

NUS *Teaching* ACADEMY



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MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR:

FOSTERING A CULTURE OF TEACHING EXCELLENCE: THE NUS TEACHING ACADEMY

Over the years, NUS has established itself as a frontline global university with a strong Asian focus, attracting top quality students from Singapore and more than 100 countries from around the world. Not surprisingly, its academic environment is fashioned by a deep commitment to excellence in knowledge discovery and its dissemination. The balance between these two aspects is often watched and debated with interest in academic circles. However, faculty members at world-renowned institutions such as NUS have understood the synergies that can be generated by fostering a closed-loop relationship between knowledge generation (research) and its dissemination in all its forms, including classroom teaching, mentoring and authoring. We understand that research and education feed off each other and it is almost impossible to think of one as being independent of the other. Good teaching leads to inquiring minds that are hungry to unravel the mysteries of nature. Likewise, research outcomes, after the usual process of validation, will find their way to the classrooms quickly so that our graduates are well-equipped to harness the bounties of nature for the benefit of humankind in a sustained manner. There is nothing wrong about excelling in only one aspect at the cost of another—it is just that this is not the hallmark of a great institution. A great institution must optimally extract the benefits that come out of the interaction between its educational and research endeavours, and effectively leverage its intellectual and capital resources to serve its stakeholders.

The recently formed NUS Teaching Academy is another clear signal from the NUS management of its intention to pursue a strategy of “inclusive” growth which will bring NUS to the highest end of the

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educational value chain. The Academy will provide thought and action leadership to initiate and sustain efforts in this direction. Our aim will be to come up with recommendations for new policies and procedures (or modification of existing ones) by facilitating action research that will utilise our lecture theatres, classrooms and virtual environments as active educational laboratories. Such research will generate data that can be harnessed by NUS to continuously evolve a niche brand of education for which the University will become famous—one that effectively combines current knowledge, domain-specific research developments as well as pedagogical research outcomes, and is brought to students using the latest technological systems. In a collaborative enterprise such as NUS, this and more should be eminently possible.

In the months since the Teaching Academy was constituted, the Fellows have been involved in preparing the groundwork to get the Academy up and running. As of 28 September 2009, the Fellows have met thrice—besides drafting a constitution for the election of its executive committee, Chair and Vice-Chair, the Academy has also articulated its Vision and Mission as follows:

VISION

To establish NUS at the forefront of education through

- *pursuing teaching and learning innovation*
- *fostering a balanced culture of educational and research excellence*

MISSION

To actively engage every section of the NUS community in transforming the educational landscape of the university.

The Academy's Vision and Mission will be achieved through a set of strategies that include: (i) recognition of faculty members for their Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (T&L), (ii) provision of resources to faculty members to facilitate pedagogical experiments that lead to T&L innovations, (iii) transformation of teaching evaluation instruments into mechanisms that contribute to the professional development of faculty members and (iv) engagement of the NUS academic community through a series of well-targeted outreach activities. Specific projects that assimilate one or more of these strategic elements will be conducted by the Fellows in collaboration with faculty members. Information regarding these specific projects will be announced shortly.

Although we work in different knowledge domains, we, as members of a community of intellectuals, are bonded by our resolve to make positive changes in our students' learning habits, attitudes and abilities. Against this backdrop, we hope to receive lots of input, participation and leadership from the NUS community in the projects conducted by the Academy. We welcome you to get involved! Meanwhile, you can visit us at <http://www.nus.edu.sg/teachingacademy/> for more information about the Academy's upcoming events and initiatives. You can also write to us at cdtvs@nus.edu.sg if you have any comments and suggestions. On behalf of the Academy Fellows, I look forward to working with you to cultivate a sustainable culture of teaching excellence in NUS. ■

PROVOST'S MESSAGE



Professor Tan Eng Chye
*Deputy President (Academic Affairs)
and Provost*

The NUS Teaching Academy is a giant leap in our effort to honour and advance an academic endeavour of major importance: teaching—not just good or even superior teaching, but great teaching. By ‘great teaching’, we mean the attempt to move beyond the traditional transmission of content knowledge within conventional classroom setups. Instead, great teaching dictates the conscious effort we put in as educators to achieve paradigm shifts in mindsets of future generations of teachers and learners.

We look to the Teaching Academy to provide leadership in effecting such a transformation at NUS through the pursuit of teaching and learning innovations, and by constructively evolving the currently existing education-related practices and performance assessment systems.

I am confident that a concerted effort by the Teaching Academy that engages all NUS stakeholders will bring about the positive outcomes we wish to see as a community of teachers and scholars. ■

OUR THOUGHTS ON ENHANCING TEACHING & LEARNING: BY THE FELLOWS

The inaugural batch of Teaching Academy Fellows share their thoughts on being part of the Academy and its role in enhancing teaching and learning in NUS.



