

**Speech by Professor Tan Chorh Chuan
President, National University of Singapore
at Freshman Inauguration Ceremony, 3 August 2009
University Cultural Centre**

Gaining, Giving, Growing

President of the NUS Students' Union, Mr Kuan Yee Han
Co-Chair of the Freshmen Orientation Central Committee, Mr Teo Feng Fu
Project Director of the Freshmen Inauguration Ceremony, Mr Donne Quek
NUS Student Leaders
NUS Freshmen of 2009
Colleagues, Ladies and Gentleman

Freshmen of 2009, my warmest welcome to the NUS family! My colleagues and I are looking forward to the new energy and fresh voices that you bring, adding to the vibrancy of our campus.

You and I have one important thing in common. Today is your Freshmen Inauguration Ceremony (FIC) and today is my first FIC as NUS President.

I have vivid memories of my first day as a Freshman in the NUS Faculty of Medicine thirty years ago. Professor Khoo Oon Teik, the Master of King Edward VII Hall, where I was to stay for 5 years, spoke about pride and humility. His message was simple but powerful. We should take pride at becoming part of a distinguished university. But we should also be humble as we start our journey of discovery and development.



Prof Khoo Oon Teik
Former Master of KEVII Hall

Today, you too can be justly proud at being admitted into NUS, as some of the most talented women and men from Singapore and beyond.

Today marks the start of your great adventure, a journey through the many worlds our University has opened for you. Along with the excitement and joy of this new beginning, I hope you will be passionate yet open, bold yet humble.

What can you expect in the years ahead? How can you make the most of your time at NUS? I would like to explore this through the stories of 3 NUS students.

GAINING a world of opportunities

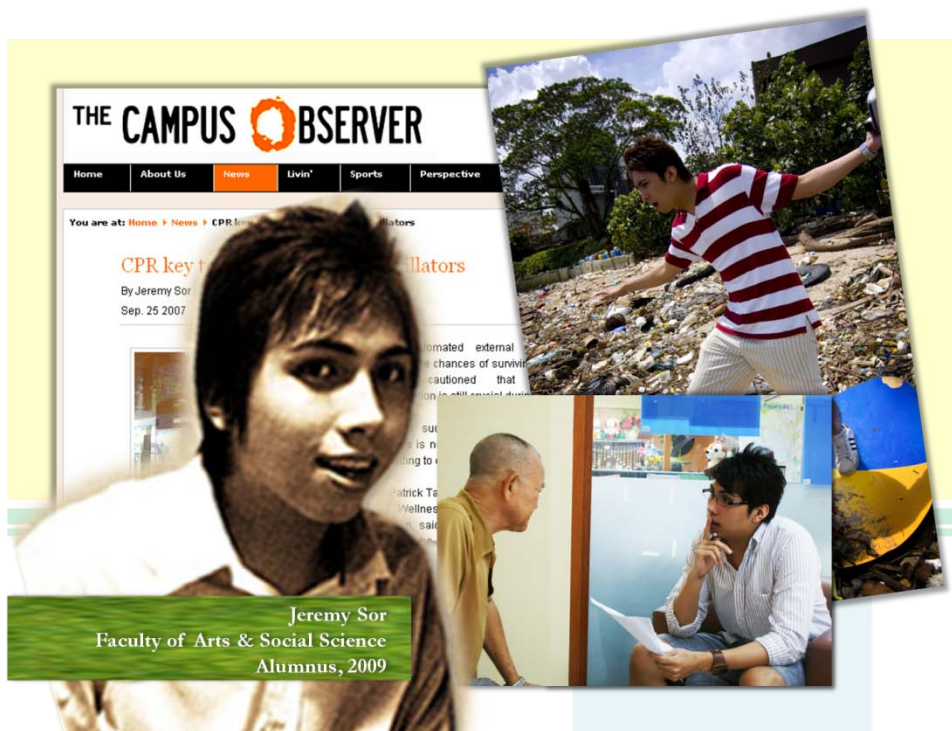
Joshua Shoo graduated from the Faculty of Science in 2005. While in NUS, Joshua opted for the Special Programme in Science. He spent one year on a Student Exchange Programme at Cornell University. Following that, he spent another year at the NUS Overseas College in Philadelphia where he had interned at a start-up company and took courses at University of Pennsylvania. He then won a

scholarship for a 10-week research attachment to Caltech. Joshua was a top student from Raffles Junior College and graduated with First Class Honours from NUS.



