INSPIRING STUDENTS, ADVANCING KNOWLEDGE

Professor Lily Kong (‘86), Vice Provost (Academic Personnel) and holder of the Provost’s Chair Professorship, talks about why professors are vital to a university and how donors can make a difference by supporting professorships.

Why is it important for a university such as the National University of Singapore (NUS) to attract and retain world-renowned faculty?

A university’s success depends on one very primary resource and that’s people, people, people. A very key part of that is the complement of faculty members. Of course, people also includes staff, students and alumni, who are all very important. But, one key part of what makes a university great and strong is, at the end of the day, the professors. One major responsibility of the professor is to educate, to draw out each individual student and maximise his or her potential. Effective professors are able to excite their students and stimulate their learning.

What can a professor offer a university?

The university is the professors. The professors are the university. If you did not have professors who are contributing to the educational endeavours of the university, there would be no university. If you did not have professors who are contributing to knowledge production through their research, there would be no new knowledge that improves society.

How can the larger community – Singapore, the region – benefit from a university that attracts the best and the brightest academics?

A professor does, very broadly speaking, three things. One, a professor teaches; two, a professor does research; and three, a professor can contribute in more direct terms to community and society.
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IN ESTEEMED COMPANY
For many years, professors have honoured eminent individuals – such as Dr Goh Keng Swee and Mr S R Nathan – who have achieved recognition through their contributions to society.

The Goh Keng Swee Professorship in Economics at the National University of Singapore (NUS) was named after Singapore’s first Minister for Finance: Dr Goh Keng Swee (’39). He is credited with putting in place institutions and ideas that are intrinsic to Singapore today. Among them are Jurong Industrial Estate (JTC Corporation), the Economic Development Board, the Monetary Authority of Singapore and the Development Bank of Singapore (DBS).

In honour of such a distinguished alumnus, the NUS Department of Economics established the Goh Keng Swee Professorship in Economics and is able to welcome eminent professors in the fields of Development Economics, International Economics and Economics of the Asia-Pacific Region to contribute to its research programmes, teach and give public lectures.

The Professorship was made possible with generous gifts from a host of corporations and eminent individuals. Among them were members of the Association of Banks in Singapore, City Development Ltd, Far East Organization, Lien Foundation, National Trade Union Congress, Overseas-Chinese Banking Corporation Ltd, Overseas Union Bank, Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce & Industry, Singapore Technologies, DBS and The United Overseas Bank Ltd.

Young professors who are appointed under named professorships not only enjoy the prestige associated with the esteemed individual, but also spend valuable time interacting with other first-rate faculty.

Professor Jeffrey C Ely, a Goh Keng Swee Professor in Economics, explains, “As an economic theorist, my work is highly collaborative, bouncing ideas off colleagues and incorporating the results of these dialogues into new directions for my research. The faculty and students at NUS provide an unparalleled atmosphere for such interactions. I believe and very much hope that appointments such as mine will allow the faculty and students of NUS to benefit from interaction with international scholars.
Every academic department needs to keep active connections across the globe and named professors that provide that kind of access.

Another man honoured for his unflagging spirit of social service is Singapore’s former and longest-serving President Mr S R Nathan (’34). Established by the NUS Department of Social Work on its 60th anniversary, the S R Nathan Professorship allows the University to bring in renowned academic leaders to advance social education and research among scholars in Singapore and Asia on issues related to social development, poverty, family development and asset building.

Professor Michael Sherraden, the inaugural S R Nathan Professor shares, “I can never do as much as Mr Nathan, but I can continue in his spirit, building capacity for research and training in social development, and engaging social innovations in Singapore – in areas such as social services, asset building, retirement security, health policy, housing, and intergroup relations – in broader international discussions. There is strong interest in Singaporean social policies not only in other parts of Asia, but many other countries around the world. I very much look forward to undertaking this work with many good friends and colleagues at NUS.”

The S R Nathan Professorship was supported by generous gifts from the Tote Board, Temasek Holdings (Private) Limited, Ngee Ann Kongsi, Singapore Press Holdings as well as four other esteemed benefactors.
A TRIBUTE TO DISTINCTION

The University has a long tradition of donors honouring a family member, a friend, a class or an organisation by setting up a professorship in their name. Here we share a few of these stories.

It has been said that because Tan Sri Dr Tan Chin Tuan’s personal history is inextricably intertwined with the history of the Overseas Chinese Banking Corporation (OCBC), he was sometimes called Mr OCBC. It was his guiding hand that helped OCBC pull through the challenging periods of the economic crisis during the Great Depression and in Singapore’s war-torn economy after 1945 to become the present-day successful OCBC.

