What in your opinion are the qualities that an NUS graduate should have, and how do you develop those qualities in your students?

I teach a core first year module for undergraduates and one of the first things I always notice is the general lack of curiosity. Most students do not know much beyond what they have formally learnt in their schools, and appear to have little interest beyond what is examinable.

In order to bring about a change in mindset, I have attempted to do various things, some of which are as follows. First, I always try to hook them by selling the bigger purpose of the course rather than just focusing on the nitty gritty details. Second, I try to make the course as practical as possible and try to relate as many recent real-life examples as possible, so that students see the innate relevance of it all. Third, asking questions which challenge their prior knowledge or assumptions or leaving information gaps (for instance in Powerpoint slides) also helps. Fourth, I get the students to ask questions. This is done in various ways. For instance, whenever there is time, students would have to come up with written questions which will later be aired in class and discussed. In addition, the formal assignment has a component which requires the students to ask questions about the topic at hand. Grades are awarded depending on the quality of the questions.

Due to such measures, I believe the students are a little bit more curious in relation to that module than they would otherwise have been. However, as to whether there is truly some long-term change may depend on their other experiences in and outside NUS.

What Students Say...

“A teacher that has an impeccable grasp of his content and knowledge in his area of expertise. Moreover, he is able to create an interesting, holistic and interactive learning environment that ignites the intrinsic desire in students to learn. At the same time, he is able to cater to the slower and less vocal students by understanding that opportunities should also be given to them to express their views as the class moves forward together.”