SENIOR MANAGER (SAFETY & SECURITY),  
POLICY DEVELOPMENT DIVISION, MHA

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SWEETSPOT PARTNER CONTENT

It is really satisfying to know that my actions bring happiness and have a positive impact on someone's life. It gives me joy to see my patients getting better and on the way to achieving their goals.

MS NG LI BING  
prosthetist and orthotist  
Tan Tock Seng Hospital



PHOTO: TED CHEN

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**As a prosthetist and orthotist, Ms Ng Li Bing helps her patients to regain their loss of mobility**

BY MICHELLE BONG

**M**s Ng Li Bing's childhood ambition was to be a shoe salesperson.

The idea of looking through shoeboxes to search for the appropriate sizes for people appealed to her. Also, her mother used to emphasise the importance of having a comfortable and well-fitting pair of shoes to "conquer" the journeys in life.

But the 24-year-old has since found her calling as a prosthetist and orthotist at Tan Tock Seng Hospital's Foot Care and Limb Design Centre.

The Healthcare Merit Award scholarship recipient has been working there since receiving her Bachelor of Applied Science and Master of Clinical Prosthetics and Orthotics from La Trobe University last year.

As a prosthetist, her main responsibilities are prescribing, designing and fitting custom prostheses (artificial limbs) for patients who have had amputation surgery or are born without limbs.

As an orthotist, she assesses, designs and fits suitable orthoses (braces) to patients who require support to their weakened or poor functioning joints or limbs.

**Framework for motivation**

Interestingly, her father is her career inspiration.

"He is a frame-maker and I am always in awe when I see him turn unattractive pieces of wood into beautiful frames for photographs.

"I find it very similar to what a prothetist and orthotist does — which is building a frame for an individual so that he or she can lead a more normal life."

Ms Ng is thankful for her scholarship, which has given her the opportunity to interact with scholars from different disciplines.

Along the way, she has come to know and understand how the specific duties of various allied health professions enable them to provide the best patient-centred care as part of a multi-disciplinary team.

She also finds job fulfilment in caring for her patients.

"During the first year of my career, I worked with my first bilateral below-knee amputee patient since graduation.

"The first thing he wanted to do when he first stood up (on his prostheses) was to take a photo with his family. That was such a touching moment. It made me grateful to be able to pursue such a meaningful career.

"It is really satisfying to know that my actions can bring happiness and have a positive impact on someone's life. It gives me joy to see my patients getting better and on the way to achieving their goals.

"Most importantly, the bonds we share mean a lot to me as well."



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# Image of health

**Radiographer Nur Ruzanna Maznin helps shine the spotlight on her field in the healthcare sector**

BY HAFIZ RASID

To outsiders, Ms Nur Ruzanna Maznin's job as a radiographer may seem like a far cry from her initial dream of becoming a teacher. But that could not be further from the truth.

A recipient of the National Healthcare Group's Health Science & Nursing Scholarship, she is fulfilling her childhood ambition, albeit in a different capacity.

"I've always wanted to be a teacher since I was a child. I would role-play at home being a teacher in heels, teaching on my whiteboard. I enjoyed sharing my knowledge and giving tips on how to do things."

Today, the 25-year-old is a radiographer at the department of diagnostic radiology at Khoo Teck Puat Hospital (KTPH).

To share with potential radiographers about the field that she loves, she has been giving talks at Anderson Serangoon Junior College for the past two years.

"I feel that radiography is still quite unknown and not as popular as other allied health professionals. I wanted the students to know about our contribution to the healthcare team, and the cool things we do on a typical day," she explains.

Through these talks, she hopes students will understand how important radiography is in the overall health and wellness management of patients in a hospital setting, and how a scholarship would help them in their education journey.

**Worry-free education**

Ms Nur Ruzanna could not have landed her scholarship at a better time.



PHOTO: TED CHEN

After her father was retrenched in 2010, she wanted to be self-sufficient and finance her own education.

She was awarded the Health Science & Nursing Scholarship before she was even accepted into Nanyang Polytechnic for her Diploma in Diagnostic Radiography in 2012.

The sponsorship covered her three-year diploma education at Nanyang Polytech-

nic and the one-year degree conversion programme, Bachelor in Science in Diagnostic Radiography (joint degree programme with The University of Dublin and Singapore Institute of Technology).

"I'm happy that I didn't have to depend on my family financially anymore after junior college. I didn't mind the bond as it means job security. So it was a win-win for me.

"Being in the healthcare industry also means stability. Even when there's an economic crisis, everyone still needs healthcare."

**Great work-life balance**

Her role as a radiographer at the department of diagnostic radiology in Khoo Teck Puat Hospital sees her taking X-rays for patients from outpatient clinics, inpatient wards, as well as Accident and Emergency department. She also performs ultrasound scans.

The work-life balance that being a radiographer affords her is much appreciated by Ms Nur Ruzanna. Once she finishes her shift, she can enjoy her plans outside of work, with friends and family.

