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Welcome to the National University of Singapore (NUS) University Scholars Programme (USP).

Inside these pages, you will find the essential facts about USP and its community – the curriculum, residential college, a selection of the modules and international programmes, partner faculties, and career services. Of special significance is our move in August 2011 to the newly-created NUS University Town, and to our new residential college premises. Students and professors engage here in intensive, yet fulfilling intellectual endeavour, with learning, questioning, and debate occurring both inside and outside the classroom. And there is space here for our USP students to participate in and support a wider and more diverse range of activities than before.

We pride ourselves on providing a rigorous multidisciplinary curriculum and an intellectual environment for highly motivated students. But the best way to describe the unique USP culture is through the voices of students themselves. I encourage you to read through the alumni narratives in this booklet. The former students relate their experiences, the intellectual training and opportunities that USP offers and their impact on continuing personal growth. Read their reminiscences of learning in a small programme, which is at once emotionally close, socially engaged, highly intellectual, and a lot of fun.

If you share our desire to create a community of thinking, engaged, globally minded and concerned young people, seize this opportunity. Learn more about USP and about the programmes you could become part of.

Professor John Richardson
Director, University Scholars Programme
Master, Cinnamon College (USP)
The University Scholars Programme (USP) is a multidisciplinary, partially residential, academic programme for National University of Singapore (NUS) undergraduates. We offer an environment of enquiry, collaboration, and creative discovery. Students learn to engage with ideas and situations, and to challenge themselves intellectually, socially, and personally. Each year, 180 incoming undergraduates join our community of exceptional students. They have the opportunity to explore across disciplines, and to lead and participate in a wide range of extracurricular and overseas programmes.
**My Major and USP**

70% + 30%

The USP programme is designed to enhance and complement partner faculties’ curricula. Students admitted to USP are concurrently enrolled in one of seven faculties or schools in NUS – Arts and Social Sciences, Business, Computing, Design and Environment, Engineering, Law, and Science. USP students earn 70% of their academic credits in their home faculty and 30% in USP. The total workload is the same as that of other undergraduates.

**USP Curriculum**

USP’s interdisciplinary modules introduce students to a broad spectrum of skills and new ways of thinking. The curriculum is designed to develop intellectual inquiry through multidisciplinary seminar teaching. The foundation modules focus on writing, critical thinking, and quantitative reasoning skills, which form the framework for complex ideas and arguments to build upon. The inquiry and reflection modules hone independent thinking and encourage students to delve more deeply into their areas of interest through research, expeditions, overseas academic exchanges, and entrepreneurial internships. Upon successful completion of USP requirements and an honours programme, students will graduate with an honours degree from their faculty or school. They will also receive a USP certificate designating them as a University Scholar.

**USP Residential College**

The USP residential college (RC) is home to the USP community where multidisciplinary learning is integrated with residential living – a first of its kind in Singapore. Its facilities and programmes create an environment conducive for open-minded discussions and interactions with people from different disciplines and diverse backgrounds. All USP students will stay at the RC for two years: year one and another year of their choice. Some will stay on thereafter. This is an important component of the students’ orientation and integration into USP, and will help them to experience the benefits of life in a closely-knit learning community.

**USP Overseas Experiences**

USP encourages and provides financial support for numerous overseas initiatives. These include exchange programmes at universities such as Yale, Delhi, Waseda, Princeton, Sciences Po, Beida, and the Australian National University. We also have expeditions to destinations such as the Himalayas, Cambodia, and Turkey, as well as overseas field trips.

**Applying to USP**

Students submit a separate USP application when applying to NUS. Admission is based on academic potential, co-curricular achievements, passion, motivation, and curiosity. Application is by transcript, an essay, a personal statement, and an interview with USP professors. NUS students in their first semester may also join during USP’s second admissions process from October to November each year. National Service men who are successfully admitted to USP will have a reserved slot in the year they matriculate into NUS.
USP Curriculum

USP offers a broad-based curriculum that balances both breadth and depth to give students an interdisciplinary education. Interdisciplinarity means more than simply taking modules in different areas of study; an interdisciplinary education fundamentally changes how we perceive, think about, and understand the world. By examining a subject with knowledge and methods from multiple disciplines, such an approach produces new possibilities for innovation and creation.

USP students take 30% of their modules in USP and the remaining modules in their home or other faculties. The total workload is the same as that of other NUS undergraduates. Upon successful completion of USP requirements and an honours programme, students will graduate with an honours degree from their faculty or school. They will also receive a USP certificate designating them as a University Scholar.

From the Academic Year (AY) 2012/2013 onwards, USP offers a revised three-tier curriculum. The three tiers are Foundation, Inquiry, and Reflection. Students who have matriculated before AY 2012/2013 will continue with the original curriculum until they graduate. Both curricula focus on providing students with flexibility and support at every stage of their undergraduate studies.

The revised curriculum strives to cultivate a strong core of interdisciplinary perspectives and skills for students to draw from and build upon. In the Foundation tier, students will be introduced to modes of critical thinking and writing as they explore sophisticated and inflected texts and documents with the hope of producing meaningful texts of their own. The Inquiry tier focuses on further developing and expanding the skills and ideas that students encountered in the Foundation modules. These modules encourage students to generate new and innovative ways to look deeply at complex issues and solve problems. The final tier, the Reflection tier, builds upon both the broadening of inquiry in the second tier, and upon the disciplinary knowledge that students have gained within their own majors by having students reflect on these processes in a single seminar-style module.
Foundation Tier

The first tier hopes to nurture a solid series of skills that will well equip students for the interdisciplinary work they will encounter in the subsequent tiers. By emphasising a close reading and deep analysis of the themes, paradigms, and methodological choices that inform texts and research, these modules encourage students to challenge assumptions and ask critical questions.

The three USP Foundation modules are conceptualised as follows:
- Writing and Critical Thinking
- Quantitative Reasoning Foundation
- University Scholars Seminar

Inquiry Tier

The second tier consists of eight Inquiry modules in either the Humanities and Social Sciences domain or the Sciences and Technologies domain. Modules will be distributed evenly between the two domains to give students a broad intellectual and disciplinary base. The overall goal of the second tier is to encourage students to make intellectual connections outside of their disciplinary areas by way of multidisciplinary inquiry. In order to create an environment of educational intimacy and collaborative discovery, inquiry modules take place in small seminars to facilitate meaningful dialogue.

Reflection Tier

The third tier, the Reflection tier, is made up of a single module. The Senior Seminar module is designed to bring students together towards the end of their degree in order to reflect on the conditions of their own disciplinary knowledge and the assumptions developed in disciplinary training, and to cultivate a broader interdisciplinary framework to approach discourse and ideas with. The goal of the third tier is to concurrently build upon the broadening of inquiry that takes place in the second tier and upon the disciplinary knowledge that is acquired through students’ majors.

Other Curricular Features

At USP, we encourage students to take ownership of their education, and to pursue their different interests as well as to challenge themselves for their personal and intellectual development. USP students thus have the freedom and support to earn academic credit in numerous and varied ways, including Independent Study Modules, research, cultural immersion, overseas programmes, and entrepreneurial development.

Students who are interested in research can initiate and study at a higher level and greater depth a topic of interest under the guidance of a faculty member. Students who wish to expand their intercultural experience and networks can choose the cultural immersion option, where they are able to study at an overseas partner university for an extended period. At this time, USP offers cultural immersion programmes/special degree programmes with Waseda University, the Australian National University, Delhi University’s Hindu College and Lady Shri Ram College, and Peking University’s Yuanpei College. The entrepreneurial development option is open to USP students who wish to experience entrepreneurial culture in some of the leading entrepreneurial and academic hubs of the world, such as Silicon Valley, Stockholm, and Shanghai.

USP Curriculum: An Example

An example of the USP curriculum is illustrated in a USP curriculum footprint. This footprint demonstrates the interdisciplinary education of each USP student. Modules and programmes taken throughout a USP student’s undergraduate studies are represented by colour-coded circles. The footprints of the USP alumni featured in this Prospectus reflect the curriculum for students matriculating before AY 2012/2013.
USP Curriculum: An Example

Home or other faculty modules
USP students take 70% of their modules from their home or other faculties. Taken to satisfy major and faculty requirements, these vary according to the choice of major and faculty.

Other USP modules
A USP student takes a total of 12 USP modules that include Foundation, Inquiry, and Reflection modules. USP Writing and Critical Thinking modules (indicated in magenta) are considered Foundation modules.

USP-organised/supported programmes
Exchange programmes, conferences, expeditions, and field trips supported by USP and/or earning USP credits.

Independent Study Modules (ISMs)
USP students undertake at least one ISM to fulfill their academic requirements. They are free to embark on ISMs outside their major or home faculty, and may undertake more than one ISM.

USP Writing and Critical Thinking module
USP students take this module in their first year.
Residential College

Home to the USP, our residential college (also known as Cinnamon College) helps students to experience the benefits of living and learning in a closely-knit community.

This section showcases the diversity, energy, and creativity of this uniquely integrated residential learning environment.
Residential College

photo by: Enoch Tang
The USP residential college (RC) offers students an integrated residential learning environment – one of the first to emerge in Singapore. By bringing people from diverse backgrounds and disciplines together, the RC creates a dynamic space for ideas and innovations to thrive, and extends learning far beyond the classroom. This experience of constant engagement and interaction helps to develop a sense of community and belonging to the programme among USP students, residents and non-residents alike. From sharing meals with peers and professors to holding thoughtful discussions in the Master’s and their own lounge, fondly known as Chatterbox, students are immersed in an environment conducive to their own personal and intellectual growth. The RC is also designed to offer students spaces for reflection and solitude. The resources within the four buildings of the RC are available to all USP students. The range of facilities encompasses classrooms, study rooms, student areas, the Reading Room, the multimedia lab, the Writing Centre, the Chua Thian Poh Hall, the dining hall, lounges, and the USP offices.
All USP students will stay at the USP RC in year one and a second year of their choice. Because students choose when to take their second year of residency, they have the freedom and flexibility of building their own unique educational path.

If they wish, students can also choose to live at the RC for three and/or four years. Having this diverse mix makes it possible for the college community to be composed of not only newly entering students, but also of those who are further along in their USP journey.
The RC is also home to our Residential Fellows, Deputy Director, Resident Writer, and Master of the RC, all of whom share in the experience of working and living alongside students in the college. A community of residents from different cohorts, disciplines, and backgrounds forms an intellectually diverse environment for students to live and learn in.

This residency supports and encourages USP students to partake of opportunities beyond the classroom, both local and overseas. Learning opportunities are not limited to the formal curriculum and programmes at the USP, but also include the USP RC that fosters more informal learning, greater exposure, and further interactions with new people.
Through the RC, all USP students, both residents and non-residents, have the opportunity to take part in a wide and varied scope of residential activities that encourage breadth, open-mindedness, and critical thinking. Activities include lectures, seminar talks, Director’s tea sessions, workshops, inter- and intra-college sports, social campaigns, movie nights, and formal dinners.

Working in the college are a distinguished college Rector, some 40 professors, and around 20 professional and administrative staff. This membership of a closely-knit community fosters close bonds of friendship and mentorship, and allows students to pursue their own goals, initiate projects, and contribute to society in meaningful ways.
A Sample of activities at the USP Residential College/by the USP community

The USP RC experience promises to be an engaging one, but much depends on the students’ own creativity, energy, interests, and passions. Students are free to plan their intellectual, industry, social, sporting, and community events. The following is a sample of community activities at the USP residential college/by the USP community.

PUBLIC LECTURES

Every semester, USP organises 1 – 2 Public Lectures by renowned speakers. We were thrilled to have had Ms Catherine Lim, who shared with us her views on the General Elections in 2011, and Prof Sing C. Chew, who shared his expertise on the relationships between global economic crisis, energy shifts, and climate change.

DIRECTOR’S TEA

The USP Director’s Tea series takes on a conversational format. The group is kept small to encourage students to engage actively with the speakers.

INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGE STUDENTS

The international exchange student community here at the College is a vibrant one. USP students forge strong friendships with the visiting students through living and dining together, and partaking in outings and activities organised.
USP PRODUCTIONS

The annual play by USP Productions is a celebration of the artistic richness and creativity embodied by USP students. It is something that the entire USP community is extremely proud of, scoring a full house attendance at every show.

CONVERSATIONS WITH ALUMNI

USP alumni remain very much connected to us, and we treasure them as important stakeholders in our close-knit community. It is therefore a joy when our alumni come back to share with students on topics like passion, career aspiration, and life.

RANDOM SERIES

The Random series, headed by the USP Residential Fellows, comprises four parts, namely Random Flights of Thought, Random Looks at Art, Random Places in Singapore, and Random Walks in Science. This series caters to the diverse interests and passion of the USP community.

CONFLUENCE

Confluence is USP’s very own research conference series, organised by students, for students. At Confluence, USP students will present the fruits of their work in various USP modules, from term papers written for first-/foundation-tier classes, to Independent Study Modules and honours theses.
PARENTS’ NIGHT

We invited the parents of our students to join us for dinner at the dining hall. It was a wonderful way for them to get a glimpse of our college life.

INTERNATIONAL EVENTS

The Global Interdisciplinary Tournament and Lee Shiu Summer Programme were two international events held in Singapore, by USP. Through these programmes, USP students learnt to play host to international students who stayed at our college. Besides academic rigour, students gained organisational skill and a network of friends internationally.

SCHOLARS PROGRAMME ALUMNI NETWORK (SPAN)

The purpose of SPAN is to build group identity and relationships for an extended community of USP’s alumni and students. We organise SPAN Get-Togethers annually for alumni to catch up with friends, former lecturers, and admin staff, e.g. Chinese New Year “Lohei” at the college hall.

COMMUNITY SERVICE ACTIVITIES

Community Service activities like the Blood Donation Drive and Caroling at the Children’s Cancer Foundation are a constant reminder to USP students of the roles they can play to serve the greater community, to make Singapore and the world a happier place.
Quick Facts on the USP RC

1. The USP RC consists of four purpose-built buildings:
a residential block, two learning blocks and offices, a 
multi-purpose hall – with facilities designed to support the 
students’ needs. The USP RC building is also known as 
Cinnamon College, and shares a connecting dining hall 
with another residential college (Tembusu). Residing in the 
USP RC, students should be prepared to:
• Immerse themselves in an intellectually 
stimulating environment
• Connect to a close-knit network of students, 
professors, and staff who will live, work, and play 
together as one community
• Dine with peers and professors whilst engaging in 
robust debate
• Participate in a myriad of sporting, social, and 
scholarly activities
• Enjoy easy access to a wide array of university 
facilities.

2. Located across the NUS Kent Ridge campus, 
the USP RC is one of the first colleges in NUS University 
Town (UTown) that has integrated green concepts in its 
master planning and building designs. All of the facilities 
and services that UTown offers are available to the USP 
community. Such spaces and resources include the 
Educational Resource Centre and its computer clusters, 
open study spaces, e-learning cafes, seminar rooms, 
and private study areas. There are also other amenities 
placed throughout UTown, such as an EduSports Complex 
(Stephen Riady Centre), restaurants, a mini-mart, retail 
outlets, and ATMs.
Both campuses are made fully accessible through the link bridge (College Link), which connects UTown to the Kent Ridge campus. The university offers a regular internal shuttle bus service that enables students to travel between the two locations with ease and speed. Public transport is also located at convenient and easily accessible spots in the area surrounding UTown.

3. Around 600 students reside within the RC, which also contains the USP administrative and faculty offices and teaching rooms.

4. The USP student lounge, Chatterbox, is located at the ground floor of the USP residential block. This is a space for students to make their own. The lounge has a distinct character and atmosphere that the students actively create and engage with. Such forms of community building are evident from the photos, comments, poetry, and memorabilia that decorate the walls of Chatterbox (and other corridors). Students are free to organise and host events in the lounge, such as impromptu open mike sessions and lively debates.

5. The dining hall is at the heart of the USP college community. All students living in the USP RC will participate in the meal plan. The experience of dining together facilitates the building and development of intellectual discussion and strong interpersonal relationships. The dining hall offers yet another space for initiatives and activities. Residents can find a rich and diverse selection of food stations to choose their meals from, including Western, Malay, Indian, Chinese, and a salad bar. All meals have been planned by nutritionists to ensure that residents’ dietary and nutritional needs are well taken care of.

6. Application to live in the RC
Students can apply through both the University Housing Management System and the USP website at usp.nus.edu.sg. Application will open at the same time as application for NUS undergraduate campus accommodation.

7. Accommodation Type
Students can have their choice of accommodation on mixed- or single-sex floors:
- Single Corridor Room (non air-conditioning)
- Single Corridor Room (air-conditioning)
- Single Room in 6-Bedroom Suite (non air-conditioning)
- Single Room in 6-Bedroom Suite (air-conditioning)

Students in the 6-bedroom suites can enjoy their own living room within their suite, in addition to a cosy student lounge that is available on every floor. Rooms with special needs facilities are also available. Room rentals vary across categories, with air-conditioning charged on a pay-as-you-use basis. For the latest rental details, please visit the USP website usp.nus.edu.sg.

8. Financial Aid
The cost of a college component may put a strain on the finances of some USP students and their families. There are several financial assistance schemes available (may vary year to year) to help with this:
- Residential Programme Bursaries
- University Town Bursaries
- University Town Scholarships
- USP Residence Grant

In addition to the above, students may tap on a comprehensive range of financial assistance schemes that NUS offers.