Over the years, under Tan Sri Tan’s astute leadership and able stewardship, OCBC expanded to become Singapore’s largest bank in 1966.

In 1975, OCBC established the Tan Chin Tuan Professorship in Banking and Finance at the National University of Singapore (NUS) to celebrate the great businessman’s outstanding achievements, commemorate his dedicated service to the banking and finance sector, and recognise his philanthropic values in a permanent and meaningful manner. This Professorship plays a pivotal role in knowledge creation and dissemination to future generations of students, who can contribute in building the economies of South East Asia.

As a Tan Chin Tuan Professor in Banking and Finance at NUS, Professor Danny Quah’s main research focus is on world leadership and global economic policymaking - how the rise of the East is changing international relations and altering the appropriate conduct of world economic policy.

Based at the NUS Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Department of Economics, Professor Quah is thankful for the opportunities given. “Without the Tan Chin Tuan Professorship, I would not be able to come to NUS from the London School of Economics each year. I get to share best-practice thinking with Singapore’s policy-makers and corporate and thought leaders. Being in Singapore allows me considerable insight into the problems I research - on economic growth, world leadership, the rise of the East, and the development experience of arguably the world’s most successfully growing economy,” he shares.

The Class of ’62 Professorship marks another significant milestone for NUS. The Class of 1962 became the first batch of students at the University of Singapore when it separated from the University of Malaya. At its 35th Anniversary, the Class agreed to raise funds over the next five years. Dr Tony Tan (’62), then Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defence was the committee’s patron, while Mr Denis Tay (’62), former CEO of Singapore Press Holdings, headed the 10-member committee.

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The Class of ’62 Professorship recognises outstanding academic excellence, as well as academic and intellectual leadership in the field of life sciences. Appointed in 2013, world-renowned snake toxin expert Professor Kini R Manjunatha, appreciates the opportunities that come with the Professorship. “Receiving such a professorship is an honour and provides a strong encouragement to me. These professorships could drive research in a specific area, and in my case, has provided me the opportunity to send my students and postdoctoral fellows to different laboratories to learn specific and new techniques that are not available in Singapore. We could potentially help millions of patients and put Singapore on the world map with the development of new drugs,” Professor Kini explains.

Professor Quah agrees. “Creativity and diversity in thinking are critical for a vibrant, lively, and ultimately productive and effective intellectual environment. Without outside support in philanthropic gifts, any academic system or university will diminish in momentum and vigour, and ultimately become less creative, less productive, and therefore less useful. Philanthropy towards the NUS community pays off massively, to the University and its community, to the nation, and thus ultimately to all of us in the world,” he expresses.
THE IMPACT OF ENGAGEMENT

Professorships attract world-renowned academics to the University who help build knowledge, inspire students and spur innovative research.

When launching a new Professorship in Arabia Asia Studies at the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore (NUS), entrepreneur and successful businessman Mr Muhammad Alagil said, “Arabia and Asia share extensive and deep commercial and cultural connections which may have been forgotten or neglected over the past two centuries. In fact, generations of Arabians have always regarded Asia as one of the places for growth, enrichment and adventure.”

The Professorship will play a significant role in strengthening the study of Arabia Asia relations through research on social, cultural, historical and contemporary areas, providing important insights into the linkages between Arabia and Asia.

Whether nurturing cultural relations, shaping a national industry, or advancing high-impact medical research, professorships are established to build expertise and promote research in key fields. Named professors serve as beacons of inspiration for the academic community as well as industry.

NUS aspires to contribute to economic development by growing strategic research and development clusters and one focus area is the offshore and marine engineering sector. With a generous gift from marine industry giant Keppel Corporation Limited’s wholly-owned subsidiary, Keppel Offshore & Marine Ltd, the Keppel Professorship in Ocean, Offshore and Marine Technology was established to put that plan into action.

Current Keppel Chair Professor and NUS Vice-Provost of Special Duties, Professor Chan Eng Soon (’80) says, “The Keppel Professorship has helped to pave the way for NUS to have a deeper engagement with the offshore and marine industry, both in education and in research. The collaboration with Keppel Corporation has also evolved towards a longer term partnership, allowing both NUS and Keppel to explore new dimensions in co-innovation and the grooming of offshore and marine engineers for the future.”

Likewise, many professorships are set up in the medical arena to bring high-impact medical research to greater heights and strengthen Singapore’s status as a leading medical hub. The Hong Leong Group gave to the Hong Leong Professorship in Ophthalmology at the NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine to bring in eminent professors in ophthalmology to offer crucial regional and international insights and share expertise with local professionals.