But that does not mean that her job is repetitive and boring. At KTPH, she enjoys the job rotation between X-ray and ultrasound, as well as inpatient and outpatient settings.

"The rotation stops the mundane cycle so that I can look forward to doing something different and not dread going to work."

"Radiography itself is not a boring job. We see many types of patients of different ages, physical and internal body structures and pathologies every day."

For someone who loves connecting with people, another perk of her job is communicating with her patients while on duty. She finds that those interactions can be therapeutic for the patients.

"I enjoy listening to the patients' random life stories as I perform their ultrasound scans. Sometimes they share invaluable advice that I am grateful for. Sometimes they share sad stories while I lend a listening ear, just so that they can feel better," she adds.

**I enjoy listening to the patients' random life stories as I perform their ultrasound scans. Sometimes they share invaluable advice that I am grateful for. Sometimes they share sad stories, while I lend a listening ear, just so that they can feel better.**

**MS NUR RUZANNA MAZNIN**  
radiographer  
department of diagnostic radiology  
Khoo Teck Puat Hospital



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Gaming and anime enthusiast Issac Ting Quan Xian, 26, recalls that as a teen, he was a science stream student with his heart set on becoming an engineer.

However, during his national service (NS) days, he found himself at a crossroads.

"I had a lot of time during NS to think about what I really wanted to do for my career," he says.

It was then that he decided to pursue his passion instead.

His love for playing video games — ranging from Darksiders to League of Legends — and a desire to create his own games inspired him to make a life-changing decision to enrol in Nanyang Technological University's School of Art, Design and Media.

Meanwhile he also applied for a scholarship offered by the Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA). Now known as the Singapore Digital (SG:D) Scholarship, it supported his studies for a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Art, Design and Media, majoring in Interactive Media.

He says: "I chose this scholarship because it offered me opportunities to reach out to technology companies like Singtel that I would be interested in."

## PLAYING AN EVOLVING ROLE

After graduating in 2018, he worked as an experience designer, creating user-centric designs for the various digital products at Singtel, which co-sponsored his scholarship.

He says his scholarship has helped to connect him to people who have contributed to his career development.

"I interacted with seniors who have taken the same path as me and also received guidance from the company to find a place that will suit my skills," he says.

"I was fortunate enough to get a role that allows me to bridge the gap between design and development, which essentially helps to improve the overall experience of the users.

"Thanks to this arrangement, I also found co-workers who are passionate and driven to create better services for our users," he adds.

He continues to learn every day.

"In the infocomm media industry, you need to have a growth mindset.

"You need to be able to accept that you might not have all the answers, that the things that you are familiar with now might change because of design convention, as well as technology and structural changes.

"I realised that it is important to be open and resilient to change."

Just like his passion for playing games, he also enjoys problem-solving, the challenge of finding ways to create new designs and pursuing his technical understanding of user experience design.

He says: "I find a lot of joy in my work. I think where I want to be is creating things that are gratifying and meaningful for people to use every day."



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# Engaging people in therapeutic activities

Occupational therapist Yip You Ming enjoys coming up with creative ways to engage her patients

BY GEL CABOTAJE

Taking care of patients is more than an occupation — it is a vocation.

For occupational therapist Yip You Ming, she found her calling during her teenage years.

"I feel that occupational therapy matches my interests and allows me to be creative in my interventions," the 24-year-old says. "It is interesting as it looks at individuals as multifaceted and holistic beings."

A recipient of the MOH Holdings' Healthcare Merit Award, Ms Yip obtained a Bachelor of Science in Occupational Therapy after studying three years at Nanyang Polytechnic and her fourth year at Singapore Institute of Technology-Trinity College Dublin.

The scholarship is awarded to outstanding students who are passionate about public healthcare.

Since graduating in 2017, Ms Yip has already had her fair share of career highlights.

Now an occupational therapist at Sengkang General Hospital, she shares some of the best parts of pursuing this job:

### Playing an active role in patient care

Ms Yip attends to patients with different conditions such as dementia and stroke.

"I assess their ability to perform daily activities such as

dressing and showering themselves, managing money and community mobility and work towards achieving their goals with them."

She sees patient care as a top priority of her job.

"At the end of the day, we want to ensure that the patient is safe within and beyond the hospital," she says.

### Different forms of therapy

"I started work as an occupational therapist two years ago and I believe I have been given many opportunities to showcase my skills and interests," Ms Yip says.

For one, she has been assigned to plan the hospital's Occupational Therapy Day on Jan 10, 2020.

Recently, she has also taken the initiative to start therapeutic horticulture in the hospital, which uses gardening or other plant-related activities as a form of therapy.

Being a scholar has also helped her grow in her career.

"The scholarship department organised a meet-up session with senior scholars to share about their challenges at work, and I think that helped me greatly in shaping my perspective and feel reassured that I am not alone in this journey and is well-supported."

Outside hospital work, she volunteers her time for the



PHOTO: TED CHEN

I feel that occupational therapy matches my interests and allows me to be creative in my interventions. It is interesting as it looks at individuals as multifaceted and holistic beings.