More information about the USP RC can be found at the USP website, at www.usp.nus.edu.sg/community-college/index.html. Questions about the USP RC may be directed to usp_rc@nus.edu.sg.
Quotes from Students, Faculty, Alumni

Although I have been studying in Singapore as an international student for five years, I feel that the USP RC is the first place I can call home. The RC has transformed my life in USP into a whole new learning and residential experience. For me, what makes the RC special are not its brand new facilities, but rather the friendly people who are genuinely interested in who I am and who care for my welfare. There is also an encouraging atmosphere here for me to have conversations with a diverse range of people. In addition, the USP admin office organises a series called the Director’s tea sessions, where prominent figures within diverse fields are invited to hold discussions with us. Living in the college makes it even more convenient for us to attend these talks and to expand our horizons. These talks inspire me to stay true to my dream no matter how impossible it may seem to other people. My stay at the RC so far has been a personal journey that has encouraged me to challenge myself and grow in many ways. It is truly up to each individual to write his or her own RC story.
– Zhang Xintian (’15), Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences + USP

Life in the USP RC has been an eye-opener. I feel privileged to be part of this new exciting experiment in communal living and identity. For the students and staff of USP, our new facilities in UTown will take us to the next level in developing bonds and relationships with students by reinforcing and strengthening daily, meaningful contact in classrooms, dining, and living areas. For the Residential Fellows in UTown, the opportunities for enhanced interaction with students have been fulfilling and great fun.
– Dr Quek Ser Hwee, Residential Fellow

Having lived on campus for four years, I must say that living in the RC with my peers has been a really superb experience so far. Here, we can hold many late night conversations and debates about a wide range of topics, including modules, theories, academia, our dreams of what we’d like to pursue outside of school, as well as the things that make us tick. Besides knowing that I have friends from other majors who I can turn to for help with modules that are outside of my comfort zone, I have also been able to see how other people have taken action to transform their dreams into reality. Whether they are helping the underprivileged or encouraging others to expand their awareness of social issues, the RC has provided us with a space to explore and expand our interests. But what I love most about staying in the RC with my peers is the kind of friendships that are built and nurtured through this experience. There is a unique kind of understanding and trust that develops over the course of daily interactions, shared mealtimes, emotional and academic support, and, of course, occasional emergencies. These are friendships that have carried me through my four years here in USP, and I know will continue to support me as I move on to new stages in life.
– Teo Min Xun (’12), Sociology + USP

The value of the RC extends beyond just being a beautifully designed place to return to at the end of the day. My floor feels like an advertisement for the United Colours of Benetton – we have people from Romania, Canada, Korea, Israel, China, India, Pakistan, and, of course, Singapore. The learning and cultural exposure that emerges from living in such diversity is unparalleled from any other that I’ve experienced. I have come to discover and be surprised by the intricacies and subtleties that are missing from guide books and other materials. From culinary idiosyncrasies to different tastes in music, it is really the little things I’ve learned from the other residents that have taught me a lot. It’s at the dining hall where I sit with different groups of students that I think some of my best learning begins.
– Yash Vardhan Kanoi (’15), Engineering + USP

Living as well as teaching in the USP RC is a remarkable experience. There is a lot of interaction both between students and faculty and among students themselves. There are excellent opportunities for informal learning; it has become a lot easier to coordinate all types of intellectual exchange than was the case before our move to the RC. For instance, during Writing and Critical Thinking sessions this semester, students attended an 8am online conference with a class from Stanford University to share research ideas. They just needed to come downstairs for the session, instead of having to commute to campus for an hour or more. After the session, the entire class repaired to the dining hall for a late breakfast, where our conversations continued.
– Assoc Prof Johan Geertsema, Residential Fellow

After spending the summer of 2010 studying at Yale and then Cambridge, I thought I would never be able to replicate the experience of community-based learning that is a hallmark of their residential colleges. But never have I been so glad to be proven wrong. The USP RC has rekindled the burst of energy I had overseas by sparking the learning spirit within the corridors here. I never know what conversations to expect: at breakfast in the dining hall, my day starts with discussions of exactly how natural selection and evolution are related; at lunch in the common rooms, chats
turn to the role of religion in the formation of our identities; and over dinner, conversations are dominated by American politics and the North African conflicts. Each topic is approached from a myriad of disciplines—be it economics, engineering, or psychology. I cherish these moments of enlightenment where I am able to bring my own disciplinary focus of Finance and Marketing to see how my perspective fits into the grand scheme of things.

– Akanksha Batura (‘12), Business + USP

This spirit of carpe diem is embodied in the communal learning experience of the USP RC. For example, although my group of friends is actively involved in club activities, we still wanted to do a group project together. If not for the fact that we are living and learning under the same roof, it would have been nigh impossible to complete the project—as it was, we would begin meetings at 10pm and end at rather unearthly hours. The RC really facilitates bonding. Far more than we could have foreseen when the idea of residential living was first mooted, living together has meant that not only is it easier to take part in community activities, but we have also come to take the community itself so much more seriously.

– Jue-Ying Gwyneth Teo (‘13), Communications and New Media + USP
Alumni

USP students come from USP’s seven partner faculties, namely:
• Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
• NUS Business School
• School of Computing
• School of Design and Environment
• Faculty of Engineering
• Faculty of Science
• Faculty of Law (USP’s seventh partner faculty beginning 2012)

Many USP graduates have leveraged the opportunities made available through USP and gone on to lead and contribute to varied fields, such as business, research, media, government, and the arts.

In this section, nine USP alumni share their USP experiences.
I am not doing what I am **supposed** to do.  
But I am doing what I **want** to do.

### Aseem K Thakur ('09)  
**Mechanical Engineering + USP**

“I was hooked when I first saw this question on USP’s application form: write about something you are passionate about. I really liked it because it allowed people to be true to their passions and share what they think. This was the tipping point for me. From that moment, I really wanted to be part of this programme so I could follow my dreams, my passion.

### Expectations Delivered

For me, USP’s key strength is that it allows people to follow their passion. Everything in USP, starting from the way the programme is structured to the people you meet, to the staff and faculty who are always there for you… they all enabled me to do what I was truly passionate about: entrepreneurship.

Businesses are actually about taking one particular idea and applying that into something completely different. For example, I could pick up ideas from psychology and apply them to engineering. USP trains you to think like that. It is a mining of ideas, a cross-pollination of different thoughts between different fields. I think great ideas come from that, and the diversity, exposure, and multidisciplinary training you get in USP are very hard to find elsewhere. USP helped me not only in creating the path I want, but also in connecting me with like-minded people to help me along that path.

### Going Entrepreneur

One of the key instruments in USP’s ‘toolkit’ is the help you are given to find the mentors you need. I had mentors who were world-recognised thought leaders during the HCAP conference in Harvard. They were entrepreneurs who impacted me in a big way and inspired me to start my own venture.

And after that, the training from the module on ‘Human Relations’ takes over – getting a team together and working with them towards a common purpose. There are always different kinds of people in a company: the visionaries who always dream of the future, the producers who want to get things done right now, the natural administrators who know the processes to follow – and you need to know how to integrate all of them.

Though I majored in mechanical engineering with a minor in technology entrepreneurship, my time in USP clarified for me that I truly wanted to be an entrepreneur. Today I am working on exciting projects that give back to the community and forming partnerships with companies at the venture I co-founded called **GIVE.sg**. Following your passion may not be the sufficient condition to succeed, but it is definitely the necessary condition for success.”

To hear more from Aseem, go to [uspsg/aseem](http://uspsg/aseem)
It was **pure academic freedom**. Like a kid in a toy store, I could choose anything, and if it wasn’t available, I could create an ISM for it.

"I flutter all ways, and fly in none." This quote by George Eliot has always rung true for me. When I first entered university, I wanted to do everything: science, physics, engineering, art... it was quite nebulous and disparate. Being in USP meant I could take a little time to try anything that caught my interest and thus shape my own education. It was really marvellous.

USP was also my most definitive turning point now that I look back on it. It shaped the way I think and taught me to think not only from my point of view but also from others’. Even today, when a problem is put in front of me, I still look at it from various perspectives. I can imagine and project better because of USP.

**Thinking and Applying**

Some lessons I learned in USP are still applicable today. The science module on ‘Simplicity’ taught me how to model human behaviour, how everything can be boiled down to simple algorithms. Today, I apply that daily in my work in the Civil Service. It’s an unexpected reward.

The writing module also continues to shape the way I approach writing. We were taught how to analyse and structure an argument. For me, the most important thing I learned was the thinking process – the various approaches to thinking that can be continually applied to any topic, and I continue to appreciate that. Ultimately, it comes down to verbal skills, thinking skills, all the ‘softer’ skills. The classes were wonderful, but it is the skillsets that make a difference.

**Breaking Boundaries**

Also, because you are exposed to many avenues of thought, there aren’t any so-called dominant schools of thought that you have to accept. Diversity is the keyword here: of views, people, and personalities. Since we all come from different backgrounds, group think does not tend to occur. We do not automatically reject new ideas. Our small class sizes helped break down our boundaries as well. They were not so small that other views were shut out, yet not so big as to alienate each individual. It created an environment of learning, not just academic, but in all aspects of human interactions. I felt I grew a lot in my four years at USP, not just intellectually but as a person as well."

To hear more from Jet, go to [usp.sg/jet](http://usp.sg/jet)
With USP, you’re not just a satellite dish receiving information – you’re on a journey of self-discovery, reflection, and synthesis.

Lum Wei Soon (’05)
Computing + USP

“I joined USP because I thought it would be a really good opportunity to broaden my experience, but I got so much more than that. There were many classes that you couldn’t take anywhere else, but for me, the greatest benefit of USP lays outside the classroom.

USP is very empowering because it gives students the leeway to tackle challenges that they set for themselves. It encouraged a lot of self-discovery and reflection. You were not just a satellite dish receiving information from your professor. You had to learn to speak up for yourself, while also being open to the views of others.

Beyond the Classroom
At the same time, you’re doing something different in almost every USP class. One of my favorite modules, ‘Africa – Cultures, Communities, and Civilisations’, opened my eyes up to a different culture, a different continent. I learned about Africa, the cradle of civilisation, and when my classmates and I wanted to physically experience it for ourselves, USP gave us the encouragement and support we needed.

We organised the expedition ourselves, from recruitment to logistics, down to marketing and fundraising. Then, we spent about two weeks helping a small township in South Africa, as well as helping some womenfolk to set up micro-businesses. The society there is more maternalistic and very different from Singapore. Being there really does change your perspective about how communities work. It was truly one of my most fulfilling experiences in university.

Opportunities and Talent
The opportunities USP offers are also not just focused on academics. Through USP, I learned about an internship in HSBC which I subsequently got. After graduation, I went back to start my career in banking as a Management Associate.

Today, I am an Assistant Vice President with the Loan Syndication Department at the Bank of Tokyo Mitsubishi. USP was really one of the catalysts for getting me here. The programme helped me be more confident in expressing myself and handling new challenges. My bosses and peers view me as someone who is both credible and enjoyable to work with.

What employers usually want are the soft skills and the attitude. That is something that USP prepares you for. You never know what you’ll find out about yourself when you try out what the programme has to offer. A lot of USPers decided to switch their career focus, like I did from computing to banking. And it has made me a much happier person.”

To hear more from Wei Soon, go to usp.sg/weisoon
There are students who didn’t know the full extent of their potential at the start, but have blossomed and matured at the end because of USP. I was one of those.

Mustafa Izzuddin ('05)
Political Science + USP

“If you were to tell me 10 years ago that I would one day pursue a PhD or win a Fulbright Award, I would have said you were crazy. I was an introverted person with low self-confidence. But because of USP’s supportive culture, I eventually overcame my fears and learnt what needed to be done. My professors gave me particular advice on how to improve my essays, my peers gave me the feedback I needed, and the staff did their best to give us as many opportunities as possible, so that we could realise our potential.

Fulbright Award
Through USP I was given the opportunity to intern with the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS). ASEAN has always been close to my heart, and doing analysis and research about the region made me realise that I wanted to pursue becoming an academic. USP encouraged me on this path and arranged sessions for students looking for scholarship possibilities. This led me to clinch two postgraduate awards from prestigious institutions. I was the youngest recipient of the Visiting ASEAN Fulbright Award which enabled me to do research at Georgetown University. Now, I am completing my doctorate in International Relations at the London School of Economics on an ISEAS scholarship.

Minus to a Plus
If there is one advice I would give to current students or prospective students, it would be this: Don’t be afraid of taking risks or saying what you feel. Call a spade a spade. USP is where you can afford to make mistakes and learn from them. I remember I got a B-minus when I first started in one of the writing modules. It was quite disheartening. But instead of drowning in self-pity, I realised that I just needed to put in extra effort. The faculty members within USP played an important part in my improvement. There is always somebody to provide you with advice. By the end of the module, I got an A-plus.

Collective Wisdom
USP’s intellectually stimulating culture gives more value to collective wisdom than individual wisdom. When you analyse or think about an issue, you don’t only think about yourself, but also about the people around you.

While USP provides numerous opportunities and cultivates thinking skills, it is ultimately up to the students to choose how to use them. I believe the kind of students that USP hones are those who are committed to learn, not just for the sake of enriching themselves, but to make an impact on those around them.”

To hear more from Mustafa, go to usp.sg/mustafa
People tend to think that Literature majors like myself are only able to write about the arts, theatre, or movies. However, when I started working at The Business Times, I was able to pick things up very quickly and not be daunted by the unknown. USP moulded me to be an individual not afraid of trying new things. It has brought me to the point where I can tackle something outside my field and be confident that I can do well. At the same time, the USP culture teaches you to have a conviction and to stand by it. But that doesn’t mean that you hold onto an opinion just for the sake of saying ‘I’m right’. You are encouraged to question your assumptions and expectations. If your argument doesn’t hold up under scrutiny, then you know that you need to carefully reconsider it.

Deep Impact

While USP taught me that having a strong opinion and standing by your conviction is valuable, it also stressed that keeping an open mind and being compassionate is equally important. It is not just about arguing or putting your point across, but it is also about arguing for whom, and to what end. USP encourages you to run with your convictions and to make your ideas real. As long as you are passionate about something, you can effect real change because it is something close to you.

On a USP-exclusive student exchange to Oregon, I learned about issues pertaining to ex-convicts’ re-integration to society, social justice, and models of retribution. For that module, 12 university students studied literature and ethics with 12 incarcerated men from a maximum-security prison. Before this experience, I had believed that ‘an eye for an eye’ was fair. Through this opportunity, I learned that criminal justice issues were far too complex to be tackled with just a ‘measure for measure’ framework. In classes, I got to interact with and study alongside ex-offenders who had turned over a new leaf. These prisoners completely changed my views, and I began to understand why it was important to rehabilitate and re-integrate ex-offenders back into society. When I got back here, I wanted to do something in and for my country. I knew that if I wanted to enact change, I would have to start with myself – so I began volunteer-teaching foundational English at the Singapore Prisons Service.

A Misconception

People tend to think that USP is a scholarly type of programme that is only for straight-A students. I’d like to tell people that this is untrue! Instead, USP is a great community that opens up a myriad of opportunities, not just because of its international programmes, but also because of how it challenges you as an intellectual individual, and more fundamentally, as a human being.”

To hear more from Kelly, go to usp.sg/kelly
Beyond the modules, your interactions with your classmates and the people around you will help to shape how you see yourself.

**Tuty Norashikin Binte Suhaiemi (’07)**
*Applied Chemistry + USP*

“In Chemistry, my colleagues and I tend to talk about molecules and formulae. The bottomline is that there can only be one correct answer. In USP it is an entirely different thing – there’s no one correct answer because there’s always a different context, another perspective to consider.

At USP, I received a melting pot of ideas, people, and passions. This experience truly helped to develop my reasoning, logic, and critical thinking because I tended to ask questions such as ‘what if’, ‘could be’, ‘might be’. It made me think of who I am and what my place in the global society is. USP helps you to see not just the face value. So naturally when I write a report, I look at what the industries are doing, what the world is doing, and see how it all factors in together. This has been very helpful for my work as a Global Technical Operating Scientist at MSD International.

USP is about trying something new, being able to step up to the plate, and enjoying what you do. That’s the thing about USP, we are not afraid to challenge the norm, to take the road not taken. We were given the opportunity to choose modules outside of our comfort zones, which broadened our perspectives considerably. For example, I had the opportunity to take modules from the Lee Kuan Yew’s School of Public Policy, so I had classmates from other countries who had different points of view.

**Flexibility to Soar**

And what I truly appreciate was that USP staff, faculty, and even fellow students have faith in what you do, and believe that you can do it well. That gives you a lot of confidence, because you know you can have the support to do whatever you want and soar.

When I was in Year 2, I did a Year 4 module outside of my faculty in a class full of engineers for my ISM. I was a chemist who thought in formulae and molecules while my classmates were doing a long list of mathematical equations. It was quite daunting, because I needed to do my own research, draw sources from different literature, and compile it into something logical and linear. But it also gave me the flexibility to increase the emphasis on research and discourse, and decrease emphasis on examinations.

USP may not be for everyone because you need to do more than just get a good grade. But when you put things into perspective, you realise that such experiences will allow you to grow into a better you.”

To hear more from Tuty, go to usp.sg/tuty

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**Year 1**: 1 2

**Year 2**: 1 2 3 4

**Year 3**: 1 2 3 4

**Year 4**: 1 2 3 4

- Home and other faculty module
- USP module
- USP Writing & Critical Thinking module
- USP Independent Study module
- USP-supported/organised programmes
  1. Vice President of University Scholars Club
  2. Sino-Singapore Undergraduate Exchange Programme
  3. Student Academic Symposium
  4. 8th ASEAN Universities Network Educational Forum - Student Leader
I first heard about USP through a friend who was neither in USP nor in NUS. She was an HR intern in one of the Ministries, and was told to pick out all the CVs with an NUS USP label on them. At that time, I didn’t know what USP was about, but I knew I wanted to be in it.

After being in USP, I realised that it really is the programme to be in. It trains you to become a scholar in the way you think, interact with people, and manage projects. USP is not an amalgamation of like-minded people. It is a cluster of very brilliant individuals, each with their own field of expertise working together. So I have to be able to appreciate the arguments and points of view of another person belonging to a different faculty, another school of thought. That’s not widely available anywhere else in university. USP exposed me to that, and helped me accept criticism a lot better. I was trained to respect other peoples’ perspectives even those that I may not personally agree with.