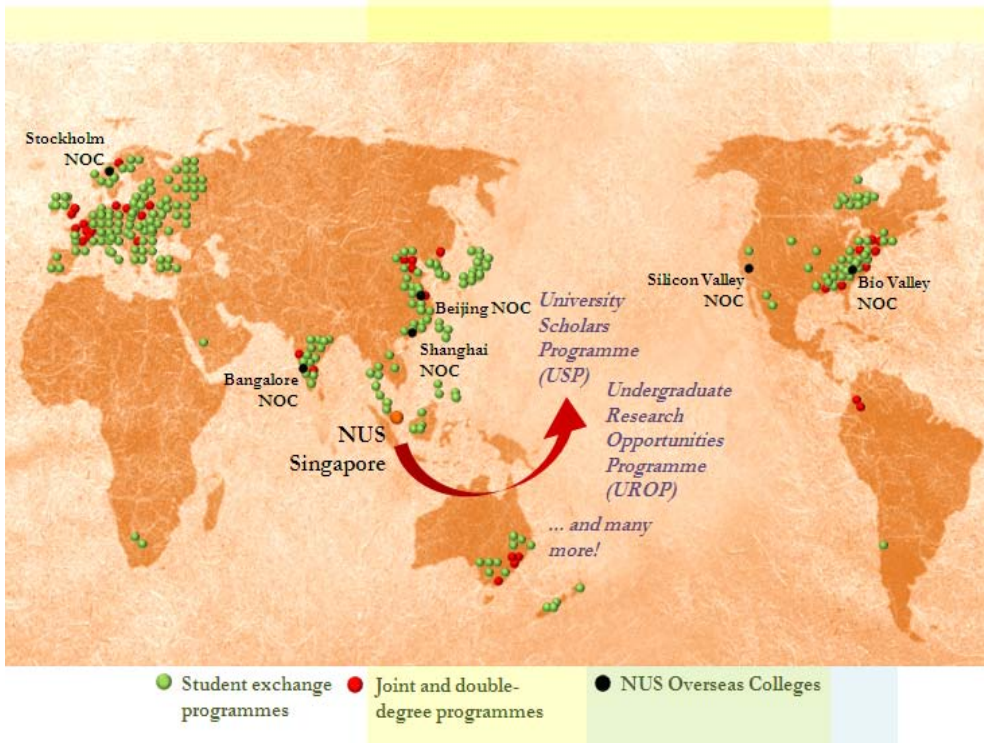
Jeremy Sor graduated this year with First Class Honours in Communications and New Media from the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. Jeremy co-founded the NUS chapter of "Roots & Shoots", an international non-profit environmental organisation. There he was involved in directing Code Blue, a marine conservation campaign that generated significant public awareness of the cause. Jeremy also served as the Editor of The Campus Observer, where he tripled the readership rate by revamping the paper.

What makes Jeremy's story remarkable is that it had taken him three tries to get a place in NUS. His pre-university report cards had a fair amount of red ink, and he finally gained admission to NUS after re-taking his A Levels.



Jeremy said that his hard-won place made him determined to make every moment in NUS count. Though he had to juggle several part-time jobs to finance his studies, he set out to pursue unique projects, and to take paths that the less adventurous would not tread. For Jeremy, his NUS experience was a defining one and, in his own words, “simply exhilarating”.

As these stories highlight, NUS provides many academic pathways for our students. I encourage you to consider a semester or two on overseas exchange. Perhaps try a double-degree programme with one of NUS’ prestigious partner universities, or within NUS itself. If you are keen on entrepreneurship, think about the NUS Overseas Colleges. The University Scholars Programme offers a broad-based multi-disciplinary exploration of subjects. Or try your hand at research by taking part in the Undergraduate Research Opportunities programme.



I hope though, that you won't just spend all your time studying. There is so much more to university life than that. From Rag and Flag, to sports and the arts, from Clubs and Societies to student-led initiatives, NUS offers you the richest possible menu of activities and programmes.



You will GAIN much more than you realize, if you take full advantage of the many academic pathways, and the huge diversity of student activities in NUS. You have the opportunity to forge your own paths and to create your own future. To make the journey uniquely yours. And as a community, my colleagues and I, your teachers and your mentors, will be here to guide you and spur you to reach the high aspirations that I know you will set yourselves.

GIVING back

But there is yet another dimension that we should reflect on. As this is orientation time, I would frame it with this question: “What do Jackie Chan and Jet Li have in common?” They are both, of course, gong fu experts and international superstars. But they both also deeply believe in GIVING to others.

Late 2007, Jackie Chan was on this campus supporting the Viva Foundation-University Children’s Cancer Centre which provides state-of-the-art treatment facilities for young cancer patients.



Jackie Chan
International superstar
Philanthropist

Main photo of Jackie Chan by Photographer's Mate 3rd Class Lee M. McCaskill, US Navy; public domain image.