MS YIP YOU MING  
occupational therapist  
Sengkang General Hospital

elderly at Calvary Community Care, where she helps to organise events for seniors to stay active in the community.

### Bearing witness to patients' milestones

For Ms Yip, the most memorable day in her career so far is seeing a patient with dementia light up when they performed doll therapy for the first time.

"Doll therapy helps individuals

with dementia reminisce about their role as a mother and their experiences with child-rearing, and it can be used to improve patients' moods and encourage more activity," she explains.

"I was glad that it was a success and that her family was open and supportive in continuing the therapy at home.

"It made me feel proud of my profession and the creative ways we use to engage patients," she adds.

# A little help from friends

A career in social work is not easy, but the support Ms Teo Jie Ting receives from her colleagues and the fulfilment from helping others keep her going

BY BRYANT CHAN

Out of the many things she's learnt in her career as a social worker, one particular lesson stands out to Ms Teo Jie Ting — that it is okay to ask for help.

A recipient of MOH Holdings' Healthcare Merit Award, she graduated from the National University of Singapore in 2018 with a Bachelor of Social Services with Honours in Social Work, bolstered by a history of volunteer work with various organisations.

Nonetheless, when she first started out in the Medical Social Services team at Ng Teng Fong

General Hospital last year, she felt like she could do nothing right.

Adjusting to working life was made even harder by her lack of familiarity with the hospital systems, and not a single day passed without a scolding from a patient or one of their family members for her inexperience. She often doubted if she was suited to be a social worker.

But every time she felt like giving up, her mind flitted back to the incident that inspired her to be a social worker in the first place.

When she was working with latchkey children, one particular situation stood out to her.

One of the women she was working with wanted to find employment to support her family, but could not do so because she had to remain at home to take care of her elderly mother.

When Ms Teo mentioned this to her superior, she was told that a social worker might be able to help. Knowing little about social work, she started reading up on the field.

"I realised that I wanted to make helping others my job," she says. "That's when I knew I wanted to pursue a degree in social work."

The initial adjustment period was tough, she admits. But it was her colleagues that made all the difference.

As is appropriate for a profession tasked with providing support, medical social workers at the hospital are privy to a great deal of support themselves.

Noticing her difficulty — and having been in a similar place before — Ms Teo's colleagues rallied around her, providing her with timely advice, emotional support and even clarifications on complex medical terms.

Support does not come solely from her peers — it also comes from her superiors.

Her supervisor in the Medical Social Services team holds regular check-in sessions for her and her colleagues to reflect on their performance, as well as to receive advice on how to approach their future patients.

These sessions are also a place for Ms Teo to candidly share her thoughts and feelings about the work she does.

She says: "My colleagues are more than just colleagues. They're also friends who are always checking in on me, making sure that I am coping well. Plus, having a nurturing supervisor to guide me is also very important in helping me grow professionally."

But an unexpected source of support comes from the very people she helps in her day-to-day life.

"Over time, I've come to realise how small my problems are compared to my clients," she says. "Seeing their strength and resilience motivates me whenever I deal with my own difficulties."



PHOTO: TED CHEN

I realised that I wanted to make helping others my job. That's when I knew I wanted to pursue a degree in social work.

MS TEO JIE TING  
medical social worker  
Medical Social Services,  
Ng Teng Fong  
General Hospital

# Perseverance is key to science success

Scholarships from A\*Star have led researcher Loh Xian Jun to important scientific discoveries

BY BRYANT CHAN

Dr Loh Xian Jun has a penchant for defying the odds.

In 1999, he was one of only two recipients of the Merit Award in the National Science Talent Search (now known as the A\*Star Talent Search), the largest science research competition in Singapore at the time.

As a result, Dr Loh was also awarded the National Science Scholarship (BS), which covered the full expenses of his undergraduate education.

But even with the option of studying overseas like many of his peers, he decided to pursue his Bachelor of Science in Chemistry at the National University of Singapore (NUS).

"If I had gone overseas, I would have had to take on too many things: accommodation, new environment, new acquaintances, new activities," he says.

"If I didn't have to go through this adaptation period, I could hit the ground running."

And he most assuredly did. Dr Loh secured himself a place in a laboratory in his first year of study, which would eventually lead to the scientific breakthrough that would change his life forever.

### Committed to excel

Despite working in a lab that had no funding for his initial ideas, he managed to invent a thermogelling polymer — a material that, paradoxically, melts when cooled and solidifies when heated — in the final year of his undergraduate studies.

Things moved quickly after that.

In 2007, he filed a patent for the thermogel and embarked on his Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) course at NUS, under the A\*Star Graduate Scholarship programme.

He was conferred his degree in just two years — a feat that he attributes to his decision to pursue his undergraduate education locally.

"I had amassed a large amount of research data by that time, sufficient to write the papers required for graduation," he says.

During his PhD studies, A\*Star sponsored his attachment to the Riken research institute in Japan, as well as his postdoctoral studies in Cambridge University.