The Singapore medical community would gain deeper insight and build capacity in ophthalmology research, while enhancing capabilities in delivering cutting-edge treatment procedures to patients,” Governor of Hong Leong Foundation Mr Kwek Leng Joo says of the significant rewards of the Professorship.

Professorships are not only crucial in transforming the next generation through knowledge and research, they are also instrumental in fostering the University’s partnership with the nation in shaping change. Both the University and the community at large will stand to benefit tremendously from a growing pool of private gifts directed towards this important talent resource.

NUS and PDPA

In Singapore, the Personal Data Protection Act 2012 (PDPA) establishes a data protection law that governs the collection, use and disclosure of your personal data. In line with this, the University has updated the Standard Terms & Conditions for Gifts to comply with the PDPA. You can find the latest version of the document on our website: www.giving.nus.edu.sg. Should you have any questions about giving to NUS, please email askdvo@nus.edu.sg or call us at 1-800-DEVELOP (1-800-338-3567).
National University of Singapore (NUS)-Autodesk Term Professor Kevin Kuang believes that innovative thinking should occur at every significant juncture in the entire chain of activities involved in research, or the designing of solutions to a particular problem. The Assistant Professor from the NUS Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering wants to challenge students to get excited about working with others in a team on projects of mutual interest. He shares his thoughts on the Professorship, his research and students.

Tell us about the nature of your work.

With the support of my colleagues at the NUS Engineering Design and Innovation Centre (EDIC), we strive to encourage students undergoing our Design-Centric Programme to exploit the potential of a suite of advanced and powerful design software to help them innovate and come up with creative solutions for their undergraduate projects. We also demonstrate the use of design software within EDIC at our annual international NUS Design Summer Programme.

Describe your achievements as the NUS-Autodesk Term Professor.

During the last two years, we have seen many exciting undergraduate student projects and teaching activities that have relied on, or made use of, design software to drive their projects to completion. These include the design and analysis of a deployment module for a nano-satellite and the design, simulation and prototyping of a toothbrush testing machine which won the Manufacturing Category of ASEANpreneurs Autodesk Design Challenge 2013.

Could you describe how your research benefits the community and society?

I am presently working on monitoring the health of structures in our built environment. For example, projects include the development of tools to detect damage in train tracks, monitor cracks in offshore platforms and gas pipes, and detect landslide/ground settlement during tunnelling or underground construction. Early detection of damage can allow us to prevent catastrophic structural failure. These are critically important to ensure the safety of users and workers.

What is the importance of innovation in your field and what is your advice to Engineering students who want to stay innovative?

Real-world societal problems, being complex and wide-ranging in impact, require innovative thinking at the macro level as well as at the micro level. I see innovation as an iterative process of thinking at both levels whilst taking into consideration the needs of the end-user at all times. The value of teamwork in generating innovative ideas cannot be overemphasised if we want to be innovative. It is a culture that needs to be developed along with many other desirable traits in our engineering students.

Describe your favourite part.

It is critical that I studied the topic first hand. Also, teaching helps me think of new questions for my research. So I enjoy both. But my passion is research.

What is the most important advice you’ve given to students who want to be successful?

Be creative in solving problems. Think outside the box. Look for new ideas, new datasets, and new approaches to solving a problem.

What are your thoughts on the impact of professorships, and the importance of philanthropic gifts towards professorships?

With limited resources in the world of academia, the importance of philanthropic gifts cannot be understated. We conduct research that takes time; we have to present the findings and seek feedback; we need funds for support and travel. Gifts make this possible and advance our knowledge of science, which helps design policy and provide solutions to private enterprise.

Pondering Simple Questions

The Low Tuck Kwong Professor in Economics, Finance and Real Estate is a passionate economist who enjoys his work so much that he likens it to relaxing on a beach. Professor Sumit Agarwal, who is also the Research Director at the Centre for Asset Management Research and Investments (CAMRI) at the National University of Singapore (NUS) Business School, and a Research Associate at the Institute of Real Estate Studies, Centre for Quantitative Finance, Centre for Behavioural Economics, and Risk Management Institute, reveals more about the work he loves.

Tell us about the nature of your work and describe your favourite part.

I do research on consumer behaviour. I like finding answers to simple questions. Do people spend or save if we give them free money? Do consumers make mistakes when they face simple choices? Do they learn from their mistakes? Can we make people walk more? Can we make people take shorter showers to save water? Why do taxi drivers not work harder towards the end of their shifts? I love solving these problems. This is my favourite part.

Teaching versus research. How do you balance both areas?