In the writing module, I learned how to write not like a science student or an arts student, but like a student who has been schooled in two or three different disciplines. This kind of training helped me to concurrently pursue a degree in Chemistry and Business, an experience which ultimately directly influenced my career choice. Now that I am working in J.P. Morgan, I realise how essential being multidisciplinary is.

USP is a brand that will distinguish you from the rest and will help you stand out from the clutter of resumes.

Ray Sharma-Ong (’10)
Chemistry + Business + USP

Heavyweight Interaction
USP also gave me the opportunity to interact with business leaders and Ivy League students. During a Harvard business conference, for example, we were randomly grouped together with students from Harvard and Princeton. We only had a few minutes to introduce ourselves and 30 minutes to read each case. Afterwards, a global business leader came in and joined the discussion to share his firsthand knowledge on how he would handle the case. We contributed our own ideas about how we would handle the same case. But we also needed to be able to understand how the others thought – to discuss and interact with them, so that we could see things from their perspective.

Though the quality of participants was initially daunting, my training in USP helped me look beyond their titles and communicate with them as peers. Through USP, you will hone your communication ability and have the confidence to rise to any occasion.”

To hear more from Ray, go to usp.sg/ray
With USP I learned to **always question assumptions, even those I have about myself.**

Betty Tsai ('11)  
Chemical Engineering + USP

“One of the most important things I learned in USP was how to think critically. We are constantly challenged to question assumptions, so that we do not become trapped by them. Assumptions can become invalid, and change the circumstances we are working under. You need to be able to adapt accordingly in order to arrive at a different conclusion, or at least be able to craft a more relevant argument. And because USP is made up of students from diverse backgrounds and disciplines, we are able to look at things from different perspectives, and learn how to communicate clearly with various audiences. During the process, I also understood myself better, and hence could position myself better as well.

**Finding a Path**

USP’s mentorship programme – both peers and professors – also played a key role in my student life. My mentor was instrumental in helping me to identify what I enjoy doing the most: research. This helped me focus on aligning my career path to my passion. Currently, I am a researcher in Procter & Gamble in the Fabric & Home Care Business Unit, and I get to do what I love most everyday.

When I went on a student exchange programme in my second year, I presented my research on nano materials to the American Institute of Chemical Engineering Conference and won first prize. My research was published in the Journal of Nanoparticle Research, which boosted my confidence to look for more prestigious research internships. In my seventh semester, I was accepted to do an internship at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA).

**Biofuels and NASA**

NASA, as most people know, is an organisation with many rocket scientists working on exotic space missions. But in fact, only 10% of the engineers working there are aeronautical engineers. NASA also has chemical engineers who research on fuels and materials and analyse moon rocks.

During the interview, what gave me an edge over the other applicants was my multidisciplinary exposure, past research achievements, and ability to link my skills to make significant contributions to their research project. I had a meaningful time at NASA because I took the initiative to meet with different research groups, and ask good questions.

**The Bottomline**

Ultimately, USP is an enabler. Because of USP, I have done so many things both within and outside chemical engineering – from learning about biodiversity conservation in the Himalayas to building excellent extensive networks including Nobel Laureates and Harvard peers. All of these experiences have enriched my life.”

To hear more from Betty, go to [usp.sg/betty](http://usp.sg/betty)
USP is like a **backpacking trip off the beaten path**. Instead of having just one guide, you have companions who give **more in-depth insights**.

**Terence Teo (’06)**  
**Electrical Engineering | USP**

“USP’s biggest draw for me was the intellectual stimulation – the breadth and focused learning that let me go beyond a typical undergraduate curriculum of just following a certain set of lectures. It triggered and catalysed my development, making me more inquisitive, open, and willing to share my thoughts.

I also became more productive and learned how to manage my time well. Graduating with first-class honours on top of doing USP modules was a hectic journey initially. I was taking more modules than my peers, so I really had to work smart to be on top of things. And by the time I graduated, I had actually completed four more modules than I needed to, but it’s really been more about the learning and not just about the grades. After five years at DSO National Laboratories as a System Engineer for complex RSAF systems, I am now pursuing a Masters in Systems Design and Management at MIT and will be returning to Singapore to do a second Masters degree with the Singapore University of Technology and Design in July 2013.

**Awe and Attraction**

When I did my first ISM, it was quite a big shock. I was asked what I wanted to do, and when I had no idea, my professors were able to give me suggestions. It was quite scary, but also pretty empowering. I also became more confident about approaching uncertainty. Although I wouldn’t say that I completely enjoy it, I don’t totally reject it and it no longer intimidates me. I’ve learned that it is more about exploring that uncertainty and connecting the dots for myself.

The critical thinking and writing I learned in USP also gave me a framework to plan out points and write in a coherent manner. Being persuasive with my arguments was not taught in any particular module, but it was honed in every interaction I had with classmates and professors, who could talk about everything and anything under the sun. And since I was very shy as a teenager, that was a bit of a pleasant culture shock initially, especially coming straight out of National Service.

**The Journey, not the Destination**

When I went to USP, I ended up networking with students from different faculties, all of whom were very enthusiastic, non-judgmental, and had different skills that I could learn. USP has really taken me out of my specialisation, and made me more interested in the world around me. Looking back, I realise that if I had focused only on grades, I would’ve shortchanged myself. Because of USP, I learned that there was more to life than just engineering, math, or science – it’s about the journey, not just the end destination.”

To hear more from Terence, go to usp.sg/terence
USP Alumni Quotes

Everyone in USP is very passionate about what they’re learning. When you sign up for a class, you don’t just sit there and be a listener, you go there and you are a participant.

– Liang Shiqi
Economics + USP (’05)
Co-founder and Director of Le Petit Society, an online label of baby/kids’ apparel and accessories. Previously Executive Director, Fixed Income Derivatives Trader, Goldman Sachs

Through the wide range of well-thought out modules and personal guidance from my professors, I was taught to think critically, write persuasively, and act courageously.

– Eric Feng Anqiang
Computing + USP (’07)
Public Speaking Coach & NUS Outstanding Young Alumni 2011

With USP, I was able to chart an educational experience that was uniquely ‘me’, while going through rigorous broad-based interdisciplinary programmes that help us address complex and multi-domain questions and problems.

– Charlene-Jayne Chang Wei-Ying
BIZ + USP (’09)
Analyst, Corporate Finance, Royal Bank of Scotland

I had so much freedom and support from USP to explore different ideas and subjects, that I could head in any academic direction I wanted to and derive satisfaction out of it. And more importantly, contribute in a meaningful way to the intellectual community and society at large.

– Huang Danwei
Life Sciences + USP (’06)
Currently a Postdoctoral Research Scholar at University of Iowa

USP’s great strength is in bringing together and connecting people from diverse backgrounds and talents, encouraging open and robust discussion, harnessing the power of creative ideation and youthful initiative, and providing a nurturing and dynamic learning environment to groom socially-conscious leaders of tomorrow.

– Ivan Yeo Ken Jin
Political Science + USP (’03)
Director (Research), Ministry of Communications and Information

Every professor I encountered in USP had this culture of mentorship – they sought to bring out the best in you, and they would not stint in helping you discover the best person that you could be.

– Reuben Ng Chong Wee
Psychology + USP (’06)
Fulbright Scholar pursuing PhD in Public Health, Yale University

Regardless of topic, we were encouraged to discuss thought – how people think, why they think certain things, how you move forward from an idea – that is something I really appreciated from USP.

– Shalina Deepa Sudheeran
Computer Engineering + USP (’05)
Process Engineer, Allied Materials, USA

USP taught us how to analyse, question, critique, and work towards innovative solutions. Teaching one how to think is far more important than imparting knowledge. USP is great at teaching us how to constantly adapt. The USP experience helps me in my work every day.

– Pearl Maria Forss
Sociology + USP (’04)
Senior Producer, Current Affairs, Channel NewsAsia
USP Interdisciplinary Modules

USP offers a wide range of interdisciplinary modules. USP modules are taught in seminars with class sizes ranging from 12 to 35. This facilitates meaningful discussions and interactions with professors and among students.

In this section, 10 of USP’s interdisciplinary modules are highlighted. This is followed by a listing of some USP modules in each academic domain, and a comprehensive list of USP modules offered through the programme over the past years.
How do clothes speak? Do they speak the same way language speaks?

How does fashion come about?

Why do clothes seem especially revealing of their wearers’ class, race, gender, sexuality, and power?

Is it possible that clothes don’t just express who we already are, but also actively shape our identities?

Can you control people by controlling what they wear?

What happens when clothes, and the identities they are supposedly tied to, don’t align properly – for example, when people cross-dress, or when Western fashion designers use “Oriental” elements in their work?
ABOUT THE MODULE

What is the relationship between clothes and identity? We tend to assume that the clothes we wear reveal some fact about who we are. For instance, many of us dress to indicate that we are men or women. This implies that clothes are primarily expressive – that is, we “have” an identity, and clothes communicate that identity to the outside world.

A corollary to this is the idea that to control what we wear is to control our identity – how it is expressed, but perhaps the identity itself. We sometimes say, “clothes make the man” (or woman), as if clothes help construct our identity. When we wear uniforms, are we just prevented from “expressing our individuality,” or do we in some fundamental sense become uniform? And what of religious dress codes, such as the wearing of veils? Are there ways of resisting such control? By changing our clothes, do we change who we are? What happens when we dress “inappropriately” – for instance, when we cross-dress, or when Western designers incorporate “Eastern chic” into their designs?

Are clothes therefore an expression of who we are, a construction of who we want to be, or something else altogether? In this module, we will examine how clothes speak and why fashion, in particular, is tied to identity. We will then look at examples of how clothes have been possibly harnessed to express, construct, control, and subvert identities.

STUDENTS’ COMMENTS

Take what you know about reading and writing, and throw it out the window. With a well-selected series of articles spanning various fields, Dr Lo will systematically (and often unknowingly) teach you to unlearn and subsequently relearn how to read and write academic essays. “Clothing Identities” lends the class a topic that is at once a unique academic experience and a good springboard for exploring other disciplines. Till today, I still refer to the articles I read and the framework taught in this class. They have proved a most valuable resource. “Clothing” has been one of the most useful and enjoyable classes in USP – after all, what other class allows you to analyse one of Madonna’s music videos and review her costumes critically?

– Joel Kang

This class was the reason why I joined USP – and it also became why I stayed. I first saw a description for this class in the Prospectus, and the policeman’s cap and the accompanying description had me hooked. Taking this class surpassed all expectations: I finally understood how university was supposed to help me grow intellectually. My attempt at exploring the new waters of academic writing and concepts was tentative at first. But Dr Lo was such a skilful captain that even the most knotty concepts of writing were made manageable – nothing was too overwhelming; everything was novel and fascinating.

– Guan Jingwen

PROFESSOR’S COMMENTS

Starting university is exciting, but also a scary prospect. You’re joining a new community – of scholars and thinkers – but, as with any community, there are expectations and unspoken rules. How, for one thing, do academics talk to each other?

One simple answer: academics mostly converse through writing. A very basic aim of this module is thus to help students become accomplished writers of academic essays. Unlike the kinds of writing that pre-university students may be used to, academic essays go beyond recapping and reporting. Instead, they tend to be argumentative, in that they are expected to put forth and prove a clear point.

Additionally, to be a valued member of the academic community requires that your perspective be original, which is where “critical thinking” comes in. Logically, you must therefore first know what people have been saying (so that you advance rather than repeat their ideas); hence, learning to research a topic is another important goal.

Intimidated by the idea that you, a mere mortal of a university student, are expected to contribute new ideas? Don’t be. In this class in particular, we are entering a dialogue about a small, accessible topic: the relationship between clothes and identity. The T-shirt you are wearing right now, for example: surely you have a theory about what it says about you? I’ve had many students who have done exactly that: contributed new insights into the topic, whether by thinking about their own shoes, or by engaging with a sociological essay that has been around for a hundred years. It’s invigorating – for them and for me – when this happens, and the point of this class, ultimately, is to help you give birth to ideas through writing.

– Assoc Professor Lo Mun Hou
What ideologies shape our conceptual constructs of “native” peoples?

Whose perspective would have a “correct” understanding of our “primitive Other”? How do primitive societies perceive our modern society? What do they think about our depictions of them?

Do the differences we draw between ourselves perhaps say more about “us” than about “them”? Are we all fundamentally different, or do we all share universal ways of thinking and acting that transcend cultural, linguistic, and social boundaries?
ABOUT THE MODULE

Modern societies have a peculiar fascination with primitive tribes and cultures. Whether in the form of a blockbuster film like Avatar or a National Geographic documentary, we frequently depict natives as mysterious, modern-day anachronisms, remnants of our own primeval origins. At yet other times we may even romanticise them as vanishing “noble savages” living in a pristine state of nature. What motivates such disparate imaginings?

In this module we will examine common stereotypes of native people and primitive cultures to uncover the underlying ideologies driving them, and analyse what cultural purpose such stereotypes serve in modern day life. We will seek to discern what palpable differences exist between primitive and modern people, and to confront the cultural and ethical conundrums entailed by those differences. Finally, we will explore how primitive people view modern society, and assess what the future may hold for native cultures in our fast-paced, globalising world.

STUDENTS’ COMMENTS

I found it interesting that studying indigenous peoples would have varying implications. In the module, there is an article written by a scholar who has studied a particular group of Native Americans for 30 years. He was first driven by the need to understand and preserve the culture. Eventually he realised that, ethically speaking, studying this group was dangerous for the people he interviewed as well as for himself. From this I realised that the reflexive act of asking why you want to understand issues is important to examine.
– Natalie Tai

Having taken previous writing classes before, I was expecting this module to emphasise a lot of the technicalities of grammar. But the module went beyond that. Besides structuring and editing my work, I also learned how to phrase arguments and how to dig deeper in analysing content. It was very interesting.
– Vanessa Lim Huimin

Studying natives was the most enjoyable part of my semester in NUS. It taught me how to challenge my own assumptions and to write in a clear and concise manner. I now realise how important it is to think clearly when writing. It also provided a whole new perspective of the cultural “Other”, bringing new philosophical significance and insight to me.
– Jared Sadesh Nair

Through this module I learned how to use writing as a way of thinking. Also I became more aware of the fact that you cannot casually classify or define indigenous people. Though we all have an idea of how they fit into a certain kind of category, upon closer analysis they don’t. They are part of the world just like us, and not to be classified separately or labelled as a different type of people.
– Ruth Tan Shi Hui

I never realised before that we were constructing peoples’ identities through the use of language. When you speak about a “primitive” or “savage” person, you immediately have an image in your head even if you haven’t met him or her before. The module debunked these assumptions and made us reflect on the purpose of why we construct them in certain ways. The word “savage”, like any other symbol, should be used carefully because it is referring to individuals who are people too — people with their own culture that we may not understand.
– Mendoza Joji Klarisse Liwag

PROFESSOR’S COMMENTS

Science is not free from its own underlying ideologies. Competing interpretations of primitive culture hinge on the question: are we as humans fundamentally different, or do we all share universal ways of thinking and acting that transcend cultural, linguistic, and social boundaries? As we explore ethnological and linguistic differences between modern and primitive peoples, we are compelled to face a number of conundrums regarding cross-cultural ethics, epistemology, and human nature.

We will examine common depictions of indigenous cultures in order to uncover the ideologies driving popular stereotypes of “natives”, “savages”, and “primitives”. We focus on how images of the native “Other” are constructed and deployed, and what cultural purposes this might serve. As the course progresses, we turn to a study of the impacts that these representations have on real native peoples — how development strategies, assimilation policies, and the way indigenous people are constructed in various human sciences impact their real lives.

Just as we have many different ways of imagining and depicting primitive society, so natives in those societies have different ways of depicting us. We will explore how natives see their relationship with, and place in, the modern world. Do they fear that their societies and cultures are threatened, or do they believe they can sustain them into the future?

This course cultivates rhetorical skills essential for critical reading, perspicacious analysis, and persuasive argumentation. We analyse arguments in a wide variety of texts and explicate the underlying assumptions and ideologies motivating them. We strive to develop clear, sustained, and coherent lines of reasoning, and we practise ancillary writing and reading skills, including: identifying tropes, using secondary sources, negotiating counter-arguments, citing properly, revising effectively, and ensuring prose “moves” stylistically.
– Dr Peter Vail
What role does the past play in modern and future-oriented societies like Singapore?

How are narratives of the past retold in accordance with projects of nationalism?

How do societies reconcile heritages of conflict, civil war, and genocide?

Is the commoditisation of culture a vehicle for economic development, or a form of exploitation?

*photo by: Patrick Daly*
ABOUT THE MODULE

Culture and heritage have gone from being niche areas of interest within Asia to being seen as key components driving economic development and creative capital. This can be seen from the huge amounts of attention and resources that have gone into renovating, promoting, and conserving heritage over the past decade across Asia – with Singapore being one of the biggest players. It is important to untangle the different and often contradictory agendas underlying the use of heritage in the region. It is important for our students to be aware of the complicated and almost always contested and political nature of cultural heritage. The essence of the module lies in questioning where we have come from and analysing the different power structures that influence cultural politics.

The module draws upon historical and contemporary case studies, largely from Singapore and Southeast Asia, to facilitate the exploration of the politics of culture and heritage. There is an emphasis upon debate, discussion, and problem-oriented individual and group projects. Students are introduced to the dynamics of cultural heritage from a multidisciplinary perspective through extensive real world engagement, including field trips, student projects, and a week-long excursion to Cambodia.

STUDENTS’ COMMENTS

The most memorable part of the module for me was the week-long study trip to Cambodia with Prof Daly and the other professors. The amount of learning that occurred by physically being there to experience the culture and learn from the locals and Prof Daly about Cambodian heritage and the politics of its representation just blew me away – it was an amazing experience. Seminars were both engaging and challenging, thus making for an extremely fulfilling experience. Through studying how political, historical, geographical, and cultural factors interact in the selection, restoration, and representation of heritage, we were introduced to issues of nationalism, sovereignty, and human rights. It was particularly interesting because we could also see how these issues continue to be relevant and influence the interactions between different cultural groups today. I ended up visiting several other museums on my own accord – first for a class assignment, and then out of personal interest. This is one of my favourite modules so far because it changed the way I looked at things, and although it was challenging, it was also well paced and well taught.