Returning to Singapore in 2012, he was then made program manager at A\*Star's Personal Care Program, overseeing a portfolio of projects with personal and consumer care companies ranging from small and medium-sized enterprises to multi-national corporations.

### Impacting lives

Today, the 38-year-old holds several appointments. He is the deputy director of graduate affairs in A\*Star's Science and Engineering Research Council, an assistant professor in NUS, the chairman of the Grants Review Taskforce in A\*Star's Science and Engineering Research Council, vice-president of the Singapore National Institute of Chemistry and department head of the Soft Materials Department in A\*Star's Institute of Materials Research and Engineering.

He may be giving back to society in a special way too — the thermogel he developed 13 years ago could soon be the key to the rehabilitation of patients who have had retinal detachment surgery.

With support from clinicians at the National University Hospital, he created a thermogel that enables the vitreous — a gel that fills the space between the lens of the eye and the retina — to regenerate, a process that was once thought biologically impossible.

Dr Loh hopes for the new gel to be used in surgical procedures within the next five years.

But he has many more years of research left to go. "I have taken 20 years to reach this stage, and I am still learning and developing," he says modestly. "Be humble. Always ask and learn," he concludes. "A career in science is a marathon, not a sprint."



PHOTO: TED CHEN

Be humble. Always ask and learn. A career in science is a marathon, not a sprint.

DR LOH XIAN JUN  
deputy director  
(graduate affairs)  
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# Getting the balance right

Podiatrist Sing Pei Kheng is dedicated to providing foot wound care and treating patients with sports-related injuries

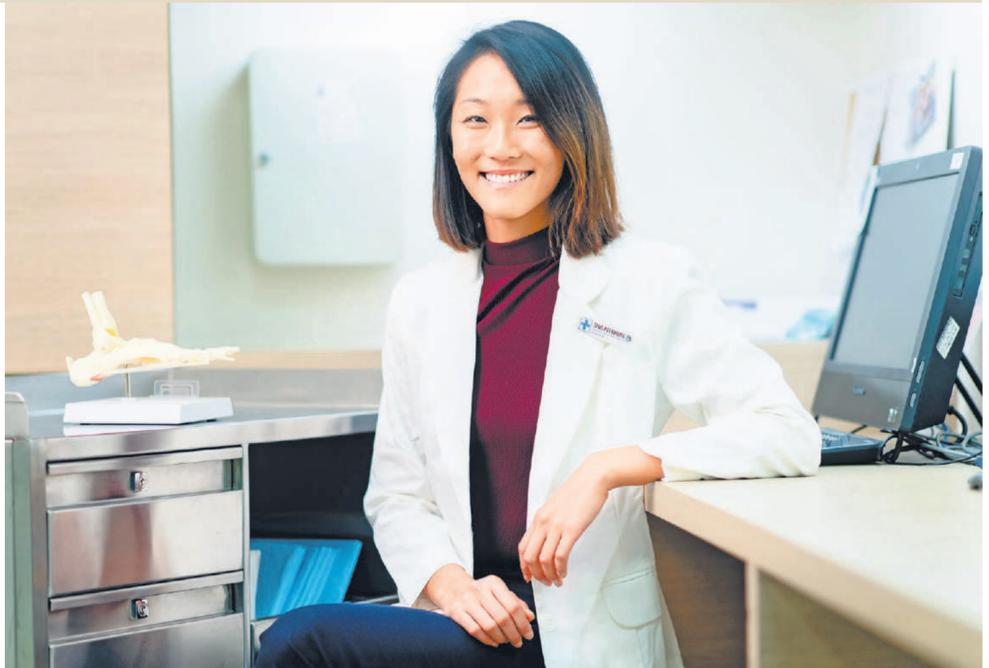


PHOTO: TED CHEN

BY MICHELLE BONG

As a junior podiatrist at Changi General Hospital three years ago, Ms Sing Pei Kheng's work day involved providing regular foot care services such as nail trimming and callus removal under the guidance of her seniors. These days, the 25-year-old Healthcare Merit Award scholarship recipient has since progressed to shouldering greater responsibilities, which include attending to wound care patients and treating sports patients.

While her current focus is mostly on diabetic foot wound care, she and her colleagues work closely with the hospital's vascular surgeons to help manage patients' pre- and post-surgery care.

They also help to manage additional wounds and deformities that may occur following the initial surgery's healing period. This promotes patients' good quality of life despite their condition.

Once or twice a week, Ms Sing runs the Sport and Exercise Medicine clinics and treats mostly athletes with sports-related injuries.

Such work is carried out in conjunction with physiotherapists and sports doctors to provide a more holistic approach to healing.

### Stepping up to her role

Ms Sing always knew she wanted to work in the healthcare industry.

She was inspired by the hospice nurses who worked round the clock to care for her cancer-stricken grandfather during his last days.

She started looking at potential careers in healthcare during her first year of junior college, and came across the scholarships offered by MOH Holdings.

After doing her own research on various medical disciplines, she found podiatry, prosthetics and orthotics very interesting.