Knowledge is power. In a world where change is the norm, knowing how to learn is, perhaps, the most powerful knowledge of all. The NUS Teaching Academy has a key role to play in helping us all become better learners. ■

Assoc Prof Sunita Anne Abraham

Dept of English Language & Literature



I want the Teaching Academy to be a link between the teaching staff and the Provost's Office. I would like to start with making the student feedback and peer review more useful and informative. I would also like to streamline the teaching awards process and improve the forms and workflow. ■

Assoc Prof Helmer Aslaksen

Dept of Mathematics

Being a founding member of the Teaching Academy is an honour and a mark of recognition. At the same time, however, it is a responsibility—the call to reach out and help provide some impetus for teaching innovations and enhancements at the university. That is a tall order, considering the already impressive quality of teaching at NUS. I hope to contribute initially in small realisable steps, including sharing my teaching experiences with colleagues. It is hoped that such contributions will help to raise awareness of the NUS' commitment to and achievements in teaching. ■

Assoc Prof Chan Wai Meng
Centre for Language Studies



I am excited by the idea of having a Teaching Academy provide leadership in education matters in NUS. I look forward to giving my full support to the Academy. ■

Assoc Prof Chng Huang Hoon
Ex Officio Member, NUS Teaching Academy
Director, CDTL



It is a great honour to be part of the Teaching Academy. Education is of paramount importance to the University. Through its various projects, I hope that the Academy will play a strategic role in shaping the education landscape of the University as well as promote a culture of teaching excellence. ■

Assoc Prof Goh Say Song
Dept of Mathematics

My hope is that the Academy can not only provide practical help to all educators at NUS, but also can facilitate discussion at a conceptual level concerning our role as educators in society. Such activity may contribute to reinvigorating the position of public intellectuals in Singapore. ■

Assoc Prof Philip Joseph Holden
Dept of English Language & Literature



The most important mission of the Academy is to help shape and re-shape the education culture of NUS. We can always review the mechanics in teaching evaluations, education awards or review our teaching programmes etc., but I think it is much more significant to tackle the bigger issues—how can we develop a culture of education enthusiasm, and how can we value (and respect) education excellence as much as we value research supremacy? ■

Professor Andy Hor
Dept of Chemistry



I see the Teaching Academy as the fountainhead of ideas, insights and new ways of looking at learning and education at our University. It is a mind space where scholars passionate about learning and education can boldly explore roads less travelled, listen, ponder and facilitate on the needs of the NUS community and enthuse its members about contributing their best in learning and education, both as a University and as individuals. ■

Assoc Prof Ashwin M. Khambadkone
Dept of Electrical & Computer Engineering

It is an honour to be part of the Teaching Academy. It is heartening that NUS is emphasising educational pursuits—one of the key roles of any university. I look forward to learning from my fellow Academy members and am confident that, together, we can forge novel and useful educational and educational research initiatives. ■

Assoc Prof Erle Lim Chuen Hian
Dept of Medicine



I feel that the Teaching Academy should provide a platform for the exchange of experiences and ideas; as well as to strategise and strengthen the quality of higher education for the university community. ■

Assoc Prof Lim Lum Peng
Dept of Preventive Dentistry



I am really glad to be part of the NUS Teaching Academy. I hope that the Academy functions in a way that students explicitly benefit from its activities. Besides that, I hope that the Academy can establish a sense of pride about teaching amongst faculty members even in a research intensive university like NUS. ■

Dr Lakshminarayanan Samavedham
Acting Chair, NUS Teaching Academy
Dept of Chemical & Biomolecular Engineering



I feel honoured to be part of the NUS Teaching Academy. I believe it will be instrumental in raising the standard of our teaching in the years to come. ■

Assoc Prof Seah Kar Heng

Dept of Mechanical Engineering



As academics, we have two tasks—creating knowledge and disseminating that knowledge. The NUS Teaching Academy, which seeks to improve the quality of our teaching, is therefore of great importance, and can have substantial impact on how well NUS achieves its mission. I am honoured to be appointed to the Academy. ■

Professor Kulwant Singh

Dept of Business Policy



It is a great honour to be inducted into the Teaching Academy. I look forward to working with the rest of the Fellows and contributing to exciting projects spearheaded by the Academy. I also look forward to making contributions to further enhance the quality of teaching in NUS. ■

Assoc Prof Sow Chorng Haur

Dept of Physics

I feel honoured to be given the opportunity to serve in the Teaching Academy. I hope the Academy can foster a culture of teaching excellence throughout the university (just like the way it has built up a culture of research excellence over the past decade). All renowned universities in the world are excellent in both teaching and research. I hope to see NUS becoming one such university. ■



Professor Bernard Tan

*Dept of Information Systems
Associate Provost (Undergraduate Education)*

I am honoured to be part of the Teaching Academy in NUS. I hope the Academy can build up a culture of teaching excellence to achieve the mission of NUS. ■