– Laura Or

The “Politics of Heritage” is an intriguing module which taught me that a common, ‘everyday’ term like heritage is in fact a messy, complicated, and slippery concept. The term ‘heritage’ involves a whole range of stakeholders who are trying to project the historicity of material culture with meanings that are useful for the future. This module has thus prompted me to look at how heritage sites and practices are never neutral, which fits in appropriately with the core quality of USP – ‘Curiosity Wanted’! I really enjoyed the academic content of this module, and the overseas field trip component really broadened my perspectives of the practical issues surrounding heritage. Dr Daly is also a highly inspirational teacher who will definitely captivate students from any academic background.

In short, this module really encapsulates the multidisciplinary nature of USP and will be a memorable experience for all!

– Shawn Quek

PROFESSOR’S COMMENTS

Once seen as obstacles to urban development, potential threats to unity, and perhaps unpleasant reminders of colonial times, culture and history have gained increasing importance and recognition. As Singapore strives to develop beyond service and into knowledge and creative economies, culture has gained new value. However, these cultural revivals and pluralism often test the bonds of the nation-state. All of this is problematic, and a characterising part of 21st Century Asia.

To tackle these issues, it is important to engage in a firsthand, critical manner with the subject material and bring students to the front lines. We hold tutorials in various places: CHIJMES and the Raffles Long Bar to talk about urban conservation and colonial heritage; Pulau Ubin to discuss the culture/nature divide within heritage studies; and the ACM and National History Museum to open the black box of how heritage narratives are selected, crafted, and represented. We also spend a week in Cambodia to see firsthand the impacts of nationalism, heritage tourism, poverty, strife, genocide, and civil war.

Students will learn to conduct firsthand research and deconstruct the world around them with confidence. As a teacher, there are few things more liberating than learning with students in the field where we can all explore the real world dynamics of the subject in question.

From every assignment, I have learned something new from my students. As an educator, USP provides me with a unique opportunity to bring my research interests, life experiences, and personal passions into the classroom and beyond.

– Dr Patrick Daly
What is considered art?

How do we make aesthetic judgments? What is our basis for defining what is beautiful and what is “sublime”?

How have new technologies been creatively used by artists and by society?

Is there anything to be learnt from the arts, even if we do not want to become artists?

Are business, political, and military leaders creative? Are there any similarities between strategic creativity and artistic creativity?

What connections exist between art, avant-garde, leadership, risk, and innovation?

Which conditions of a society foster creativity?
ABOUT THE MODULE

Cyberart refers to a field of contemporary art that makes use of media with cybernetic features. These computer-based artworks have been emerging since the 1950s, and rely on developments in the information and communication technologies. In this module, students explore how artists have been inspired by the possibilities of new media, and in many cases, contributed to various conceptual and technological innovations.

Taking Cyberart as a starting point, we will explore the major schools of contemporary art, reflect on their aesthetics, and learn how to interpret them. Students will be able to practise and hone these skills of interpretation by taking an excursion to an exhibition in town. The bulk of the semester will be practice-based: three assignments requiring the use of video and Internet or other interactive media. Focus lies in the conceptualisation of the artworks, the methodology of brainstorming, and aesthetic decision-making. Students will experience interdisciplinary collaboration and the use of theory as a source of inspiration for creative works, i.e., innovations. We also train the awareness of the relations between artworks, as for example, how to conceptualise meaningful combinations in an exhibition. All stages of the production are discussed together in class.

Finally, we reflect upon our experiences in the broader context of society. For example, we discuss how the creativity of leaders may differ from that of artists and if the lessons learnt may be valuable in other contexts.

STUDENTS’ COMMENTS

It was interesting how the module tapped into our responses to the things we see around us. For instance, we see videos and multimedia everyday, but we do not give much thought to why it is there. In this module, I learned how to do a critical analysis on why art is displayed a certain way, how exhibitions are carried out, and why certain sculptures are placed in front of a museum or a building. I gained a heightened awareness of the art around, both its purpose and value. It was a very enlightening experience.
– Fong Mei Yi

The module not only gave us an opportunity to express ourselves aesthetically but also helped to shape our complex ideas into presentations, short films, and websites. Dr Daniela Plewe’s efforts in laying the groundwork for brainstorming – both individual and collective – stirred us into creating diverse works that touched on theories spanning Schrödinger’s Cat to sine waves and even human agency. One might make the case that “Cyberart” is the embodiment of education in USP: stimulating, all-encapsulating, and truly creative in an interdisciplinary way.
– Marc Lim Ken Ji

Through this module, I have learnt many important skills that have been useful to me even beyond my stay in NUS. Besides taking on the role of actor, director, playwright, website and Flash designer, and even MTV producer, I also learnt about group work, team dynamics, and public speaking as we presented our ideas in front of the class. The guidance and insights provided by Dr Daniela Plewe were invaluable. They served as timely probes into furthering our explorations in the field of New Media. To a class consisting of many engineers and scientists, the topic of art was never an easy one to begin with; but Dr Plewe has done a great job both as a teacher and as a friend.
– Lim Shen

PROFESSOR’S COMMENTS

This module combines theory and practice so that students, through the creative experience, learn about their creativity and about the reception of creative works. More generally, it aims to help students generate new ideas and advance their conceptual thinking.

Artists seem to have some core competencies in critical thinking, questioning of the unquestioned, and interpreting the world in unfamiliar ways. Yet, they also have to be output-oriented as the artwork is an objective which needs to be realised through a sequence of complex decisions and actions. Artists may even need to apply marketing-oriented practices in order to get their works recognised. All these skills are relevant to other professions and roles in life, where creative thinking, leadership, and strategising are also necessary. Therefore I consider the module as initiating some creative adventures and equipping students with the respective methodologies, thereby encouraging risk-taking and training goal-oriented brainstorming, and other forms of innovation. Students will also see how the theoretical knowledge of any discipline can be the subject of works of art.

It is always interesting to observe how students with the various backgrounds form interdisciplinary teams. During the assignments, I hear about long nights of editing videos with lots of midnight pizza and coke. I consider this a glimpse into the atmosphere of the creative industries.

The moments of the final presentations are always a wonderful experience. I was very happy to see the complexity of the student works. Since conceptual rigour is the main focus, some technical imperfections are to be expected. I especially appreciate it when students outsmart and challenge me and my assignments and deliver wonderful surprising results.
– Dr Daniela Alina Plewe
Is our world becoming increasingly religious?

Why do some religions spread so quickly while others fade?

What makes some religious movements, beliefs, and practices attractive?

What is it about religion that distinguishes it from other aspects of social life?

Why does the world seem so fraught with religious conflict and tensions?
Can different religions co-exist peacefully or will they always tend to compete?

Can religious and civil life co-exist?

Can religions solve problems and bring about a better world?
ABOUT THE MODULE

Grounded in historical perspectives, the module takes a closer look at the multi-faceted growth and manifestations of religions and religiosity in contemporary global and local contexts. It explores various socio-cultural, political, economic, and technological forces and processes that impact religions and their complex interactions in different societies. Beginning with problematising the category “religion” as an analytical domain, the material is organised to introduce the multiple, complex, and sometimes opposing strands and arguments in many social science studies of religion, emphasising both empirical and theoretical issues. Topics include the Western and Asian concepts of religion; religious traditions, innovations, and revivalism; new religious movements; religious pluralism and integration; religious piety and expressions; commercialisation of religion; religion and technology; religion and social services; proselitisation and conversions; religion and gender; religion in the public sphere; religious competition and conflict; inter-religious dialogue; and religious diversity in Southeast Asia.

STUDENTS’ COMMENTS

From this exposure, I gleaned many new academic skills such as fieldwork techniques, film analysis, and research on religious issues. The strengths of this module are the depth of its scholarship, the robustness of the theoretical frameworks, and the candour with which my classmates discussed socially sensitive and personal religious issues.

– Jeremy Auw Jian Jin

This module has provided just the right balance between studying global trends and local phenomena, and between theory and fieldwork. Few courses provide the same opportunity for students to delve into one of the most interesting but least understood areas of study, to have a comprehensive and detailed exploration of religious issues that is necessary for an appreciation of contemporary society.

– Ow Yeong Wai Kit

The module offered me many opportunities to immerse myself in a humanities environment, be it through field trips or dialogue sessions. These are opportunities I probably would not be offered from other modules as a Science student. Many of the readings and discussions prompted me to think more critically about religious issues. I enjoyed the sessions with guest speakers for a flavour of what is going on out there in the real world.

– Ameera binte Ahmad Jailani

More than just a typical academic course, the module has had far-reaching consequences on my intellectual, spiritual, and social self. Understanding religion has helped me to come to terms with it and also to negotiate with others in this very pluralistic society. It has left me with a heightened perspective and understanding of the religious spaces of the world.

– Fong Mei Yi

PROFESSOR’S COMMENTS

Much has happened in the name of religion – some shockingly violent or fraught with conflict and mistrust, others bewildering and confusing, yet others redeeming, uplifting, and inspiring. In an age of globalisation, urbanisation, and migration, growing religiosity and religious diversity is the order of the day. This presents many complex and sometimes competing claims but also positive possibilities and options.

This advanced module is designed with the aim of getting students to explore the many facets of “religion” and religiosity in today’s world, and to develop a complex and nuanced understanding of religion’s significance in social life and the significant issues and debates involving religion.

This intellectual journey about religions can also turn out to be a personal one. As one student discovered: “The module has transformed my very personal and subjective perspective on religion into one that is more sensitive to its complexities and nuances. Seeing religion now as something that is strongly, and sometimes very problematically, situated within social, historical, and political contexts, my view of my own faith has definitely changed. My faith is no longer just something deeply personal, I now see it as something that is shared and that makes me an important social actor. This module has evoked an interest in inter-religious issues. I am a Catholic and I have decided to pick up a book on Prophet Muhammad.”

At the end of the module, students should be able to explain and evaluate some main conceptual and theoretical frameworks used to understand the complex and diverse forms of contemporary religiosity, the historical contexts of the changing role of religions in various societies and socio-political processes, the various dimensions of religion, and how they relate to one another.

– Dr Lai Ah Eng
How can we exercise meaningful leadership in a world increasingly characterised by turbulence, uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity, tensions, and dilemmas?

What can we learn about leadership from great works of philosophy and major historical/literary characters?

How can the lessons of past leaders illuminate issues in our present, and help us as leaders to shape the future?

What is your personal leadership brand, and how can you harness it to make a positive difference to the world around you?
ABOUT THE MODULE

The module adopts an eclectic, multidisciplinary approach towards the challenge of leadership in a constantly changing environment. It begins by highlighting the key tensions and complexities involved in leaders’ decision-making, which are exemplified in seminal thinkers’ work on how to determine the “right” and/or “good”. The class then explores how these tensions and complexities play out in a selection of Great Texts, both philosophical and literary. Finally, students apply the ideas of leadership tension and complexity to current leadership challenges. Students initiate their own USPitch Projects, which help them acquire a firsthand practical experience of the challenges and issues explored throughout the course.

STUDENTS’ COMMENTS

A good module develops the student, but a really good module changes the student. In “Leadership in a Complex World”, I was trained to grapple with sophisticated tools of strategic analysis, to closely read great texts, and to apply these insights in our USPitch Project presentations. The process taught me that multidisciplinary critical thinking is not only relevant in academia, but also crucial in making responsible real-world decisions. I entered class a cynic, but emerged more assured that I could make an impact, now and in the future.

– Yvonne Lim

While experience is leadership’s principal teacher, being articulate, clear-headed, and sharp about leadership is also of great value. “Leadership in a Complex World” embodies this spirit of combining theory with practice. Its experiential approach not only challenged me to deepen my understanding of leadership, but also compelled me to examine my convictions and to expand my appreciation of leadership. I particularly enjoyed the tutelage of Aaron Maniam, who is a proficient instructor and tactful motivator.

– Huang Yipeng

The module is unique because it balances practical and theoretical models to augment students’ understanding of leadership. Not only were we exposed to influential philosophers such as Kant and Rousseau, we were also given practical opportunities to demonstrate our leadership skills and rationalisation processes. The latter is done via what I believe to be the highlight of the module – a social USPitch Project that compels students to account for economic feasibility, administrative practicality, vision, and sustainability. The module is rigorous and demanding, but thoroughly insightful and enjoyable at the same time.

– Ng Kuan Khai

Of all the modules I have taken in NUS, “Leadership in a Complex World” has left the greatest impact on me. The module helps students to broaden their perspective and develop maturity of their thinking processes by putting them in situations where they are forced to face moral dilemmas. The module challenged students to be rational when a decision in a particular situation clearly did not appeal to emotions. By the time I was done with the module, I noticed that the way I perceived the world and made decisions had changed. Taking this module has proven to be an intellectually satisfying and extremely fulfilling experience.

– Chan Shiaw-Yan

PROFESSOR’S COMMENTS

The world demands more of leaders than ever before. The global environment, ever-changing and comprising intricately connected sub-systems, requires us to understand phenomena through multidisciplinary or even transdisciplinary lenses, drawing linkages among and within existing areas of knowledge.

In such a world, the challenges of leadership are manifold. Amid imperfect or incomplete information, and dilemmas with no clear-cut answers, leaders will be called to make decisions... How can you ensure that your own leadership decisions are as sound as possible?

This module does not pretend to offer clear-cut answers. Instead, it suggests frameworks, structures, and vocabularies to unravel the tensions and contradictions facing leaders in a complex world. You will be asked to reflect on the leadership ideas of some of the world’s greatest thinkers, link them to your own experiences, and share perspectives with your classmates in a collective learning environment. You will also move beyond a theoretical, abstract understanding of leadership and engage in a hands-on USPitch Project on an issue of your choice to apply what you learn.

You will probably finish the module with more questions than what you started with. I hope they will be deeper questions that reflect an active celebration of our world’s dazzling complexity, and the opportunities within it for leaders.

– Aaron Maniam
What is the scientific evidence that supports the theory of evolution?

How do scientists evaluate evidence and select among competing theories?

What role does human nature play in the debates around evolution?

How has evolution shaped the body and behavior of human beings?

What role does evolution play in our lives today?

How does the study of evolution, and particularly models of human evolution, challenge beliefs about ourselves?
ABOUT THE MODULE

The theory of evolution is controversial within some parts of society, though no opposition comes from within science, where evolution is accepted as a unifying cornerstone of natural sciences. How can this happen? Why would scientists accept a theory that is rejected by so many?

In this module, students are challenged to separate science from religion, fact from preconception. We will focus on the theory of evolution and its power to explain the diversity of life and adaptation; however we will not let the theory go unchallenged. We will examine phenomena seemingly incompatible with natural selection, like “altruism,” where individuals risk their own lives to help others, and “sexual selection,” which leads to excessive (and life threatening) ornamentation such as the peacock’s tail. We will study key events, such as the origin of sex and humans. Above all, we will focus on evolution as the theory that explains the amazing diversity of life on Earth today, as the result of natural selection.

STUDENTS’ COMMENTS

What a difficult topic to deliver and Prof Meier has more than delivered it! He convinced us that evolution is as scientific as any other science. His extensive use of videos is remarkable and enhances learning so much. Another strength is that early on in the module, he confronted religion and creationism head on, using not moral or valued arguments, but instead strict scientific evidence. He took more than a month to provide extensive evidence to show how the theory of evolution is good science. He is very calm and clear in his thinking, as well as humorous at times. One of the best discussions I ever had bordered on heated but constructive arguments. Overall, the emphasis on class and forum participation is commendable.

Instructors tend to get carried away with their own pre-set course outline and often crush differing opinions or cut them off in order to get back on track. But with Prof Meier, we are encouraged to ask questions at any time they arise. He is willing to go along with the flow to satisfy our curiosity, even if this results in rearranging his agenda. He also makes the class interesting and relevant to everyone, regardless of what discipline you are in. Prof Meier involves all of us by asking us to list our own objections, so that we are able to better direct the flow of the discussion. This is the kind of interdisciplinary learning that makes science subjects relevant to all.

PROFESSOR’S COMMENTS

We are all the product of billions of years of evolution. In fact, as Russian population geneticist T. Dobzhansky argues, “nothing in biology makes sense except in the light of evolution”. This emphasises the importance of evolution as the main unifying concept in biology, yet the theory of evolution remains controversial outside of science. We will study whether the objections to evolution are based on reasoning that is compatible with the principles of science. In particular, we compare the explanatory power of “Neo-Darwinism” and “Intelligent Design” and compare the latter to pre-Darwinian paradigms. We will also discuss how natural selection explains phenomena like altruism and death that appear at first to be incompatible with natural selection. We conclude the module by discussing the importance of evolution for understanding cultural evolution (“memes”) and human health and senescence (“Darwinian medicine”).

In my module, I argue that it is impossible to have a sound understanding of the “world around us” without knowing the main principles of evolution. I have dedicated my professional life to the in-depth study of evolution because I think it is one of the most important and thought-provoking theories in science. It is my hope that the module will promote scientific literacy. Scientists have a very particular way of generating and evaluating evidence. This leads to misunderstandings when non-scientists look at the same evidence. I also hope that some of my enthusiasm is infectious so that the students will leave my classes thinking about evolution whenever they encounter animals, plants, and humans in daily life.

– Professor Rudolf Meier
What are the limitations of current computer technology?

Can one adopt new paradigms in addressing these limitations?

How is quantum physics changing the way we deal with information?

Is teleportation a natural result of quantum systems?

Is a “Quantum Computer” a notion from science fiction?
ABOUT THE MODULE

This module aims to provide an introduction to the field of quantum computing. Quantum computing is currently one of the hottest topics that encompasses computer science, physics, and engineering. While very much a technology of the future, the module examines some of the possibilities that the quantum world offers in advancing the capabilities of computers and how our notion of information has evolved. Essentially, the module showcases two major paradigm shifts: one from classical physics to quantum physics and the other from the standard Turing principle in computer science to its modern quantum counterpart.