"I requested to shadow a podiatrist after completing my

Despite the challenges, healthcare is a very rewarding job. And seeing my patients get better and return to their normal life always warms my heart.

MS SING PEI KHENG  
podiatrist  
podiatry department,  
Changi General Hospital

A levels and had the opportunity to be attached to Tan Tock Seng Hospital's Foot Care and Limb Design Centre for a day. I was able to observe podiatrists, prosthetists and orthotists work, and felt more inclined towards podiatry," she recalls.

Through her scholarship, she obtained a Bachelor of Science with Honours in Podiatry from the University of Southampton in 2016.

### Stand and deliver

While no two work days may be the same, the challenges that come with her role remain a constant.

She explains: "The biggest challenge is managing patients' and their family members' expectations.

"While our goal is to provide the best care and treatment for everyone, the success of a particular treatment depends on the patient's comorbidities (the presence of one or more addi-

tional concurrent conditions), lifestyle choices and willingness to embrace change.

"It is important that there is effective communication between us and the patient so that he is fully aware of what a particular treatment might entail."

To those who are considering a similar scholarship, she has the following piece of advice: The experiences and opportunities provided by MOH Holdings are aplenty. If you are unsure of the profession, request to have an opportunity to shadow a professional because that helped firm up her decision to take up the podiatry scholarship.

She says: "Despite the challenges, healthcare is a very rewarding job. I also provide voluntary podiatric services at the hospice that my grandfather was at — a place that still means a lot to me.

"And seeing my patients get better and return to their normal life always warms my heart."

Nursing is a profession that requires a great amount of patience and compassion. Nurses care for patients who are sick and unwell, and when these patients eventually recover, we share their joy when they leave the hospital. It is satisfying to feel that I made a difference in someone else's life.

MS CINDY CHAN  
senior staff nurse  
National University Hospital



PHOTO: TED CHEN

patients and other healthcare practitioners to redesign healthcare for the future.

Ms Chan says: "With our ageing population, healthcare demands will increase. However, as with many countries, we are also having a shortage of nurses. Therefore, nurses in this new millennium need to be adaptable and versatile to cope with the rapidly changing healthcare environment.

"For instance, the nurse's role is redesigned to take on greater complexity such as being an APN or the use of technology to utilise resources more effectively."

### On track for success

This year, she completed her Advanced Nursing Course (Nephrology) at National University Hospital (NUH), where she works to care for patients with kidney diseases.

Her job responsibilities include administering medication, going on ward rounds with doctors to assist with the diagnosis and treatment of patients' conditions and coordinating the care of inpatients during their hospitalisation.

On top of ensuring patients' basic needs are met and treatment plans are carried out in a timely manner, she also mentors new nurses and nursing students.

### Selecting a career

Ms Chan had her first glimpse of nursing as a career when she worked as an executive assistant at NUH after her A levels.

As a 19-year-old then, she was inspired by how nurses gained satisfaction from their jobs.

Her mentor there, senior nurse manager Hui Soh Heng, eventually convinced her to join nursing as a career after delineating its pros and cons to her.

Subsequently, Ms Chan was awarded the Healthcare Merit Scholarship, which covered her tuition fees, other mandatory miscellaneous fees, training allowances and a one-time uniform reimbursement.

Since her graduation with a Bachelor of Science (Nursing) with Honours from the National University of Singapore in 2015, she has been serving her bond, which will end this year.

Ms Chan says: "Nursing is a profession that requires a great amount of patience and compassion. Nurses care for patients who are sick and unwell, and when these patients eventually recover, we share their joy when they leave the hospital.

"It is satisfying to feel that I made a difference in someone else's life."

# Putting patients first

Senior staff nurse Cindy Chan shares how the Healthcare Merit Scholarship has helped her build a meaningful career

BY MICHELLE CHIN

Senior staff nurse Cindy Chan, 27, is working towards her career goal of being an Advanced Practice Nurse (APN). This would require her to possess clinical acumen and high-level decision-making skills to diagnose and manage patients' common medical conditions such as chronic illnesses.

Ms Chan's efforts reflect how the demands of the nursing profession continue to evolve, and it has become necessary for nurses to be equipped with broad-based skill sets they can practise across different care settings. In the long term, she would be collaborating with

# Actively caring for people

The Singapore-Industry Scholarship (SgIS) enables Samantha Tan to pursue her passion to serve in the healthcare sector

BY JAC WOO

Ms Samantha Tan Jiamin, 24, says she "can't really sit still". She is a go-getter with a penchant for healthy activities such as dragonboating, exercising and nature travel.

She also has an unwavering passion for serving in the healthcare sector.

"I have always wanted to join the healthcare sector since my secondary school days, when I joined the St John Ambulance Brigade as a co-curricular activity (CCA)," she recalls.

The CCA experience piqued her passion to contribute to the healthcare sector, which eventually led her to apply for the Singapore-Industry Scholarship (SgIS).