I think that a good researcher makes a better teacher and vice-versa. When I talk about the role of banks and regulators in my banking class, it is critical that I studied the topic first hand. Also, teaching helps me think of new questions for my research. So I enjoy both. But my passion is research.

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INSPIRING STUDENTS, ADVANCING KNOWLEDGE

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1:

Through teaching, a professor is contributing to graduates who then graduate and contribute to society. Through research, professors can contribute to disease alleviation, to the design of the next new instrument or gadget, to technology that will make a difference to our lives. A professor can be researching the histories and economies of a society that tell people where they have come from and where they might go. So, through the research of a professor, a society stands to gain in understanding itself better and in bettering itself.

Why would outstanding academics choose to work and teach at NUS?
There is a lot going for NUS. In NUS, professors have access to some of the best students who choose to come to NUS from Singapore, the region and the world.

Professors look for good students and are attracted by them because it is through the interaction with good students that they too can push themselves forward in their thinking and their research.

Professors also choose to come to NUS because of the University’s supportive research environment. This takes two forms. One, there is the physical environment. Professors have access to excellent laboratories and facilities. They also have access to the societies, communities and people of a vast and diverse region. For example, for the Humanities and Social Sciences, if somebody is interested in studying Asia the region, the field is right here. Singapore is at the crossroads of Asia.

Second, professors also have access to a cultural environment, made up of their peers. Good professors want to work with other good professors because they get to exchange ideas. They have the benefit of minds rubbing against one another and the advantage of learning from one another. It is through the cut and thrust of debate and discussion that academics further sharpen their ideas. So, having that critical mass of excellent professors at NUS is a real draw for the professors who are contemplating coming to Singapore.

Do students benefit in any way from the eminent academics who come to NUS?
When you have professors who are at the cutting edge of their work, whether medicine, music or architecture, they bring the latest knowledge into the classroom. Generally, when they are also working at the cutting edge, they are passionate about what they are doing. They bring that passion into the classroom and they inspire the students. Because, what the students should be learning is not words on a page. Learning is about people who are interrogating certain research questions, who are struggling to find answers to those questions. Students learn by watching what the professors themselves are doing.

“Donors who contribute to NUS have the opportunity to help shape educational and research initiatives... So, in giving to professorships in particular areas, one could actually be enhancing in very significant ways the education of our students and the development of research in those important areas.”

What qualities are you looking for in a professor?
Generally we look for people who are at the cutting edge of research, and we look for excellent communicators and committed educators. We want people who also have a potential to continue to grow with us.

Is there a greater bias toward hiring overseas professors or local ones?
If so, why?
NUS is committed to hiring the best. And the best come from Singapore, as well as from all over the world.

Why does NUS want to attract philanthropic support to fund professorships?
There are several reasons why philanthropic support is very important. First, it signals a society’s value system: what we value and what we support. So, for example, support for cancer research suggests a society that is concerned about certain health issues and wants to support the development of cures.

We are an ageing society and if one supports a professorship in industrial design, students will be able to work with professors to design new products – it could be as simple as a kettle or a chair – that facilitate the mobility of elderly people and the ways they navigate the homespace. Philanthropic support for industrial design, to educate students and to develop products that cater to the elderly population, basically signals that this is a society that is concerned about its elderly population.

Philanthropy reflects the priorities and values of a society. Philanthropic support also signals that education and research are a collective responsibility, and not just the responsibility of the government – although the government here is very supportive of education and research. It is a larger collective endeavour, and philanthropic support demonstrates that society values education and research and wants to support these activities.

Why should a prospective donor consider making a gift in support of a professorship?
Donors who contribute to NUS have the opportunity to help shape educational and research initiatives. To give an example, if one were an advocate for protecting the environment, endowing a professorship in environmental studies will bring top professors here who can contribute to the education of students in making the environment better and also contribute to research in improving the environment. If one were interested in intercultural understanding, then endowing a professorship in multiculturalism will enhance students’ and societal understanding of intercultural relations.

So, in giving to professorships in particular areas, one could actually be enhancing in very significant ways the education of our students and the development of research in those important areas.
REALISING STUDENTS’ POTENTIAL

By combining the leading of research programmes with teaching, professors inspire our students and empower them to achieve their own success. Here five students share their experiences of working with world-renowned academics.

“I was inspired by Professor Halliwell’s work on free radicals, antioxidants and ageing, as an undergraduate research intern. My time at Prof Halliwell’s lab has laid the foundations for my plans of eventually establishing myself both as a medical scientist and as a specialist in geriatric medicine.”

Fong Sheng, a First Class Honours graduate in Life Sciences and currently a medical student at Duke-NUS, on Professor Barry Halliwell, Deputy President (Research and Technology) and Tan Chin Tuan Centennial Professor.