Students will be introduced to the basic principles that underlie quantum physics and computer science, and gain insights into the fascinating revolutions that are currently taking place. The module will draw upon the limitations of the classical views in computing and the challenges they’ve been subjected to. These will provide students with an excellent opportunity to appreciate how scientific tenets can be challenged and the analysis that goes with such revolutions. Topics covered will engage students to critically analyse some of the bizarre implications of the quantum world and to make sense of notions that are sometimes perceived as incomprehensible.

STUDENTS’ COMMENTS

This module is one of the most well structured modules I have ever taken. Right from the start, it was clearly established where the module was going to take us and what the experience would be like. The module gave students a foundation to pursue further knowledge on quantum topics. Prof Singh builds an interactive atmosphere between the students and himself. It is a refreshing teaching style compared to the science and engineering lessons that I’m used to, whereby concepts are taught didactically with little interaction. Prof Singh’s lessons are very thought-provoking and he encourages students to question when in doubt. As such, the class was comfortable to ask questions, even those that seemed trivial at first. Prof Kuldeep Singh is passionate in his teaching.

This module is really challenging. The word “Quantum” would scare some people, being such a theoretically undeveloped topic in Science. But Prof Kuldeep Singh makes such a difficult topic manageable and enjoyable.

To turn a subject as esoteric as quantum physics into something understandable and simple while encouraging us to take initiative in learning it ourselves... now that is education.

PROFESSOR’S COMMENTS

The mere mention of “quantum” in any context, academic or otherwise, often evokes remarks like, “it’s only for nerds” or “you have to be super-smart to be able to comprehend it”. In this module, I try to dispel these baseless notions.

Quantum phenomenon, while bizarre in how it presents itself, is by no means difficult when one has to deal with its behaviour. For instance, we often speak of particles that are de-localised in space or objects that lose individual characteristics and assume a common set of properties. To exploit these quantum systems is yet another matter. Indeed, what is often perceived to be “difficult” is the language that is used. The ordinary language is sometimes inadequate for framing such concepts and one has to resort to a more precise mode of description – and that is the language of mathematics. Remarkably, all the mathematics that is needed here does not extend beyond what most high school students are already equipped with.

Once students move past the misconception that it is incomprehensible and learn to frame the phenomenon appropriately, the quantum world presents itself in the most natural way. With the proper tools, one is able to understand how quantum gates are constructed, how quantum algorithms can outperform classical ones, how quantum laws allow for ultimate secrecy in secure communication or how teleportation is a natural consequence of quantum systems.

– Dr Kuldeep Singh
What is ecological footprint (EF)? What are its components?

How can we quantify the eco-footprint of travel, food, home appliances etc.? How do we compute eco-footprint for an individual, a community or a country? What are the implications of these numbers for our choice of lifestyles?

What does quantitative reasoning (QR) involve?

What is a mathematical model? How do we construct mathematical models from data? How do we exploit the power of mathematical models for decision making?

What are the sources of uncertainty and how do we characterise it?

How do statistical formulae relate to the quality and quantity of data?
ABOUT THE MODULE

This is a Quantitative Reasoning (QR) Foundation module in USP. QR is widely regarded as a fundamental literacy for the 21st century. It is a complex learning progression for a student as it includes the act of quantification, quantitative literacy, quantitative interpretation of a model, and quantitative modelling. QR is underpinned by a context – this particular module employs ecological footprint of human activities as the substrate on which students gain QR skills through several cycles of learning and doing work on authentic problems.

This module strives for students to attain the capability to address ecological footprint related problems. They will do this with a deep understanding of the concepts behind converting data into useful models which can subsequently be used for strategising and decision making. Acquiring a clear understanding of the nature of data (quality (noise), quantity, collinearity etc.) and the mathematical models that are used to fit the data, they will be able to create sophisticated arguments supported by statistically sound quantitative evidence. They will be able to communicate those arguments in a variety of formats including text, mathematical equations, graphs, and tables.

STUDENTS’ COMMENTS

Reasoning comes in different ways, and can be conveyed through different medium. Usually, we employ language as the means to reason, but in science and mathematics, domains where numbers have the leading significance, the ability to reason with numerical data becomes crucial. This is what the module trains us exactly. In the class, I learnt the tools to exhume meaningful analysis from what seems to be a mess of senseless numbers, and that made me understand nature and the world better and at a deeper level. The class had, delectably, made the plain quantities a little more curious to explore.
– Yan Jiaxin

We learnt more than just modelling, quantification, and calculation; we also gained insights into the mechanisms behind data mining methods such as Principal Component Analysis. Learning the mathematical concepts behind these tools strongly complements what I have learnt in my faculty (Engineering), and has supported my learning by adding meaning and application to abstract mathematical ideas.
– Ho Leon Yoon

This module helped me to understand how to treat data and trend. We were able to overcome the fear of numbers. Equipped with tools for mathematical modelling, we will know how to analyse and make sense of large data of numbers we may encounter in the future.
– Lim Zhan Rui Jonathan

One of the things I like about this module is that the professor, despite coming from the supposedly rigid discipline of engineering, is open to the diversities of the student pool. Adopting flexibility in his lesson plans, he helped us to experience the predictive prowess of statistics and realise the danger of trusting statistics too much, which would otherwise be easily manipulated to present entirely different interpretations. Through this module, one gradually found himself able to relate to the alien language of statistics and sometimes even tricking the statisticians in their own game.
– Lim Wen Bin Clive

PROFESSOR’S COMMENTS

In my many years at NUS, I have never had the opportunity to teach a class with students that have as diverse educational background and interest. So, when this USP teaching assignment came up, I was really glad. It has been a challenging experience for me to take USP students through QR and ecological footprint (EF) both of which are complex, nuanced topics. I should admit that my task was made easier because EF is an interesting and motivating topic that lends itself as an ideal contextual area to engage students with QR concepts. USP students have responded admirably with high level of classroom participation when discussing research articles, by asking questions and making short presentations during seminars. The highlight to me was the individual presentations they made on a fairly open-ended problem – I could see that most students have developed an appropriate level of QR skills and the language that goes with it. The journey to imbue these students with QR skills to read scientific reports on energy, transportation, food, etc., to act on that information, and to make well-considered personal decisions and influence public policies has been truly rewarding!
– Assoc Professor Lakshminarayanan Samavedham
What is the significance of academic research?

What motivations – both personal and intellectual – drive research?

How does academic research shape and/or respond to questions and issues within a broader social context? What is the nature of academic research?

What kinds of research take place across the university?

How does research create connections across diverse disciplines?

How does the research process emerge from the initial phase of posing and pursuing research questions?
ABOUT THE MODULE

The “University Scholars Seminar” (USS) is designed to facilitate a process of intellectual inquiry leading students to identify and pursue good and feasible research directions in the hopes of formulating an individual research proposal. It aims to help students identify potential questions, turn potential questions into research questions, and turn research questions into research proposals.

The “USS” reinforces skills taught in Writing and Critical Thinking, and further develops them by having students apply them within an environment that encourages independent thinking and learning.

To achieve this, the “USS” is structured as a year-long series of talks revolving around a broad topic such as the current theme, “Questions about the Human”. For each session, researchers from a variety of disciplines speak about their own research experiences. This gives an overview of both the substantive content of their on-going research and personal accounts of how their research emerged in the first place. These talks stimulate the students’ sense of discovery and get them started on their own research journey.

STUDENTS’ COMMENTS

The module provided a good platform for us to explore a wide range of subjects. Professors introduced research ideas and achievements, which left us with many ideas to further consider and work on independently. As a takeaway from this experience, we will be able to propose our own research ideas and compile a research proposal from them. This module was very helpful in further developing our research skills.

– Huang Sha

What I found most meaningful in the “USS” was not how much I could learn about various disciplines, but rather the idea of “critical thinking”. I observed how academic research leaders tried to solve the challenging questions in smart and careful ways based on the information they had gathered along the long road of conducting their study. They taught us how to think, instead of how to only solve. Through this journey, I discovered there are several methods to deal with a problem. More profoundly, there are also several ways to look at a problem.

– Yu Yuebo

The “USS” opens up your mind to ideas you never thought could pique your interest. It was amazing that these talks evoked different ideas within me and helped me to connect two varied disciplines. I realised that although the research process has a different procedure for every discipline, every discipline continues to work in an interdisciplinary manner. This changed my view of scientific concepts. Nothing is black and white. There exists a grey area for disciplines to interact with one another. That was enriching for me because as an arts student, I found the scientific world challenging but the “USS” helped to break it down in a way that was exciting and enjoyable. The most important insight I took away was that we must constantly pursue the things that we are passionate about.

– Divya Gundlapalli

PROFESSOR’S COMMENTS

Embarking on a research project is a daunting task for all academics, much less an undergraduate. The research process is often fraught with obstacles, insecurities, or even a lack of inspiration. Where do I begin? How do I proceed? Can I even say or do that? The “USS” is specifically designed to ameliorate these concerns by offering students a glimpse into the research experiences of faculty conducting research across NUS. If, as it is often said, one learns by example, then this module offers many examples of how research is carried out. We invite faculty from across the various disciplines so as to address the interests and research demands of every student across diverse disciplines.

Often conducted in an informal fashion, each presenter shares with students the ups and downs of their personal research process. I have been told by many of the invited speakers that they have immensely enjoyed presenting at the “USS” because it allowed them the opportunity to really think about what motivated them in the first place. This, I think, is what makes “USS” unique: it provides an environment for everybody – both students and faculty alike – to get back to the basics of learning and thinking.

– Dr Mabel Wong
Here is a listing of some USP modules offered under each academic domain. Following is a comprehensive list of USP modules that USP students have taken through the programme over the past years. To offer a diverse and innovative curriculum, USP introduces new modules and rotates its curricular offerings.

**WRITING AND CRITICAL THINKING DOMAIN**

**UWC2101A**
**Writing and Critical Thinking: Colonialism and Cosmopolitanism**
This module teaches writing and critical thinking through a critical exploration of the notion of cosmopolitanism and its relation to colonialism. Topics discussed include the origin of cosmopolitanism, the relevance of cosmopolitanism as a moral ideal in the age of globalisation, and the formation of cultural identity among diasporic Asians. The module thus provides the chance for students to reflect on the notion of global citizenship in the contemporary world, as well as their responsibilities as cosmopolitan citizens.

**UWC2101B**
**Writing and Critical Thinking: Civic Discourse in a Fractious World**
This module teaches writing and critical thinking through a critical exploration of theories of civic and public discourse as they were configured by the ancient Greeks. Topics discussed include the political, ethical, and emotional uses and impacts of civic discourse. The module thus provides the chance for students to gain a critical awareness of the natures of their own engagement with public discourses, to contextualise these discourses both locally and internationally, and to explore the possible futures of communities of which they are a part.

**UWC2101C**
**Writing and Critical Thinking: Monuments, Memorials and Commemoration**
This module explores how monuments, memorials and other forms of public commemoration represent the past and influence culture and politics in the present. It takes a comparative approach, using case studies from different societies. The module highlights the complexity and contested nature of commemoration and memorialisation. Although monuments and memorials may be intended to tell the “true” version of historical events, the end result often hides controversies that may have been part of the process of designing these structures. Similarly, the meanings attached to monuments and memorials can change dramatically over time, as societies change and these structures are reinterpreted.

**UWC2101H**
**Writing and Critical Thinking: Power, Space and Pleasure**
This module examines the ways power, space, and pleasure are interconnected. The module is divided into three units. First, we will look at how space is related to questions of power, focusing in particular on surveillance. Then, in the second unit, we will consider more closely the relation between space, power and pleasure as exemplified in voyeurism and surveillance: here we will be watching people watching other people. Finally, we’ll consider the relations between space, power and pleasure in Singapore, in particular as this applies to the tensions between traditional practices and urban planning in city spaces here.

**UWC2101N**
**Writing and Critical Thinking: Clothing Identities**
For a full description, including students’ and professor’s comments, see pages 38 – 39.

**UWC2101V**
**Writing and Critical Thinking: Language, Culture and ‘Native’ Peoples**
For a full description, including students’ and professor’s comments, see pages 40 – 41.

**UWC2101Y**
**Writing and Critical Thinking: Issues In and Around Justice**
This module teaches writing and critical thinking by introducing students to the assumptions that inform, and the arguments for, different concepts and practices of justice. Students will engage topics such as human rights, the place and limits of legal institutions, justifications for civil disobedience, and whether violence is justified in the pursuit of justice. This module enables students to think critically about theories of justice and how these theories shape the pursuit of justice in political life.
The Politics of Language and Literacy in Singapore

 Whereas the goal of many literacy studies is to determine who is literate or what counts as literacy, the goal of this module is to examine the political, economic, and social assumptions, factors, and effects of the distinction between literacy and illiteracy. Although such a study could take place within any national context, this module will focus on Singapore as a location for taking up this issue. Organised around the literacy narratives and histories of USP students, older generations of Singaporeans, and people from other cultures and nations, this module explores the impact of the distinction, between those who are literate and those who are not, on Singaporean identity, history, politics, and ethics.

Cyberart

For a full description, including students’ and professor’s comments, see pages 44 – 45.

Theatre and the World

In diverse cultures, theatre has been viewed as a model for interpreting the wider world. Meanwhile, theatre-makers have historically sought to represent, recreate and indeed transform that world by their actions on stage. This module examines the relationship between world and stage as a means of understanding what theatre is and how it works. Examining a range of theatrical forms and the critical debates they have provoked, students will gain a grounding in key historical and contemporary performance practices, and an appreciation of their often contested place in society. Reflecting this variety, classes will combine seminars, practical workshops, and fieldwork, such as a trip to Yogyakarta to study wayang kulit.

Creative Thinking

Creativity seems to be an overused and vague buzzword, though only few would deny its fundamental role in an economic system which relies on innovations as a driving force. So what actually is creative thinking, can we foster it or is it just a matter of inspiration? We will analyse different forms of creativity with examples from history, research, technology and the arts. Then we will practise creative thinking and explore strategies on how to manage innovative teams. To show that creative strategic thinking plays a role in various domains of society we turn towards negotiation and deal-making. We conclude with ideas on how to communicate new ideas best and a discussion on creative leadership.

Ethics and Aesthetics

This module examines the intersections between ethics (the study of what is right and wrong) and aesthetics (the study of beauty and taste) in light of two questions: (1) whether the appreciation of artworks makes us morally better persons, and (2) whether a moral defect make an artwork less beautiful. Students will study both historical and contemporary philosophical debates on these two issues, and make use of examples of representational art – i.e., artworks which depict an object, event or mental state – to explore their own positions. Examples of representational art examined include: novels, paintings, films, photographs, and museum exhibits.

Understanding Law and Social Change

How does law affect people and society? How do people and society influence law? Can law bring about social change? In what ways? This module approaches the study of law as a social institution, and examines law, legal actors, and legal institutions from various perspectives such as sociology, psychology, political science, and legal scholarship. We will discuss theoretical perspectives on the relationship between law and society, the relationship between law and social behaviour, law in action in various social contexts, the role of law in social change, and the roles of lawyers, judges, and juries.

Politics and Emotion

Emotions, it is often said, have no place in politics. Where the former is thought to be primal and unruly, the latter is regarded as the realm of reason, of pragmatic and thoughtful deliberations. But how accurate is such a view? Don’t emotions typically accompany our political judgments and actions? Might they perhaps condition such responses, priming them and orienting us towards certain political attitudes and dispositions? Organised around five emotions—fear, disgust, grief, compassion, and hope—this module explores how emotions circulate within political life, how they emerge and are deployed for the mobilisation of identities, sovereign legitimacy, ethical responsibility, and resistance.
USE2315
Participatory Social Development in Southeast Asia
Southeast Asia is widely regarded as a model for economic development due to its advances in alleviating poverty, improving infrastructure, and fostering education and healthcare. But economic success often overshadows critical social problems that arise in tandem with such rapid development. This module, offered only in special summer sessions, takes a hands-on approach to examining critical issues in social development, in particular those revolving around local empowerment, democratisation, and sustainability. Working within a framework of participatory action research, and collaborating with peers at another ASEAN university, this rigorous course includes substantial fieldwork conducted among development projects outside of Singapore.

USP3506
Religions in the Contemporary World
For a full description, including students’ and professor’s comments, see pages 46 – 47.

USP3509
Law and Violence
The concept and practices of law are inseparable from the concepts and practices of force and/or violence. In this module, we will investigate three questions. First, is there a difference between legitimate and illegitimate violence, and so, what is the difference and how is it explained? Secondly, what is the, and why is there an, internal relationship between law and violence? Finally, why do we punish? We will read texts from various thinkers, including Walter Benjamin, Bentham, Robert Cover, Derrida, Foucault, Kant, Locke, Nietzsche, Rousseau, A. John Simmons, Robert Paul Wolff and others.

SCIENCES AND TECHNOLOGIES DOMAIN

ULS2204
Biodiversity and Conservation Biology
Biodiversity conservation became one of the important environmental themes of global concern after UN Conference on Environment and Development at Rio de Janeiro in 1992. The realisation that human development has to complement and not to compete with biological conservation ultimately developed into the famous Agenda 21. This protocol bound all the nations into accepting various responsibilities towards conservation of nature and natural resources. This module aims to help students understand and appreciate various concepts and issues concerning biodiversity and conservation at local, regional and global levels.

UNL2207
The Nature of Natural Law
This module examines the evolution of our present theoretical understanding of some basic aspects of the physical world around us. It explores the role of certain primitive concepts of science and how these key ideas have been used to construct a coherent “mental” picture of the physical world. The module focuses on a well established and “deterministic” law of nature: the Law of Universal Gravity and how this led to Newton’s prediction of the motion of the planets. The module will also question, on a higher level, the nature of “scientific”: how these are extended over time and inevitably get modified by having to take into account new “facts” provided by observation and experiment.