### Multi-disciplinary insights

"I chose SgIS because it accepts a diverse range of disciplines and partners numerous healthcare organisations, allowing me to kick-start my career in healthcare upon graduation," says Ms Tan, an executive in the Primary Care Division at the Agency for Integrated Care (AIC).

With the scholarship, she pursued a Bachelor of Environmental Studies in the National University of Singapore because environmental issues are one of her interests. She valued the multi-disciplinary curriculum that inculcated adaptability and taught her critical-thinking skills that she could apply at work.

Upon graduation last year, she joined AIC



PHOTO: TED CHEN

and was admitted to a young talent programme for SgIS scholars which aims to provide fresh graduates and young professionals with a challenging and fulfilling career.

"To maximise our potential, AIC provides us with the exposure, knowledge and networks such as Personal Induction Experience Programme, Ground Attachment, Job Rotations, Mentorship, Developmental Projects and Structured Training Programmes.

"The exposure has provided me with valuable insights on the community care and primary care sector, and has helped me to better scope my career goals," she says.

### Shaping the healthcare sector

Ms Tan works in the Community Health Assist Scheme (CHAS) team, one of the functions in the Primary Care Division.

Her team engages members of the public through regular community roadshows to increase awareness about CHAS, encourage applications and scheme utilisation.

"As I joined AIC to pursue my passion in healthcare and to care for the seniors, it is important to me that my exposure in AIC is meaningful and purposeful such that I can contribute towards shaping the healthcare sector for current and future generations," she says.

One of her memorable events at work was volunteering as a Silver Generation Ambassador, where she visited seniors at their homes to increase their awareness of relevant government schemes and health services.

"This experience constantly reminds me of my purpose in healthcare and renews my conviction of the continual need to shape the healthcare landscape into one where Singaporeans would be happy to age in," she says.

To those who are considering an SgIS, she advises: "The SgIS caters to the greater mass of undergraduates from different disciplines as there will be something for everyone.

"The wide array of companies that is offered in the SgIS means that undergraduates have many choices. Choose wisely and follow your passion."

As I joined AIC to pursue my passion in healthcare and to care for the seniors, it is important to me that my exposure in AIC is meaningful and purposeful such that I can contribute towards shaping the healthcare sector for current and future generations.

MS SAMANTHA TAN  
executive  
Primary Care Division  
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In my job, I need to be on the constant lookout for technological advancements and how they can be applied to SCDF's roles and functions.

CPT MUI CHIN NAM  
staff officer (operations projects,  
operations department)  
SCDF

PHOTO: TED CHEN

# Tapping technology to fight fires

MHA's Local Merit Scholarship ignited CPT Mui Chin Nam's passion for a career with the SCDF

BY JAC WOO

Midway through his Bachelor of Science (Life Science) course in the National University of Singapore (NUS) from 2010 to 2014, undergraduate Mui Chin Nam realised that although he loved what he was studying, he did not want a desk-bound research job after graduation.

Sourcing around, he found out that the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) offered scholarships for careers in uniformed services.

"The ability to make a real difference to society coupled with the exciting prospects of being a front-line firefighter motivated me to sign up for the Local Merit Scholarship with the Singapore Civil Defence Force (SCDF)," he recalls.

Hot topics

With the scholarship and his sights set on his future career, he did his Final Year Project (FYP) on heat acclimatisation in SCDF firefighters.

"This sparked my interest in the field of heat acclimatisation, prevention of heat injuries and maximisation of performance, especially in firefighting.

"The interest developed and knowledge gleaned during the FYP stayed with me till today, and I am able to apply it in my current work," says Captain (CPT) Mui, 30, now a Staff Officer (Operations Projects, Operations Department) in SCDF.

Besides supporting his studies, the scholarship also provided him with opportunities to take on additional responsibilities both within and beyond his job scope.

After graduating from NUS, he went through SCDF's Rota Commander Course before he was posted to Tampines Fire Station as a Rota Commander.

He was then posted to SCDF HQ as Staff Officer (Improvised Explosive Devices Disposal Threat, Hazardous Materials Department).

"I picked up skills in dealing with Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Explosive (CBRE) threats and was able to apply what I learnt in school to my work," he recalls.

In his current role, CPT Mui is in charge of changing and enhancing the way SCDF operates through the use of technology.

"SCDF firmly believes that technology can be a force multiplier in enhancing our operations.

"In my job, I need to be on the constant lookout for technological advancements and how they can be applied to SCDF's roles and functions.

"A project that I am working on is the development of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) in SCDF. We envision that UAVs are able to replace human manpower in the performance of functions such as surveillance and fire-fighting," he says.

People skills matter too

However, he learns that it is also important to not just introduce new technologies to the users, but also gain their acceptance.

"Although the ultimate intention is to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of operations, we must also be aware that the front-liners may have their reservations or face limitations in accepting the new technologies.

"Hence, communication with the front-line officers is important to ensure that they understand the rationale behind the introduction of the new equipment," he explains.

To those who are considering a similar scholarship, he advises: "Having an interest in what you do is vital if you want to enjoy your work and do well. Be open-minded and explore the different opportunities that are out there.