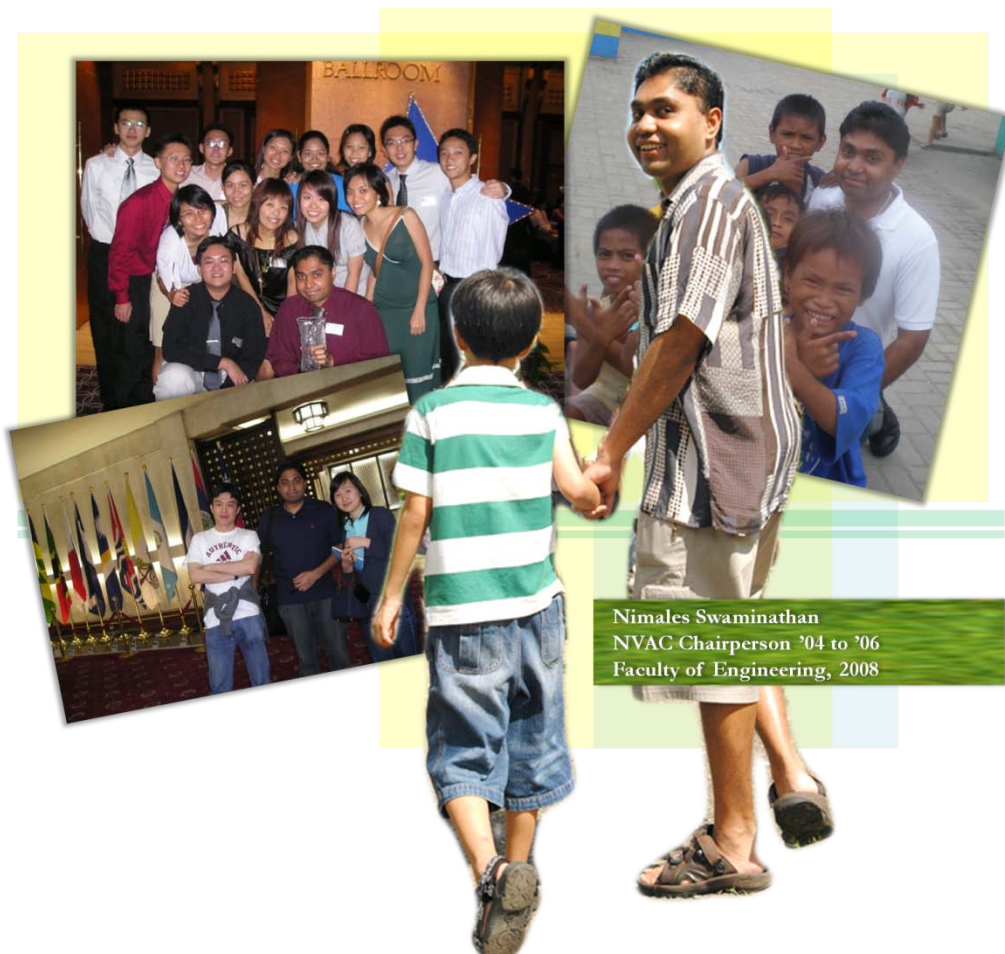
Last week, Jet Li was in NUS as the inaugural speaker of the UBS-NUS Philanthropy Series. We were all inspired and moved by his deep conviction and commitment to make a positive change in society. His message was simple and direct – for each of us to think not just of ourselves but others as part of the same global family; to not just think only of receiving but also of giving; giving not just in terms of money, but in the spirit of wanting to help others.



While none of us in this hall are superstars, yet there is much that each of us can GIVE to those around us. By giving of your time and talent to the NUS community, you enrich it greatly – in the classroom, in your clubs or halls, in the playing field, and in student activities and programmes.

You can also do much by giving to the wider community, in Singapore and beyond. And you can do it right here at NUS. Take for example, Nimallesvaran Swaminathan and the NUSSU Volunteer Action Committee (NVAC). Nimalles devoted much of his time at NUS to volunteering and service. As a past Chairperson of NVAC, he launched several new initiatives, and helped raised substantial funds. He also found

time for numerous academic and cultural exchanges, as well as overseas community service projects, before graduating with a Bachelor of Engineering degree last year.



As a result of passionate individuals like Nimala, NVAC has been very effective in spearheading fund-raising for relief efforts, organising community service projects and promoting volunteerism in Singapore. For example, NVAC volunteers assist patients at the National University Hospital, and under the Boys' Town Tutoring Program, serve as tutors, mentors and role models. NVAC's efforts were recognized by a Singapore Youth Award in 2002 and Medal of Commendation this year.

GAINING, GIVING, GROWING

If you seize the opportunities that NUS offers, I have no doubt that you will GAIN a great deal. Not just intellectually and academically, but as an educated person able to appreciate and enjoy the world around you, skilled in expressing ideas and views clearly, and effective in working with others.

I hope you will also give of your time, energy and talent, to the NUS community, to Singapore and to society. In GIVING you will touch the lives of many others, and be an agent for positive change. At the same time, in GIVING, you too will gain and GROW.

GROW as a person and as a leader. As a responsible global citizen making a difference in society. While doing all this, you should also not forget to LIVE.

Your journey of growth in NUS will also be a voyage of self-discovery – understanding yourself more deeply and clearly, strengths and weaknesses, good points and bad.

More than 2000 years ago, Plato said “The unexamined life is not worth living”. But also remember the rejoinder to this, which is: “The un-lived life is not worth examining”.

Your time here will be one of the most memorable phases of your life. You should enjoy it! So as you embark on your NUS adventure, remember to GAIN, GIVE, GROW, and to LIVE.

Thank you.