

4th Student Achievement Awards Ceremony
Speech by Ag President Prof Tan Chorh Chuan
Friday, 31 October 2008, Grand Ballroom Sheraton Towers

My senior NUS colleagues; Judges
Students, Friends,
Ladies and Gentlemen

Good evening.

Four years ago, we launched the Annual Student Achievement Awards to celebrate the many unique talents and contributions of our students.

These awards also underscore NUS' belief that learning cannot be confined to the classroom but must also extend outside of the classroom.

Why is this so?

Today, we live in a world full of frequent rapid change. Sometimes the changes are large and dislocating, as with the current financial crisis. We also frequently have to work as part of a team, and our ability to get on with others is very important especially during periods of change. For our students, you will find that resilience, resourcefulness, adaptability as well as good "people skills" will be as critical as domain knowledge in your area of work. The university is the best place and time to develop these attributes. But it cannot be done by taking courses. You need to go out of the classroom, and out of your comfort zone.

At NUS, we seek to enrich and challenge each of our students to make a difference, to develop your potential. No apologies for our insistence on academic rigor, but we also try our best to encourage our students to try new things, and to provide a wide range of learning opportunities outside the classroom. However, we can only do so much. In the end, you, our students, would need to take the plunge, in order to take full advantage of the opportunities we have made available.

I am really delighted that many of our students *have* taken the plunge. For this year's Student Achievement Awards (SAA), we have nearly 200 nominations. I consider each and every one of the nominees a winner, even as we honour 17 outstanding individuals and 36 exceptional student groups tonight. I congratulate all the nominees and our SAA winners for your sterling accomplishments.

The diverse achievements of this year's award recipients are impressive. Let me just highlight a number of these:

The NUSSU Volunteer Action Committee or NVAC [*en-vac*] is widely known for its community service projects. This year's committee, led by Timothy Lin, was awarded the 2008 Commonwealth Youth Silver Award – one of only five winners across Asia, Africa, the Caribbean and South Pacific regions. Honored for the impact of their projects on the community, NVAC received recognition for its Charity Fiesta project, which saw more than 800 students and members of the public participating in its *Volunteer-A-Day* segment, to help the less fortunate in our society.

Next, the NUS Chinese Debating team. It is remarkable how well our debating team did against heavy odds, at the Inter-Varsity Debate Tournament organised by CCTV in Beijing. Pitted against the top Chinese universities, our team emerged as 2nd runner up. The pressure was intense as the debates were watched by over 300,000 international viewers over CCTV. Our debaters – Guan Yipeng, Wang Haiqing, Lan Yuhong, Li Hongyang, Wang Yu and Wan Huaming did not buckle under pressure and did NUS proud.

Let me also mention NUSSU. Through its Rag and Flag Day, NUSSU has consistently raised hundreds of thousands of dollars each year for charity, with support and active participation by the Faculty Clubs and the Halls of Residence. For being the only student organization to have achieved this, NUSSU received the Community Chest awards from the National Council for Social Services. I consider this a great accomplishment because so many students from across the university were united to raise money for good causes in Singapore.

For the three groups I have mentioned, what strikes me most is that they are not first time winners of titles, accolades and awards. Each year and with each competition, they challenge themselves to go beyond their limits – in other words, they aim to be *self-surpassing*. They focus not on outperforming others but on bettering themselves.

And most importantly, the aim of all these efforts is not to win awards or personal glory, but to discover their own limits, to have a good time, and to help others.

As Dennis Waitley, an American author once said, “The most splendid achievement of all is the constant striving to surpass yourself and to be worthy of your own approval”.

To our students, I hope you will continue to be self surpassing, striving to outdo your own best. You are our new generation of ambassadors and role models for your peers. You have contributed much to the excitement and vibrancy of NUS. At the same time, you will find that you will have gained as individuals, learning much outside of the classroom.

On this note, let me once again congratulate all our award winners tonight. I wish you all the very best and may you always pursue your passions, be your best in whatever you choose to do and take pride in your University the same way it takes pride in you and your endeavours.

Thank you.