"If possible, try to go for internships for the opportunities that really interest you, so you can learn more about the organisations, their values, cultures and the way they work."

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# From national athlete to budding anthropologist

Former national athlete Audrey Lim stopped competitive sports to broaden her worldview at Yale-NUS College

BY MEREDITH WOO

At age 12, Miss Audrey Lim qualified for Singapore's national sailing team and subsequently enrolled in the Singapore Sports School (SSP) to pursue her sporting dreams. At 15, she developed an interest in the sport of shooting and made the national air rifle team after only a year of training.

These experiences equipped her with the mental fitness and physical endurance required to thrive in high-level competitions. Little did she know that she would one day be testing her mental limits in an entirely different field.

While pursuing an International Baccalaureate (IB) diploma, Miss Lim became intrigued by a subject called the Theory of Knowledge (TOK). The core IB subject features philosophical methodologies that made her more aware of her personal and ideological assumptions, and trained her to reflect on life's diversity — much like anthropology, which studies human behaviour and societies.

"My TOK teacher was the first academic mentor who brought to life the idea of how academic texts weren't just words on paper, but could be engaged with on a very human level too. By studying locally, I had the chance to be

a voice for our own subalterns (people with little political or socioeconomic power) and that shaped my academic focus in college," she says.

### Everything to gain

After graduating in 2015, she took time off from sports training to do a marketing internship and attend a three-month bible school course. It provided her the space to explore new experiences, and the confidence to step away from the familiar realm of sports.

Eventually, she set off along a new path at Yale-NUS College under the bond-free Global Leader Scholarship and decided to stop competitive sports completely to focus on her newfound interest in academia.

Many people told the 22-year-old that it was "a waste to throw away years of training", but the plucky undergraduate holds a different view.

"Life is experienced as an unfolding narrative. If we feel like there's only one path for us to take, then I think we need to create some space to challenge that. The new experiences and knowledge I've gained haven't made my past experiences irrelevant, they have added to it," she says.

If anything, her background in sports has helped to bolster her academic life at Yale-NUS College. A sharp mental acuity developed in her earlier years helps her to think nimbly in classes, while her strong discipline code translates to a meticulous work ethic.

### Broadening her global outlook

Last year, she had the opportunity to spend an immersive semester in the Indian Himalayan region.

"Previously, I had more of a textbook understanding of anthropology. However, being outdoors and visiting significant cultural and historic field sites have given me a glimpse into what an anthropologist does during research. I learnt the value of humility, to be less insular in my outlook, and to keep asking questions and challenging my assumptions," she says.

Her coursework also gave her a glimpse of the positive impact of social work and research on local issues such as sexual violence and social inequality.

Miss Lim hopes to work in a research role for organisations that tackle issues of inequality and social violence after graduation.



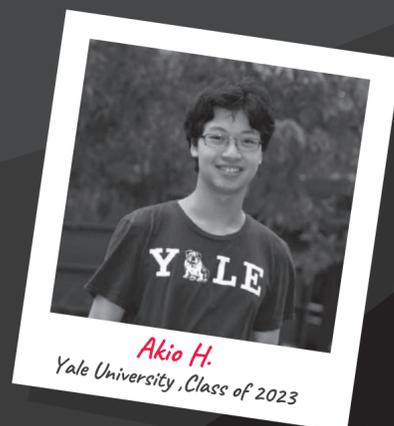
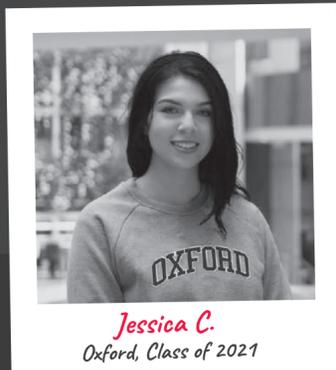
Life is experienced as an unfolding narrative. If we feel like there's only one path for us to take, then I think we need to create some space to challenge that.

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# Embracing a global outlook

SMU undergraduate Alexander Gee explains how History and Economics influenced his choice to pursue twin degree programmes

BY MICHELLE BONG

With the SMU Global Impact Scholarship Award, Mr Alexander Gee is pursuing his Bachelor of Business Management and Bachelor of Social Science in Politics, Law and Economics. He started his twin programmes last year, and will graduate in 2022.

The 21-year-old shares why he chose this educational pathway.

**How did studying History and Economics at International Baccalaureate level guide you towards your choice of degrees?**

"Both subjects are common concepts present in Politics, Law and Economics (PLE). History gives you excellent case studies to help you better understand how politics (both on the local and international level) interacts with economic factors and social issues — as many leading political theories trace their origins to major historical events.

"As for Economics, the interplay with Politics is obvious as they both jointly determine who holds power in society. And it is increasingly important for us to understand how economic reasons and priorities are often the main drivers behind certain political or even legal decisions.

"I knew that I wouldn't want to pass up the opportunity to study them further at university level."