UOR2210
Measuring and Quantifying Innovation
This module will critically examine and review classic and emerging literature addressing the measurement of scientific innovations. Topics discussed in class will include: innovation, its operationalisation, the processes and metrics of measuring innovation, collaboration processes, discourse, technologies, networks, and spaces; and collective action and intelligence. Students will participate in discussions, individual assignments and a group research project involving an immersion at a working laboratory, integrating foundational theoretical and methodological approaches with a specific project to produce a critical or empirical contribution to the scholarship in the field of measuring innovation.
UPC2207
The Technology of Life – Machines that Go Squish
Can we learn how man-made technologies work by taking a deeper, more quantitative look at how living organisms function? The nature of physical law imposes unique constraints on the evolution and functioning of living organisms – the same constraints (and opportunities) we encounter when inventing technologies. This module will investigate how living organisms of all shapes and sizes have evolved creative solutions around natural constraints, and indeed turned these into opportunities for amazing feats of “natural” engineering. To do this, students will learn important engineering fundamentals such as fluid mechanics and chemical and heat transport. The overall goals are to assemble a conceptual toolkit to analyse physical and chemical technologies, and to also highlight how nature can inspire new man-made technologies.

UPC2208
Molecular Courtship
How does an understanding of molecular interactions help us to make sense of everyday chemical phenomena or of important chemical technologies? For example, why are plastics non-biodegradable? Why and how an LED lights up or gets quenched, or one drug molecule works while another results in side effects? These are important outcomes resulting directly or indirectly from initial intermolecular forces. Environmental issues such as differentiation between biodegradable and “unfriendly” materials can also be discussed. Stereochemical or 3D-controlled intermolecular forces allow an understanding of many chemical processes in biological systems.

UIT2201
Computer Science & the Information Technology Revolution
We live in a world where technological advances and technology-related decisions constantly impact society in many different ways. Being able to critically assess technological claims helps one make better judgments that could significantly affect our world. This module looks at central ideas and major technological advances in the field of computer science, and how these developments have shaped modern society through the IT revolution. Although the specific subject matter deals with computer science and information technology, the module objectives are more general in nature. We aim to develop in students a balanced perspective of science, technology and their impact on modern society.

UIT2205
Quantum Computing and Information
For a full description, including students’ and professor’s comments, see pages 52 – 53.

UIT2206
The Importance of Being Formal
Formal methods of reasoning have been studied in all major civilisations, but the appearance of automatic computing devices in the 20th century has led to an explosion of interest in and applications of formal logic. Today, the advantages of formal reasoning are recognised and utilised far beyond computer science. Students of this module will discover the power as well as the limitations of formal methods for philosophy and mathematics, and learn to apply them in diverse areas such as political speeches and arguments, analysis of detective novels and the scheduling of sports tournaments.

QUANTITATIVE REASONING FOUNDATION DOMAIN

UQF2101C
QRF: DNA Evidence in a Court of Law
This module prompts students to think critically about the kinds of problems that quantitative reasoning can solve, and the possibilities that a quantitative approach might bring to their analysis. This particular instance of the module is on the evaluation of DNA evidence in a court of law.

UQF2101E
QRF: Quantifying Our Eco-Footprint
For a full description, including students’ and professor’s comments, see pages 54 – 55.

UQF2101F
QRF: Calculating Risks
This module prompts students to think critically about the kinds of problems that quantitative reasoning can solve, and the possibilities that a quantitative approach might bring to their analysis. In this module, we will learn quantitative tools to understand and to quantify risks encountered in daily life; to compare and to weigh the consequences of these risks for a more insightful decision-making. The underlying limitations of these tools will also be examined.

UNIVERSITY SCHOLARS SEMINAR

USS2105
University Scholars Seminar
For a full description, including students’ and professor’s comments, see pages 56 – 57.
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### QUANTITATIVE REASONING FOUNDATION DOMAIN

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### UNIVERSITY SCHOLARS SEMINAR MODULE

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### UNIVERSITY SCHOLARS SENIOR SEMINAR MODULE

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### USP MULTIDISCIPLINARY MODULES

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<td>Urban Landscape and Cultural Identity</td>
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Independent Study Modules

USP students enjoy the freedom to undertake more than two Independent Study Modules (ISMs), and the freedom to undertake ISMs outside of their home faculty, in line with USP’s ethos of fostering critical thinking and interdisciplinary inquiry. Students are also able to pursue Course-Based Modules (CBMs) which seek to both broaden and deepen knowledge within a specific research area.

In this section, seven USP students share what they have achieved with support from USP with their ISMs and CBMs.
How did your ISM come about?

Thanks to the USP, I was given the wonderful opportunity of interning in the lab of world-renowned biochemist Barry Halliwell. The worm-specific research skills and experimental techniques that I gained during the internship helped me to secure an Undergraduate Research Opportunities Programme (UROP)-based ISM under Prof Halliwell.

What made you interested in this ISM?

I became interested in the field of ageing research while working on a research project on free radicals and ageing during a three-month joint USP-NUS Graduate School for Integrative Sciences and Engineering (NGS) research internship in 2008 under Prof Halliwell. Through informal discussions with my mentor, Dr Jan Gruber, and the readings that he recommended, my interest in ageing research was solidified.

Did USP give you specific knowledge that made possible your work in the ISM?

During the three-month joint USP-NGS research internship, I was taught how to formulate a scientific hypothesis, develop relevant research methodologies, and apply these research methods to the investigation of loopholes and gaps in our current scientific knowledge. This invaluable experience definitely helped me to think critically about the unanswered questions in ageing research.

Fong Sheng’s ISM

Effects of Dichloroacetate on Caenorhabditis Elegans Lifespan and Mitochondrial Physiology

Ageing is caused by an accumulation of detrimental changes within a living organism which alters its physical state over time. The UROP-based ISM that I took aimed to improve our overall understanding of the role of free radicals and mitochondria in the biological ageing process through scientific research. I investigated the effects of the drug dichloroacetate (DCA) on the lifespan and mitochondrial physiology of the nematode worm Caenorhabditis elegans (C. elegans). DCA was shown to extend C. elegans lifespan. As part of a larger study to elucidate the mechanism responsible for the lifespan extension, I found that DCA increased the energy levels and decreased free radical production in C. elegans.

The mitochondrial free radical theory of ageing (MFRTA) proposes that free radical byproducts of aerobic respiration are responsible for causing damage to biomacromolecules such as proteins, lipids, and DNA. Lifelong accumulation of free radical-mediated macromolecular damage is therefore thought to result in decreased mitochondrial function that might lead to ageing. My findings, which are consistent with the MFRTA, suggest that the lifespan extension might be due to lowered free radical production.

However, the relevance of the MFRTA to the ageing process remains an open and controversial question with some studies supporting the MFRTA and others not. Ongoing research must still be conducted to validate the MFRTA as a major cause of ageing. For the ride-on ISM, I validated two experimental methods originally used in cell culture, which could be used to better investigate the role of free radicals and mitochondria in ageing in C. elegans.

What have you achieved with your ISM?


Has the ISM helped you in other non-academic ways?

My firsthand research experiences helped to develop my problem-solving skills. In order to troubleshoot and solve certain problems that I encountered during the ISM, I sometimes had to approach the problem unconventionally, and with lots of imagination and flexibility. Thanks to the rigorous first-tier and advanced curriculum developed by USP, I believe that I have been trained to think independently, critically, interdisciplinarily and creatively.

Fong Sheng completed three different ISMs. He is a medical student at the Duke-NUS Graduate Medical School, and a recipient of the 2011 SingHealth Medicine Scholarship. Fong Sheng’s research also won him several awards, namely the Singapore Society of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology Medal, Sung Kah Kay Memorial Prize, USP President’s Honour Roll, and the Biochemistry Honours Book Prize.
Why were you interested in doing this ISM?

As a Geography major, I am very interested in the influence of new media in shaping civic space and social movements such as cyberactivism in Singapore. However, as my department neither conducts research nor modules related to the link between civic space and new media, this ISM offered me the opportunity to bridge these concepts in an interdisciplinary manner.

How has USP enabled you to pursue your ISM?

The USP Student Opportunities was instrumental in helping me to obtain my internship with the Institute of Policy Studies. I interned under the supervision of the late Dr Ooi Giok Ling in the summer of 2009, wherein I conducted a literature search on cyber civic space and environmental sustainability in Asia. As I pored over the literature, I gradually saw the potential to synthesize issues within these different areas, both of which have rarely been probed by academics in a holistic manner.

Did any USP module give you specific knowledge or experience to prepare you for the ISM?

The Writing and Critical Thinking (WCT) modules in USP are what I consider to be a USP student’s “rite of passage”. The writing and research skills that I gained from WCT prepared me to handle the ISM. I was able to craft my research questions in a clearer and more confident manner. This helped me to organise and focus my writing style even for term essays within my own home faculty.

Zelig’s ISM
Forging a Sustainable Singapore through Online Space – A Case Study of Environmental Cyberactivism in Singapore

Environmental Cyberactivism in Singapore is a relatively new area of study which has not been previously researched. The ISM investigates the role of cyberspace in shaping environmental activism in Singapore. In my ISM, I argued that online space plays a relevant role in forging awareness of environmental issues among Singaporeans owing to the strong, proactive efforts of environmental activists. I presented a detailed case study via empirical research, which was based on the analysis of Singaporean environmental websites and interviews with the Singapore-based environmental activists who run these websites.

Most interviewees expressed optimism when questioned, and believed that their websites have to a large extent successfully forged awareness of environmental sustainability among Singaporean viewers. However, the new media’s influence in the environmental cyber civic space and state-society relations in Singapore has brought about ambivalent outcomes. Interviewees have different perspectives regarding how their positions as non-governmental organisation (NGO) activists shape their working relationships with the government. It remains uncertain whether state-society relations in Singapore are on equal footing, despite NGOs having a stronger and freer voice vis-à-vis the government in improving their online presence and NGO engagement.

The long-term sustainability of online environmental movements perhaps can be better visualised in the offline sphere, where several tangible environmental initiatives today appear to be crafted from ideas raised in online space.

Has the ISM helped you in other non-academic ways?

As a youth who is passionate about environmental sustainability in Singapore, this ISM gave me the opportunity to understand the motivations and strategies used by fellow Singaporean environmental activists. I was especially interested in looking at how activists peruse online and social media as a means of pursuing their respective causes. This ISM helped me to build relationships with these activists, thus expanding my network for potential collaboration in different advocacies. I was also very fortunate to have Dr Peter Marolt from the Asia Research Institute as my ISM supervisor.

Zelig completed two different ISMs and an honours thesis. His thesis investigated how environmental entrepreneurs in Singapore shaped environmental activism and the green economy both locally and internationally. He had also served as the Assistant Welfare Secretary in the 33rd National University of Singapore Students’ Union Executive Committee and volunteered for the non-profit youth social enterprise Syinc.
Why did you take this CBM?

A cursory glance at the dynamics of contemporary society reveals that faith is still at the forefront of our lives. From the way people dress to what they eat, religion continues to command an authority over millions in a way that few social forces have been able to do. That's why I thought that this Course-Based Module (CBM) was fascinating, timely, and engaging. It involved a panoramic and colourful exploration of religion and its importance in shaping the lives of people today.

What key issues did your CBM explore?

The term ‘religion’ itself is a problematic one. Is religion concerned with moral norms, or simply metaphysical ideas and mystical experience? Can there really be religious harmony if faiths make competing truth-claims? Many have debated these questions for years, but what this module offered was a challenging approach – to ground these questions in specific historical contexts and consider both Western and Eastern case studies to provide evidence for arguments.

We were encouraged by Dr Lai Ah Eng to draw insights from our personal experience. Some of our classmates were members of mega-churches, others followed the faith of their ancestors, and quite a few were simply free thinkers. A few of us who participated in the USP International Programme had also travelled overseas to further understand issues of religion, such as to Iran to learn about Islam and multiculturalism, and to India and Thailand, as I did, to study the practice of Buddhist pilgrimage.

Regardless of our backgrounds, the class offered multiple intriguing perspectives and encouraged us to explore complex questions and difficult debates.

We were able to engage in insightful dialogues with leaders like former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, who discussed issues ranging from politics to interfaith dialogue, as well as activist See Guat Kwee and anthropologist Julius Bautista, who shared about their experiences working with diverse religious communities around the world. By lending an interdisciplinary focus, these sessions instilled a heightened awareness of the multiplicity of faith traditions today.

What activities were conducted within your CBM?

Having a variety of activities allowed us to gain a holistic appreciation of the role of faith today and the extent of religious diversity on both the local and global scale. For example, we watched a film on religious conflict resolution in Nigeria, and then blogged about it with students from the University of Western Australia. We also divided into groups to undertake field trips to places of worship across Singapore before delivering presentations and writing reports on the sites. My group studied sites in Upper Serangoon North, where we visited two Taoist temples, a Hindu temple, a mosque, and a Brethren church. The experience of visiting and studying the sites was a helpful introduction to field research, providing the opportunity to gain a firsthand understanding of the area.

What were the insights and specific knowledge/experience you gained?

I realised how different the views of others were from my own, and how central these views were to them. In exploring the history of religious fundamentalism, I was struck by how willing people were to live and die for their beliefs. After studying the works of the religious scholar Karen Armstrong on fundamentalism and faith, I wrote my term paper on the Charter of Compassion and the Singaporean movement compassion.sg. Dr Lai even introduced me to several founders of the movement, such as playwright Alvin Tan. My interviews with them were some of the most gripping and thought-provoking conversations that I have ever had.

The CBM has set our class on an odyssey that does not just end with academic discussions. Instead, we’ve embarked on a process not merely of appreciating difference, but of self-discovery – each of us has learnt so much more about other faiths as well as our own. As we proceed into a challenging and uncertain future, the lessons from the CBM offer a valuable glimpse of both the dangers borne of religious hatred and ignorance, as well as the hopes for reconciliation and harmony that arise from interfaith understanding.
How did being in USP make it possible for you to do your ISM?

USP allows for exploration and investigation of myriad issues and an ISM allows for research that spans outside the classroom. The cross-disciplinary nature of USP and the curriculum enable research that is based on interests and grounded in deep analysis. With a diverse faculty, I realised that my research into microfinance had the ideal supervisor in the form of Assoc Prof Albert Teo. His understanding of the socio-economic issues, exposure to the industry, and insight into the various academic theories enabled me to explore the issue further and gave me the confidence to pursue my microfinance-based ISM in its entirety.

What inspired or motivated you to do this ISM?

With a keen interest in the financial markets and the machinery driving these markets, an exploration of various financial products was natural. USP’s association with SP Jain Institute of Management and Research allowed me to spend a summer in India with a Microfinance Institution (MFI). I gleaned an understanding of operations and policies, and witnessed the chain of transaction from the microfinance institute to the poor that were being served. The exposure gained through fieldwork and subsequent data analysis fuelled my interest in the industry further.

Kanishk’s ISM

Microfinance in India: Poverty and Policy

Poverty has multiple drivers and an analysis of various theories of poverty highlights a key distinction between the psychological and sociological aspects of poverty. However, when analysing the causes of poverty, economic reasons at both the micro and macro levels explain decision-making processes both by the individual and the society. A critical review of spending patterns, propensity to save, and credit history broadens the discussion into what the poor need in order to support their expenses, businesses, and sustenance.

Microfinance aims to provide credit to the poor who are financially excluded. Group loans and individual loans in rural and urban centres form the basis of the business. Poverty and the microfinance sector in India are tightly linked due to legislative efforts to include the poor financially and socially. Microfinance was initially targeted at the poor as a means towards poverty alleviation but there has been a focus shift towards profit maximisation. A case study of Swadhaar FinServe Pte Ltd, explores how a MFI remains profitable and the difficulties it faces in the form of loan delinquency. Empirical data collected explains some of the reasons for loan delinquency and sheds further light on the issues faced by the poor in India.

Issues such as credibility, transparency, and reliability of the sector are reviewed by analysing current policies and their limitations. The research provides policy recommendations that could streamline operations for MFIs but more importantly protect the sustainability of the sector by refocusing on poverty alleviation.

Has the ISM helped you in other non-academic ways?

The ISM opened up a whole new arena of microfinance for me; the research itself consisted of two aspects – fieldwork and theoretical building– and through them I have been able to connect my experiences and understanding of the sector. I would genuinely like to pursue operations and process flow improvement projects within the sector. Coming from an engineering background, microfinance may seem a little distant but the insight gained in operations and policies can easily be translated to any industry and that is where I see the tangible dividends of the ISM.
What enabled you to start your ISM?

Having been through both the junior college and polytechnic routes prior to my undergraduate life, I have always been concerned with the general lack of understanding regarding the polytechnic education landscape and polytechnic students. Hence, I was eager to probe into popular perceptions of the polytechnics, specifically those related to polytechnic students' academic calibre and their suitability for public sector employment and scholarships.

How has USP helped you in doing your ISM?

Being in USP gave me the opportunity to pursue my interest with the right skillsets and direction. Professor Albert Teo's expertise in organisational culture and ecology guided me in understanding the wider implications of my research. More importantly, the confidence derived from Prof Teo's academic supervision gave me the necessary shove to venture into research areas beyond the scope of my major.

Marvin’s ISM
Understanding the Changing Polytechnic Education Landscape: A Case Study on Ngee Ann Polytechnic

Historically, the polytechnics were primed to produce "industry-ready" graduates. In other words, a polytechnic education could very well be the final stop of a student’s education path. Yet, such a mentality seems to have changed with times. Given that by 2015, the percentage of the Primary One cohort that receives a polytechnic education will grow to nearly 45%, the need for greater awareness of the polytechnic education landscape is compelling.

Given the lack of prior research done in this area, my project is essentially an exploratory study based on Ngee Ann Polytechnic. As the term “exploratory” suggests, the ISM aims to provide preliminary data and set up frameworks of analysis for subsequent research to be conducted, so as to allow the academic discourse on the polytechnic education landscape to be further explored and developed.