Assoc Prof Tan Kay Chen

Dept of Electrical & Computer Engineering

My hope for the Academy is that it will act as a catalyst, inspiring all our colleagues to strive for excellence as educators. Our goal is to ensure that our students leave us knowing they have experienced a great education. ■



Professor Tan Thiam Soon

*Ex Officio Member, NUS Teaching Academy
Vice Provost (Education)*

The Teaching Academy is in a unique position to champion the cause of outstanding education at NUS and beyond. I am honoured to be a founding member and hope to explore how the university can produce holistically educated citizens equipped with an ethical compass and an enlarged mentality. ■

Assoc Prof Kenneth Paul Tan
Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy



I am glad to see that NUS is making an effort to recognise teaching excellence through the setting up of the Teaching Academy. The difference between an Outstanding Educator Award (OEA) winner and a Teaching Academy Fellow is that the former 'receives' and the latter 'gives'. If my contribution as an Academy Fellow can make a positive impact on the teaching community in the university, the intangible reward will be even greater than winning an OEA. ■

Assoc Prof Victor Tan
*Vice-Chair, NUS Teaching Academy
Dept of Mathematics*



I am thrilled to be part of the Teaching Academy, and I look forward to contributing towards teaching excellence at NUS. ■

Assoc Prof Jochen Wirtz
Dept of Marketing



CONTACT US

We would like to hear from you! If you would like to contact the Academy about its upcoming initiatives or to share ideas on teaching and learning matters, please email Vickneswari at cdtvs@nus.edu.sg or call 6516-1967. ■

REACHING OUT TO THE NUS COMMUNITY

As part of its efforts to engage with the NUS community, the Academy, in collaboration with CDTL, organised the Academy Chat series in August 2009. These sessions were conducted during the most recent run of the Professional Development Programme (Teaching) (PDP-T) and the Teaching Assistants Programme (TAP), where participants had the opportunity to speak with Academy Fellows Associate Professors Goh Say Song and Kenneth Paul Tan on a wide range of teaching and learning issues.

During these sessions, both Fellows candidly shared good (and bad) teaching experiences and also spoke of how they juggled research with hectic teaching schedules. Assoc Prof Tan used the musical analogy of the counterpoint to illustrate how teaching and research, which seem separate and independent of each other, can exist in a synergistic way where one's research can be driven by one's teaching needs. He related instances where he managed to turn aspects of his teaching experiences into viable publication outcomes. Assoc Prof Goh also outlined some fundamental teaching

"do's and don'ts" when he spoke to the TAP participants, including the importance of being well prepared for the classes and having regular communication with the module's lecturer to ensure that the learning outcomes are met.

Both sessions ended with the Fellows addressing participants' questions and concerns on various teaching-related issues, such as dealing with latecomers and how to keep academically strong students in a classroom motivated while helping those who are weaker in the subject.

The Academy will be conducting more workshops which cover topics such as student motivation, putting together a teaching portfolio as well as how to balance teaching and research. Visit the Academy's website at <http://www.nus.edu.sg/teachingacademy/> for more details. ■



Assoc Prof Tan relates his teaching experiences to the PDP-T participants.



Assoc Prof Goh giving the TAs some teaching pointers.

FORGING A PARTNERSHIP WITH THE NUS TEACHING ACADEMY



Assoc Prof Chng Huang Hoon
*Ex Officio Member,
NUS Teaching Academy
Director, CDTL*

Since April this year, when the NUS Teaching Academy was established, many colleagues have asked me if the Academy is a part of CDTL. The simple answer is 'no'—the two are independent units. It is however easy to understand why this misconception has arisen. There are several points of overlap between CDTL and the Academy. One, I play a dual role—both as CDTL Director and as an ex officio member of the Academy. Two, although CDTL's primary focus is on the immediate issues of staff and student development whereas the Academy's main thrust is to serve as a think tank for the university, we share a common goal—to enrich the education landscape in NUS. My hope is that CDTL and the Academy will forge a close partnership as we work towards contributing to the NUS vision on education. We can all look forward to a range of collaborations between CDTL and the Academy, and at the same time, both units will move ahead independently to define its own identity and role in the years to come. ■

CONGRATULATIONS

The Fellows of the NUS Teaching Academy would like to extend our heartiest congratulations to Professor Bernard Tan on his recent appointment as Associate Provost (Undergraduate Education) on 1 September 2009. We look forward to working with him on future Academy initiatives.



The Centre for Development of Teaching and Learning (CDTL) provides a wide range of services and facilities to promote the teaching, learning and research programmes of the National University of Singapore. These include teaching and learning support, research on educational development issues, as well as instructional design and development.

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Contributions on teaching and learning topics, as well as feedback on this issue, are welcome and should be addressed to:

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