**Why was SMU your university of choice?**

"SMU is the right option in terms of an innovative pedagogy, a convenient location and the right degree programmes that I wanted to pursue.

"It also offers the Global Impact Scholarship that I am a recipient of, which gives its scholars the financial support needed to gain global

exposure. Through it, students are enabled to pursue their passions, be it in their chosen academic disciplines or extra-curricular pursuits overseas. The support of the SMU Centre for Scholars' Development (CSD) has also been invaluable."

**What do you hope to gain from your choice to study both Business and Politics, Law and Economics (PLE) programmes?**

"The choice was a no-brainer for me. Since I was young, I've been interested in how companies navigate the complex business landscape but no opportunity to fully experience it for myself. At the same time, having had some degree of familiarity with the underlying concepts of PLE made it a very clear area of academic interest.

"Practically speaking, in a job market increasingly valuing cross-disciplinary skill sets, being able to analyse and critically think about issues (be they business, social, political or economic) will put anyone in good stead with their employer. This is something I think my degrees have been formulated to address."

**What are your future career aspirations?**

"Consulting, because it is influenced by the varied complexities of the modern world. To address business problems, today's consultants have to deal with uncertain government regulations, fluctuating economic realities, unpredictable customer trends and the priorities of the business. It seems that any proposal would try to square the circle. I enjoy the challenge, and think that it would help me grow as a person.

"More specifically, I hope to eventually specialise in travel, transport and hospitality consulting — they are the industries that I enjoy reading about."



PHOTO: ALEXANDER GEE

In a job market increasingly valuing cross-disciplinary skill sets, being able to analyse and critically think about issues will put anyone in good stead with their employer. This is something I think my degrees have been formulated to address.

**MR ALEXANDER GEE**  
undergraduate  
SMU Bachelor of Business Management and  
Bachelor of Social Science in Politics,  
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# Mightier than the sword

Mr Tee Zhuo's belief in the power of the written word inspired him to take up the SPH Journalism Scholarship

BY BRYANT CHAN

Mr Tee Zhuo has always believed in giving a voice to the voiceless. Perhaps this is best illustrated by his time as a Philosophy, Politics and Economics undergraduate at Yale-NUS College, during which he spent his senior year helping create sexual misconduct policies for the college.

Over the course of several weeks, he listened to the accounts of survivors of on-campus sexual violence, repeatedly petitioned the school to take action, and finally helped establish a committee to formulate and enact policies.

It was, in his own words, an emotionally draining and exhausting experience. "But it also shaped my ethical beliefs, taught me the importance of empathy, and also showed me the need for activism in seeking justice and holding people to account," he says.

But rather than enter the legal profession or don the badge of law enforcement, the 25-year-old chose a rather different path — he joined the print newsroom.

"I've always loved writing and the written word," says the recipient of the Singapore Press Holdings Journalism Scholarship (Local), who is now a breaking news reporter with The Straits Times



PHOTO: WEE TY

(ST). "But more than that, I believe in the function and duty of journalism to bring truth to light and hold people in power to account."

**A force for good**

As such, it comes as no surprise that the defining moment of his budding career thus far was the publication of his first opinion piece last August.

In response to a vice-principal at St Joseph's Institution barring an activist from the Inter-University LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) Network from speaking at a school event, Mr Tee took to the pages of ST to contend that rather than being a force for division — as said vice-principal had argued — activism was necessary and vital for society to progress.

The publication of the op-ed was crucial to his growth in multiple ways. It helped him gain a better understanding of the editorial process, and find his voice and write critically about other social issues.

Spurred by the overwhelming response to his work, Mr Tee has gone on to write extensively on a plethora of subjects including colonialism, discrimination and racial and religious issues in Singapore — all within his first year with ST.

**Navigating OB markers**

Of course, being a young firebrand in the newsroom often put him in conflict with his editors, particularly when it came to their views on reporting on topics deemed "sensitive" like race and religion, politics, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) issues.

But in time, he learnt to work more productively within the constraints imposed on him.

"I learnt to accept my editors' opinions even if I disagreed with them, and to express my personal opinions within the editorial line of the newspaper," he says.

Editorial constraints aside, he makes no illusions about the difficulties

of being a journalist, something he impresses on scholar hopefuls who approach him for advice.

"Think carefully about what being a journalist means to you," he says. "Don't take the scholarship if you're not prepared to make sacrifices."

By his own admission, there are few perks to being a newshound. The pay is mediocre, the working hours can be brutal and reporters are often faced with the reality of not being able to write what they want.

Still, the satisfaction of a story well told is worth it.

"I have many colleagues who face challenges both within and beyond the newsroom just for doing their jobs," he says.

"But it was worth it for them to raise important issues ranging from LGBTQ rights, to migrant worker rights, to sexual violence, to inequalities in society, to mental health and other important issues."

Think carefully about what being a journalist means to you. Don't take the scholarship if you're not prepared to make sacrifices.

MR TEE ZHUO  
journalist  
The Straits Times



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Toh Wen Li  
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The Straits Times



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