Over the course of my fieldwork, Prof Teo guided me in learning about “content analysis” – the nuances of conducting personal interviews and designing surveys, as well as performing time-series analysis on various sources of raw data. The project also combined the usage of quantitative and qualitative research tools to reach and analyse key findings. Considering my interest to pursue postgraduate studies, the experience was exceptionally useful. Hence, I am glad that USP pushed me out of my academic comfort zone and helped me to pick up new skills.

This ISM was a product of collaboration with Ngee Ann Polytechnic, Public Service Commission (PSC), and other various parties. Working with multiple stakeholders challenged me to put forward a research angle that could address their different concerns. For example, Ngee Ann Polytechnic understandably wanted to ensure that the confidentiality of the data would not be compromised. At the same time, PSC was keen to collect as much data as possible. Learning how to manage and navigate these different objectives successfully is undoubtedly an invaluable takeaway.

What impact do you want your ISM to achieve?

I presented my findings to the PSC Secretariat. The project has helped to establish an official communication platform between PSC and all the polytechnics on the scholarship front. Given that the PSC scholarship is perceived to be the pinnacle of public sector scholarships, I hope that the deepened understanding of the polytechnic sector will have a trickle-down effect on the other ministries and statutory boards.

Has the ISM helped you in other non-academic ways?

As an undergraduate, I often wonder if I can actually put what I have learnt in university to good use. PSC’s involvement in this project provided a practical impetus for my research since I knew that my findings would have a chance to influence the way that the public sector viewed polytechnic students’ suitability for scholarships and employment. Thus, this motivation refreshed my perspective on academic learning, as I was able to apply my research in very tangible ways.

Some quotes from ISM collaborators:

Things have been happening on the poly front as a result of your project and we are working together with all the polys on the scholarships front. So thanks again for being the catalyst for all this.

– Ms Rachel Quek, Project Co-Supervisor and Asst. Director, PSC Secretariat, Public Service Division, Prime Minister’s Office

Your report is an important step in helping PSC and the polytechnics to work together to identify talents from the polytechnic sector for PSC scholarships.

– Mr Chia Mia Chiang, Principal, Ngee Ann Polytechnic
Why did you choose this topic?

Ping: The topic of art activism was very novel to me at that point in time, but it also presented a perfect opportunity for me to expand my intellectual curiosity beyond what I was familiar with. This ISM is also part of a series of activities that culminates with an art exhibition in the following year. How often does an engineering student get the chance to see the behind-the-scenes of planning an art exhibition by a distinguished artist?

Wilson: This topic is something that is really close to my heart. Being brought up in a country where little balance exists between industrialisation and proper environmental management, I was very curious to find out about what some people in Indonesia are doing in order to improve the conditions of their environment.

What makes this USP ISM uniquely different?

Ping: This USP ISM is unique because of its field trip component. I was able to meet new people and become a participant observer in the community. Art activism by Tisna Sanjaya, a distinguished Indonesian artist and activist, is on the very unique and dire issue of environmental degradation. Our exchanges with Mr Sanjaya, his colleagues and students, and the villagers were particularly enlightening. For instance, the artist’s vision of art as a medium of social catalyst that brings about tangible changes in a community has completely changed my perception of the arts.

Wilson: The “Human Relations” module taught me how to observe how people behave in certain circumstances. As a Chinese Indonesian and a non-Muslim, I definitely had to be careful with my own behaviour while interacting with the people so as to not offend them.

Who did you work with?

We worked together with Ms Karen Lim, the curator of Cigondewah: An Art Project exhibit at NUS Museum which ran from 17 Feb – 3 Jun 2011. We also worked with Mr Tisna Sanjaya and his colleagues, the distinguished artists behind the project, as well as talented students from Faculty of Art and Design Bandung Institute of Technology (FSRD ITB), one of the leading Art and Design faculties in Indonesia.

Pingasari’s and Wilson’s ISM
Water, Garbage, Art: Social Impacts of Industrialisation in Cigondewah

The paper attempts to understand the unique socio-cultural impacts brought about by the industrialisation process in the semi-urban village of Cigondewah Kaler. The study was conducted based on qualitative methods of literature review, interviews, and observations. From literature and the categorisation of the social changes identified, the paper concludes that rapid and extensive occupational and ecological changes in Cigondewah have resulted in changes in the social systems. The most notable change observed was in the form of social differentiation and attenuation of traditional systems.
The paper argues that the environment, religion, and kinship systems are critical media of socialisation that have kept the village in a state of equilibrium. However, as the traditional systems industrialise together with the city which brought about the drastic occupational and ecological changes, changes in the traditional systems are becoming more severe.

**What were some memorable moments?**

**Ping:** My most memorable memories were of cultural exposure, friendship, and sheer hospitality offered by everybody we met during our trip: the artists, FSRD ITB students, and villagers amongst others. They invited us to the *Environmental Art Day* event, where we were given the honor to be one of the first to taste a local eel delicacy. It is a dish that the village is renowned for, but faced extinction as eels are more difficult to find now that the paddy fields have been converted into industrial zones. Together with the villagers, we watched the many performance arts with a sense of awe and utmost curiosity. In a strikingly unconventional performance, an artist and his band performed in the polluted river behind the cultural centre with buoys. Traditional and contemporary art performances were performed in harmony and enjoyed by all, thus showing how both can co-exist in the modern world. They were organised by the artists and students not only to raise villagers’ awareness of the environmental degradation occurring around Cigondewah, but also to bring different parties together to find a solution.

**Wilson:** Some of the memorable moments include the interaction with the villagers and the festival held in Cigondewah. I spent exactly three nights in Cigondewah last year and I am still able to recall vividly my experience in that village. My visit to Cigondewah coincided with the festival of the village. The festival itself involved various talented artists from Bandung and the ITB. Initially, I thought the performance was going to be like a musical concert, where a group of musicians would be invited to perform in the village in order to raise the awareness to protect the environment. However, to my surprise, the performance was more than just a musical concert: the artists involved expressed their talents through mini-skits, traditional dances, and chanting. The villagers, including the elderly and children, were able to follow the performances and I believe they truly enjoyed the festival. In addition, the festival also revived the traditional dances and rituals which used to be practised during the harvest period. The traditional music involved in the rituals was rather mystical. One of the villagers told me that the music combined with the chanting are the kinds of means that were used in the past to summon the God of Harvest.

**Has the ISM helped you in other non-academic ways?**

**Ping:** It was definitely an exciting and meaningful experience – one of the few which I will always remember as I look back at my NUS student life. It not only has exposed me to facets of social research, but also helped me to grow as a culturally diverse individual. Interviewing the artists, seeing firsthand the sheer potential of art activism, and catching a glimpse of the dedication and planning that go into creating an art exhibition also inspired me to appreciate arts beyond its immediate aesthetics and poetics: to be able to view arts as a catalyst for social change.

**Wilson:** My experience in Cigondewah has been priceless. I was asked to become the interpreter for the NUS Museum and now I can see myself as a better communicator. I am also fascinated by how passionate the villagers are in improving the conditions in Cigondewah. In short, I believe in doing things that I am passionate about and I do hope to influence other people.
USP Overseas Experiences

USP students initiate and participate in a wide range of overseas experiences.

An overview is given at the beginning of this section followed by a showcase of six overseas experiences:

- Princeton Interactive Crisis Simulation (Princeton, USA)
- Inter-Civilisational Dialogue (Malaysia and Turkey)
- NUS-in-Yale (USA)
- SP Jain Institute of Management and Research Internship (Mumbai, India)
- NUS-Waseda University Double Degree Programme (Japan)
- Niem Vui Vietnam

A selection of USP’s international programmes within a typical academic year is listed at the end of this section.
**International Programmes**

USP International Programmes are designed to give students the opportunity to explore interdisciplinary modes of thinking and understanding beyond the conventional classroom setting in Singapore, and relate and translate their learning to the wider world. Students are encouraged to become active participants in the experience, whether by proposing and organising international programmes, or by demonstrating leadership skills and resourcefulness throughout. In doing so, USP hopes to foster an environment wherein students, with support from professors and administrative staff, take both initiative and ownership of their personal and professional endeavours.

The USP International Programmes, thus, aim to offer students opportunities that will enable them to become sensitive to and familiar with a global context by helping them gain cross-cultural understanding and depth of perspective in looking at modern global issues.

**Legend:**
- **USP Student Exchange Programme**
- **Joint Degree Programme**
  - Double Degree Programme
- **Cultural Immersion Programme**
  - Summer Programme
- **Module Study/Field Trip**
  - Study Programme
  - Youth Expedition Community
  - Service/Learning Project
  - Others
- **Conference/Symposium/Dialogue**
  - International Internship
Our Overseas Experiences
Princeton Interactive Crisis Simulation (Princeton, USA)

Princeton Interactive Crisis Simulation (PicSim) is a two-day conference held at Princeton University in New Jersey, with the aim of using interactive crisis simulation to train delegates to respond to and resolve crises. It is a Model United Nations conference that simulates real world diplomatic interactions. In the past, PicSim has simulated crises in the Balkans, the Middle East, Central Asia, and for this particular conference – Latin America.

Participants are sorted into delegates according to country or political grouping, and each delegation reacts to crises affecting the region. Delegates interact with each other through a ‘crisis room’ and participants work together with their delegations to come up with solutions and action plans in response to the crises.

Students’ Notes

PicSim enabled me to experience learning on a global scale, rather than just making notes in a classroom. Sharing this intellectual journey with friends gave us something that we could later look back on and reminisce about.

The USP international programmes are, to a great extent, student-driven. While many universities do fill students’ lives with opportunities, at USP the biggest opportunity is that each student is supported and encouraged to make their own. The breadth and quality of USP international programmes is something I wouldn’t get anywhere else.

– Richard Dear

I was able to experience firsthand how choices and decisions of individuals were influenced and motivated by their cultural and national backgrounds. Debating, formulating policies, and working together with these students around the world in a crisis setting was nothing short of spectacular.

– Christopher Chok

One of the best experiences I had during the trip was walking around Princeton University. The university, beyond being picturesque, was filled with heritage and history. The best memory I have of the trip was being in Princeton Chapel, a very peaceful place where Martin Luther King Jr. gave his speech on democracy and the rights of African Americans. It was an oddly humbling and empowering feeling to be seated on the pews and reflect in the silence.

– Madhumitha Ardhanari

Throughout the conference, we met many delegates from various universities in the USA but also engaged in conversation with many delegates from around the world. The conference involves much discussion, debating, and strategic planning in order to avoid falling into drastic situations!

My main interest in Latin America was its culture, environment, and history. But this soon expanded to encompass many other areas including finance and law. Whilst training for PicSim, I gained very specific knowledge about the interworking of governments and how they deal with such a broad range of issues. I also realised how important it is to possess knowledge from a variety of disciplines in order to make informed decisions. As a joint degree programme student from the Australian National University, I was also keen to participate in PicSim in order to make the most of my experience as part of the USP community. There are so many opportunities in USP to explore new ideas.

– Hannah Bull
Inter-Civilisational Dialogue (Malaysia and Turkey)

The fourth Inter-Civilisational Dialogue (ICD) study trip was held in 2010 in Penang, Kuala Lumpur, and Istanbul, with a central theme of Islam and Cosmopolitanism. In this context, a dialogue can be defined as a conversation or discussion between representatives of two or more groups that may differ along the lines of religion, ethnicity, or other markers of distinction. The purpose of the dialogue is to create mutual understanding, interest, and concern between groups. USP brought a group of students to Penang, Kuala Lumpur, and Istanbul to immerse them in various academic and cultural activities. These revolved around an intense study of the religions of Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Judaism.

Students participated in university seminars and discussions with faculty and students in the various host/partner institutions, as well as interacted with interfaith community groups and leaders. There were also visits to churches, mosques, synagogues, temples, and organisations all of which were committed to strengthening inter-religious relations.

Students’ Notes

As is characteristic of a USP programme, the group was made up of students from various disciplines and faculties, including those from Philosophy, Political Science, Malay Studies, History, Engineering, and Science. The diversity of the group led to the uncovering of interesting insights through intense discussions that went beyond the formal settings, which stretched across bus and plane rides and throughout the many meals we had together.

I questioned and re-evaluated my own beliefs and perceptions. This experience has reshaped my thinking in irrevocable ways. ICD has certainly left an indelible mark on my intellectual growth and my personal development as a USP student. The cosmopolitan character of the cities of Penang, Kuala Lumpur, and Istanbul helped us to contextualise our academic learning. We fell in love with the dynamism of the cities, the warmth of its people, and most importantly, the wealth of knowledge they had to offer.

– Siti Hazirah Binte Mohamad

It was an immensely eye-opening, enjoyable, and enlightening experience in my intellectual quest to fathom and gain more perspicacious insight into the world’s major religions. I had the chance to acquaint myself with 11 other like-minded friends, all of whom share the same openness to experience, interests, and multidisciplinary inquiries in interfaith matters. Engaging in countless dialogues that encapsulate theological, philosophical, socio-cultural, and political perspectives is an amazing adventure that I will forever cherish!

– Nur Hani Bte Zainal

I thought the trip would teach me only about the academic side of religion, but I was wrong. Experiencing Turkey with friends and under the guidance of our professor was unbelievably fun and inspiring! From learning about the Sufi tradition from a sheikh to late night discussions about religion amongst ourselves, the trip deepened my understanding of Christianity and Islam and gave me even more to reflect on.

– Ng Hui Ying

ICD is much more than just an overseas trip to two countries. It is an intellectual and cultural window into Islam, a brief and tantalising glimpse into a great civilisation through the curtains of time and space. We often see these curtains as great obstacles but, if left unpulled, the opportunities for understanding are lost and forgotten. Sometimes, you get a chance to peel these veils back and see the world that lies behind. That is what ICD did for us.

– Jonathan Chua Yi
USP Summer Academic Exchange

NUS-in-Yale (USA)

Administered by USP each year, seven to 10 NUS undergraduates are given the opportunity to go on a five-week academic study programme in Yale University. Students are immersed in the collegiate culture of Yale University through interacting with their students, residing in their residential colleges, and experiencing other aspects of Yale undergraduate life. In the summer of 2009, seven NUS students went on this summer programme.

Students’ Notes

From the morning sunlight at the fountain in Sterling Memorial Library to the dinner music from the ringing bells at the Harkness Tower, my experience in Yale was filled with colours and novelty at every moment. I passionately researched the philosophical theme of happiness with Prof Lawrence, and brought these valuable thoughts and insights with me on my own quest for happiness and meaning. On the other hand, Prof Vivek Sharma ushered me on an ancient quest for the Holy Grail by probing into the religious conflicts across the globe. My brain was stimulated with ideas and my heart was often filled with joy. I have two close friends studying in Yale and they brought me to various places in New Haven. Standing atop the East Rock Mountain was really an eye-opening experience.

– Zhou Zhong

In Singapore, breaks from classes usually involve grabbing a meal or doing window shopping. But at Yale, there are no such nearby comforts! The nearest theatre is a 45-minute bus ride away and the nearest shopping centre is a one-hour bus ride away! So we had to do simple things to entertain ourselves like walking on a nature trail as a group. Even if we did the Singaporean thing (i.e., indulge in food) and treated ourselves to simple pleasures like pizza and ice cream, there was a much larger emphasis on the people we were with rather than the place or the activity. Simple things like walking up a hill and eating an ice cream cone had never been this much fun.

My greatest joy was walking through New Haven and popping into a cafe for some real coffee and fresh air before stepping into class for a serious two-hour lesson. That short walk magically invigorated me. This is slightly different from the present university campus setting in Singapore, where each turn you take brings you to another classroom or lecture theatre, but I reckon it will be slightly similar once our own UTown and residential colleges open.

– Mei Yan

Yale professor’s and student’s comments:

I am pleased to write about my six years of experience with the wonderful students from NUS. I have taught a five-week seminar each June at the Yale Summer Session. Right down the line, I’ve been impressed with the high caliber of NUS students, their eagerness to participate in a liberal arts course, and the ease with which they get along with other students from all over the world. I am so happy that Yale is partnering with NUS on a campus in Singapore. I’m sure this will be great for both places. If I could have students every semester like the students from NUS, I’d be the happiest professor on the planet.

– Prof Larry Vogel

The NUS student integration to the summer program at Yale is highly helpful to the broadening of horizons of the students studying in the USA. Although I have travelled extensively, I have never had the opportunity to interact and gain in depth knowledge of such a far reaching culture representative of students in Singapore or native to China, as I did during the summer session at Yale. This was a wonderful opportunity for our philosophy class, particularly since Americans receive much of the writings on the philosophy of power, war, and happiness from Eastern cultures. Students like Zhou Zhong who are intelligent and dedicated have enriched my learning experience at Yale.

– Vanessa Oates
USP Internship

SP Jain Institute of Management & Research Internship (Mumbai, India)

Five USP students participated in the inaugural USP-SP Jain Internship Exchange Programme in Mumbai, India that was held during July and August 2011. The students, fondly known as the “Mumbai Five”, worked in the different areas of non-governmental organisation (NGO) practice, such as microfinance, health issues, and women’s empowerment. The internship objective was to contribute positively and thoughtfully to the socio-economic development of India. In order to go beyond a strictly textbook or intellectual understanding of development and social change, the students found that they needed to look closely at the context of such change.

Students’ Notes

I worked with AMRAE, an NGO that promotes the empowerment of women in rural and urban areas. Our job was to propose the establishment of a Women’s Development Centre in the slum areas. There I met a girl whose mother had taken her out of school because it was ‘too far for a girl to travel on her own’. And while staying in SP Jain’s girls’ hostel, I met a group of girls who were pursuing MBAs and were poised to move into high-paying jobs. The disparity was stark. It reiterated the importance of championing education in the slum areas. I am glad to have been given the opportunity to do more than study. The internship allowed me to get out of Singapore to gain an outsider’s view of the inside – to stand in the shoes of the Mumbai dwellers and appreciate the difference.