“It has been a delight to study under Professor Cook. His approach in the classroom has been a wonderful challenge: Prof Cook does not give ‘easy’ answers to fundamental questions, instead encouraging us to delve into classical Chinese philosophy ourselves.”

Feroz Mohamed Khan, Freshman at Yale-NUS College on Professor Scott Cook, Tan Chin Tuan Professor of Chinese Studies.

“Professor Reeb was a great teacher who not only taught me about the financial markets, but more importantly, how to think for myself and critically evaluate things. All of these skills are more important than any knowledge a teacher could possibly impart to his students, as they will follow me through life. Furthermore, his passion for finance inspired me to pursue a career down that path. For that and for everything else, I am very grateful to him.”

Mr Shaun Loh, NUS BBA, Class of 2014, on Professor David Reeb, Provost’s Chair and Mr & Mrs Lin Jo Yan Professor in Banking and Finance. Shaun currently works at J.P. Morgan.

“Professor Yeoh is known for his memorable analogies. His ability to conceptualise and communicate complex ideas in a succinct but humorous manner makes his lessons always relatable and interesting. He is also very generous in imparting his vast knowledge. Hearing about his overseas experience and working under Prof Yeoh has shaped my thinking and perspectives to be more comprehensive.”

Joshua Lim Yew Suang

“Professor Yeoh always encourages me to think and work independently, to address problems a couple of steps ahead of my experiments and at the same time, to always focus on how my research can help improve patient care.”

Grace Koh Shimin

PhD students at the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine on Associate Professor Allen Yeoh, Viva-Goh Foundation Associate Professor in Paediatric Oncology.
The National University of Singapore (NUS) will be establishing an endowed Professorship in Social Sciences in honour of Singapore’s first President, Encik Yusof bin Ishak. The Yusof Ishak Professorship in Social Sciences memorialises and honours Encik Yusof’s many distinguished contributions to Singapore, in particular his deep interest in promoting harmonious relations in a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural nation. The new Professorship was announced by Singapore’s Prime Minister Mr Lee Hsien Loong during his National Day Rally 2014 speech.

The endowed Professorship, which will be established at the NUS Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, will enable the Faculty to attract and appoint leading social science academics who have demonstrated excellence and established international recognition in teaching and research in the areas of multi-ethnicity and multi-culturalism.

The Yusof Ishak Professor is expected to assume stewardship for enhancing cutting-edge research in one or more of the following fields of study: race, ethnicity and community studies and multi-culturalism; communication and civic engagement; and studies of religion and religious diversity.

All gifts and donations will be channelled to an endowment fund to support this Professorship.

Said NUS President Professor Tan Chorh Chuan, “As Singapore’s first President and our University’s third Chancellor, Encik Yusof bin Ishak served the nation and University with great distinction. He challenged the University community to inspire the national consciousness and civic spirit, and reminded us to be a centre of learning as well as a focus of nation building.

“We are honoured to have the opportunity to establish the Yusof Ishak Professorship in Social Sciences to continue his legacy of furthering understanding of multi-ethnicity and multi-culturalism for an inclusive and progressive society.”

Professor Brenda Yeoh, Dean of the NUS Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, added, “We are delighted to set up the Yusof Ishak Professorship in Social Sciences at the NUS Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. The Professorship will allow us to enhance our expertise in the study of race, ethnicity, multi-culturalism and religion. More importantly, it will allow us to work towards the strengthening of understanding for multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious issues in the national consciousness, an area of deep interest to Encik Yusof bin Ishak.”

Born in 1910 in Padang Gajah, Perak, Encik Yusof bin Ishak rose from humble beginnings to become the first Malayan-born Yang Di-Pertuan Negara on 3 December 1959 and later, the first President of the Republic of Singapore on 9 August 1965. Encik Yusof served 11 years as Head of State and President and provided Singaporeans with steadfast courage and leadership during the early tumultuous years of nation-building.

A distinguished journalist and editor, Encik Yusof was a prominent patron of the arts in Singapore, and was also a member of the Films Appeal Committee, the Nature Reserves Committee and the Malayisation Commission. His exemplary career was also marked by an appointment as the Chairman of the Public Service Commission in July 1959.

Encik Yusof was the third Chancellor of the University from 1965 to 1970. As Chancellor, Encik Yusof demonstrated a keen interest in the University’s growth and development as a centre for scholarship and focus for nation building. In 1969, Encik Yusof was conferred the Honorary Degree of Doctor of Letters by the University for his significant contributions to the development of modern Singapore as a united multi-racial and multi-cultural nation.