– Florence Tang

Being a Computational Biology major, I am interested in how emerging technologies can be employed to solve the world’s problems, particularly in healthcare. Prior to this internship, I thought about how mobile phone technologies could be used to improve the quality and access to HIV/AIDS-related healthcare. In theory, it was a relatively easy task. However, our ground experience in Mumbai stressed the fact that all solutions must put the people affected by such change at the centre, especially for patients with HIV/AIDS who can be ostracised if their status becomes leaked. One of the most important points I learned is that, in considering problems such as HIV/AIDS, palliative care can never replace ‘mobile care’. The personal touch of a doctor should never be replaced by automatons devoid of any soul.

– Ivan John Mercado Clement

The whole internship experience in Mumbai has widened my perspectives due to the nature of my internship, which dealt with contemporary issues such as HIV. In just one month, I visited almost 20 organisations that deal with HIV. The learning curve was steep but the experience was very fulfilling.

Living in Mumbai is also another experience. The hustle and bustle of life reflects the growing economy in India. This internship would suit students who like to challenge themselves and experience new things in life. Patience and non-verbal communication skills are very important to overcome the language barrier with the locals. I believe that everyone can gain something important from this programme just as I did.

– Law Tian Boon

Having had a similar opportunity to visit India previously for Microfinance Focus in Bangalore, I was excited to take up the internship to apply what I had learnt. Working at Swadhaar put me at the frontier of microfinance. I was able to critically evaluate its impact on poverty alleviation and help develop a food-sharing network to reduce the costs of microfinance loans. I was excited yet also perplexed over the intricacies involved in how this change could be implemented. I visited villages where I could see the beneficiaries of our work. Putting a face to the names behind our stories and getting to see the change in their lives was inspiring.

– Shaun Chan

I think what was most striking about my project on women’s empowerment was seeing how the Mumbaikars dealt with poverty and crises. For an idealist like me, such experiences grounded me in the realities of what it is like to be part of an NGO. It made me wonder if it was possible for an inexperienced person like me to make a difference. What gave me hope was interacting with youths who dream to achieve great things despite living in a poor region. We met enterprising women who mobilised entire neighbourhoods to start new businesses, thus providing a new source of income for many families. I believe that the face of poverty is shifting in Mumbai ever so slightly and I am grateful for the opportunity to have witnessed it.

– Madhumitha Ardhanari

Comments from student mentor and Chairperson of the Centre for Development of Corporate Citizenship, SP Jain Institute of Management & Research*

It was a pleasure to have students from USP and mentor them for a period of five weeks. They had an understanding of the complex issues and dealt with the subject matter with maturity. In spite of language barrier they were keen to learn, and made an effort to interact with various stakeholders and organisations. The level of commitment, interest, and quality of their assignment was significantly high, which reflected in the report presentation to the external resource panel.

– Prof Nirja Mattoo

* Inaugurated in 1981, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan’s SP Jain Institute of Management & Research has emerged among the premier B-Schools in India. It has carved for itself a unique and eminent position through its philosophical approach to management education, the cornerstones of which are learner-centric, holistic and integrative thinking, the KSA (Knowledge, Skills and Attitude) Matrix, and “Beyond Classroom Learning” pedagogy.

Opposite:
Championing education in Mumbai
Double Degree Programme

NUS–Waseda University (Japan)

The NUS and the Waseda University's Double Degree Programme (DDP) provides the opportunity for students from USP and the Waseda University’s School of International Liberal Studies (SILS) to study at both institutions. The participating NUS faculties in the DDP are the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and the Faculty of Science.

Held in one of the top universities of Japan, SILS is a college with a strong emphasis on internships and socio-civic activities, which promote intercultural understanding. The DDP with Waseda University expands the opportunities for USP students to complete their USP curricular requirements under the Cultural Immersion option.

USP students who successfully complete the DDP are issued with a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) or a Bachelor of Science (Honours) from NUS and a Bachelor’s degree from Waseda University. Waseda students who successfully complete the DDP are issued with a Bachelor of Arts or a Bachelor of Science from NUS and a Bachelor’s degree from their home institution.

Okada Kotaro, a Waseda University student relates his USP experience:

From the day of arrival, I received a warm welcome from the USP community. When my Japanese friends and I reached the airport, our buddies who were assigned to take care of us were already there and had arranged a taxi. What I found interesting was the fact that the language they spoke to the driver sounded very different from what I had known as “English”. This was my first encounter with “Singlish”.

It did not take long for me to realise that the students in the USP are united by a sense of solidarity and are keen to improve the welfare of the community. At Prince George’s Park Residences where I stayed when I first arrived, various events and activities were organised by members with diverse talents and interests. My favorite was a French cooking course, which happened to be taught by one of my buddies Joel. His passion for cooking inspired me to develop my own cooking skills even after the lessons had finished. I often offered my cluster mates a taste of my dishes and sometimes we even cooked together. This helped me to mix with new people and make more friends. Food does play a significant role in social life, especially in Singapore.

I experienced holding media interviews for the first time in my life because of USP. I was interviewed by the largest Japanese TV station, which was making a documentary on the university education system in Singapore. I was quite nervous before the interview trying to be as prepared as possible, so that I could represent the students of my home university and NUS well to a Japanese audience. But what made the day memorable was when a local journalist asked about the Tohoku earthquake that happened the previous day. I didn’t know if my answer was published, but the thought that my views on such a historic disaster could have reached foreign readers impressed me. As I had never been away from my hometown more than a month and thus had few opportunities to communicate with foreigners before coming to Singapore, adjusting to life in a foreign country was not so easy. What made it possible for me to handle every difficulty and settle into the new environment was the kind help offered by my USP buddies, cluster mates, friends, and staff. These experiences will prepare me for future success in both my career and my life.
Youth Expedition

Niem Vui Vietnam

Niem Vui Vietnam (NVVN) is an overseas Youth Expedition Programme (YEP) that aims to allow participants to understand and experience what service learning is about. NVVN was launched in 2008, known then as Destination Danang. It was later renamed NVVN; “Niem Vui” means joy and happiness. Every year, a team embarks on this meaningful three-week expedition to a different village in Danang, Central Vietnam. Through exchanges with the overseas host community, each team strives to understand what service learning is truly about – its benefits and constraints.

Each team typically spent months before an expedition making preparations, comprising a series of fundraising events, weekly facilitations, Vietnamese language lessons, education programme curriculum planning, etc. Before serving the overseas host community, a team learnt to serve first in Singapore, at a primary school. The team planned the programme for the selected primary school, essentially to introduce the concept of Community Involvement Projects to the younger students. At the same time, this local stint provided an opportunity for USP students to gain experience working with children prior to the expedition to Vietnam.

Edna Chai, Life Sciences + USP, Class of 2015, gives an account of her experience:

With no prior experience and understanding of YEPs, I knew I was in for an interesting experience when I signed up for NVVN in 2011. The trip to the village was simply unforgettable. Our van got stuck in a mud-pit just several kilometers away from the project site. As a result, the entire team had to walk under the scorching sun to the project site – balancing on rocks to avoid stepping in water holes and holding on to each other to prevent slipping. The walk was a blessing in disguise as we really enjoyed the scenery that surrounded us – truly a sight to behold.

The team was not prepared for the cultural shock that awaited us. Upon arrival at the project site, we were greeted with warm reception and loud music. As the night wore on, I witnessed an extremely strong community spirit within the villagers. It felt like the “kampong spirit” we all heard about from our parents, but never quite experienced ourselves!

Initially, many of us were unsure of how to begin interacting with the villagers. Instead of spoken words, we drew pictures and made hand gestures to communicate with the Vietnamese school children and the home-stay owners. Additionally, we had to prepare all three meals for the team. It was a daunting task as there were limited ingredients available for cooking. At the end of the village stay, we appreciated how “pampered” we were living in Singapore, where transport, food choices and communication were taken for granted.

In 2012, I decided to lead NVVN and became a YEP leader together with two other co-leaders, Wai Hong and Joel. Leading a team is never easy, and NVVN provided me an opportunity to hone my leadership skills and meet new people. Although the challenges faced by NVVN’12 were similar to NVVN’11, the experience was not the same as each team brought new ideas to the table.

My teammates and I thought that NVVN would be about providing service to the “needy” villagers. However, we realised that our action could be a service, or a disservice to them. Our host community, though poor, is happy. The villagers like their way of life, the lifestyle that they are accustomed to. We, being “strangers”, could actually cause more harm than good. The material goods we brought might improve their way of life, but after chatting with many of them, we realised that it was simply our presence, and not the material goods, that brought happiness to them. The friendship forged despite the language barrier was the greatest takeaway for all of us.
### List of International Programmes

USP offers and supports a wide range of international programmes every year. A selection of trips taken by USP students is shown here:

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<th><strong>USP EXCHANGE PROGRAMMES &amp; INTERNSHIPS</strong></th>
<th><strong>Joint &amp; Double Degree Programmes</strong></th>
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<td><strong>China</strong></td>
<td><strong>India</strong></td>
<td><strong>Hong Kong</strong></td>
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<td>Peking University Yuanpei College</td>
<td>SP Jain Institute of Management &amp; Research</td>
<td>Chinese University of Hong Kong</td>
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<td>Cultural immersion programme</td>
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<td><strong>India</strong></td>
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<td>Carleton College</td>
<td>Bogazici University</td>
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<td>Jan – Jun 2014</td>
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<td>Cultural immersion programme</td>
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<td>Pennsylvania State University</td>
<td>Bilkent University</td>
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<td>Jul – Dec 2013</td>
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<td>Cultural immersion programme</td>
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<td>University of Arizona</td>
<td>Utrecht University</td>
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<td>2 Jun – 5 Jul 2013</td>
<td>Jan – Jun 2014</td>
<td>University College Utrecht</td>
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<td>Study programme</td>
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<td>Jan – Jun 2014</td>
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<td><strong>JOINT &amp; DOUBLE DEGREE PROGRAMMES</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Japan</strong></td>
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<td>Sciences Po-Le Havre Campus</td>
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<td>Waseda University</td>
<td>Chapel Hill Honours College</td>
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<td>Sep 2013 – Jul 2014</td>
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<td>Arizona State University</td>
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# FIELD TRIPS, STUDY TRIPS, YOUTH EXPEDITIONS

**Thailand**
- 1 – 10 Jun 2013
  - Green Backpack Community Theatre study programme
  - 4 students

**Japan**
- 10 – 22 Dec 2012
  - Buddhism in Asia study trip
  - 12 students

**Thailand and Laos**
- 24 May – 23 Jun 2013
  - State-Minority Relations in Southeast Asia field trip
  - 7 students

**Cambodia**
- 24 Feb – 4 Mar 2013
  - Politics of Heritage study trip
  - 3 students

**Thailand**
- 24 Jun – 21 Jul 2013
  - Participatory Social Development in Southeast Asia study trip
  - 3 students

**Philippines**
- 15 May – 1 Jun 2013
  - Builders’ Connect learning programme
  - 12 students

**Iran**
- 23 Feb – 4 Mar 2013
  - Civilisation of Iran study trip
  - 12 students

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# CONFERENCES, SYMPOSIUMS, DIALOGUES

**Korea**
- Ocean 2012 MTS/IEEE Yeosu International Conference
- 21 – 24 May 2012
  - 1 student

**USA**
- George Washington University
- 12 – 18 May 2013
  - Dialogue programme
  - 7 students

**USA**
- Tufts University
- 19 – 27 Feb 2013
  - International symposium
  - 2 students

**USA**
- Princeton University
- 20 Feb – 2 Mar 2013
  - Crisis simulation conference
  - 10 students

**United Arab Emirates**
- Zayed University
- 11 – 17 Mar 2012
  - ‘Women as Global Leaders’ Conference
  - 6 students

**Latvia**
- 2 – 5 May 2012
  - International Science conference
  - 1 student

**Thailand**
- 6 – 8 Dec 2012
  - International Science conference
  - 1 student

**Hong Kong**
- 6 – 7 Sep 2012
  - Investment Banking conference
  - 2 students

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# OTHERS

**Taiwan**
  - Harvard Project for Asia and International Relations Conference
  - 1 student

**Australia**
- The Australian National University
- 8 – 13 Jul 2012
  - International conference
  - 1 student

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**USA**
- Massachusetts Institute of Technology
- 11 Jun – 10 Aug 2012
  - NUS-MIT Summer International Exchange Programme
  - 1 student

**Vietnam**
- Vietnam National University
- 24 – 30 Jun 2012
  - AUN forum and contest
  - 2 students

**China**
- Peking University
- 10 – 19 Jul 2013
  - USP-ANU Global Cross-Disciplinary Tournament
  - 5 students

**Philippines**
- University of Philippines
- 25 Feb – 1 Mar 2013
  - ASEANpreneurs Youth Leaders Exchange Programme
  - 1 student
Career Services

USP encourages students to explore and identify their future career interests as early on in their undergraduate studies as possible. The USP Career Services aims to provide students with targeted resources and mentorship to help them in this endeavour.

This section highlights the career services offered by USP.
Career Services
The **USP Career Services** is committed to supporting students at every stage of the career development process, from when they first enter USP as freshmen to their transition to USP alumni. In recognising the value of early exploration, the USP Career Services adopts an open and personalised approach with a focus on active engagement with students, industry partners, and alumni. This involves initiating discovery of students’ self-awareness and career desires, understanding industry partners’ recruitment needs, and inviting USP alumni to share career insights. We seek to help students make informed decisions about their future – be it planning for a career in the private sector, the public sector, non-governmental or non-profit organisations, becoming an entrepreneur or pursuing postgraduate studies – by providing them with comprehensive and individualised resources and counsel to support their career aspirations.

*From top:*
USP students attending an “Assessment Centre” training workshop
Laurence Lien, CEO of National Volunteer & Philanthropy Centre, speaking with USP students
Making Connections

The USP Career Services organises networking events, career mentorship, and recruitment talks for students to connect with organisations such as ministries, research institutes, think tanks, multi-national companies, and small medium enterprises, involving alumni and industry partners to create platforms and opportunities for USP students in their exploration process. We also facilitate sharing sessions on pursuing postgraduate studies. We strongly encourage students to draw on these resources as the exposure to wide and varied areas will help to open up new dimensions for their career development and future planning.

Empowering Students

To prepare students for a competitive global economy, USP Career Services conducts learning and development workshops and courses with the aim to enhance career readiness of students and develop relevant competencies and skillsets to complement their existing knowledge and experience.

Organisations that USP students have interned with or have had attachments at include the following:

- Accenture
- A*Star
- Barclays
- British American Tobacco
- CapitaLand Limited
- Central Asia Development Group
- Centre for the Arts, NUS
- Citibank Singapore
- Control Risks
- Credit Suisse
- DSO National Laboratories
- DBS
- Deutsche Bank
- Economic Development Board
- Government Investment Corporation
- Heartware Network
- HSBC
- HCMi Pte Ltd
- IE Singapore
- Institute of Policy Studies
- Institute of Southeast Asian Studies
- JTC Corp
- Jobsfactory
- KPMG
- Mapletree Investments
- Mediacorp
- Ministry of Defence
- Ministry of Education
- Ministry of Finance
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Ministry of Home Affairs
- NUS Graduate School of Integrative Sciences and Engineering
- National Volunteer & Philanthropy Centre
- OCBC
- Public Service Division
- Platts
- Shell
- Singapore Airlines
- Siemens
- Singapore Power
- Spring Singapore
- Standard Chartered Bank
- Tangible Pte Ltd
- Temasek Laboratories
- Temasek Holdings
- Vrien and Partners

Engaging in a discussion with a Ministry of Foreign Affairs staff

Resources We Offer

- One-on-one consultation
- Career profiling
- Assessment tools
- “Lunch & Learn” sessions
- Company presentations and networking events
- Internships/research tie-ups
- Mentorship programme
- Postgraduate studies sharing sessions
- Career development workshops
- Personal development workshops
USP Career Services provides USP students with extensive workshops designed to build and develop specific skillsets. For those who are still exploring, they also offer sessions to help students identify areas of interest and future career paths. Personally, I have benefitted greatly from these services. What I found most striking about USP Career Services is its personalised approach. The staff are keenly aware of the strengths and weaknesses of USP students, and thus, are able to provide relevant and useful advice. I highly recommend USP students to consult USP Career Services when they can.

– Edwin Yeo (’12)
Political Science + USP

USP Career Services provides good service in recruiting of potential Industrial Attachment students. The people at USP Career Services are helpful and quick to respond.

– Jit Chee Chua
Research Engineer, Computer Graphics and Interface Department, Institute for Infocomm Research, A*Star

USP students are open to diverse cultures and perspectives, with a strong sense of social responsibility and the ability to think beyond borders. These are attributes we value at HSBC and we are pleased that many USP alumni are part of the HSBC family, and have excelled in their careers with us.

– Melissa Ng
Vice President, Talent Resourcing and Organisation Development, Human Resources, HSBC Singapore

When I was studying at the USP, I remember that there were a lot of internships made available to USP students through USP Career Services. These were great opportunities for students. I also have fond memories of both planning and being a part of the activities organised by the University Scholars Club, such as the orientation camp and the USC Bazaar. These activities provided a platform for me to further develop my non-academic interests and to hone soft skills. Having these experiences has really prepared me well for the working world.

– Tan Huiying (’06)
Life Sciences + USP
Senior Business Development Manager, Cordlife Services (S) Pte Ltd

The students from USP are bright, inquisitive and not afraid to ask tough questions. They were active participants during the exclusive EDB-USP networking session, which resulted in a very engaging and insightful discussion for both sides. Our EDB Officers enjoyed interacting with the students and we look forward to more sessions with the USP students in future! It was also a joy working with the USP Career Services, especially Josephine (USP Career Advisor)! She took care of logistics and prep work for the event and was around during the whole session to ensure that everything went smoothly.

– Jenevie Lee
Senior Officer, Human Resources, Singapore Economic Development Board

Obtaining assistance from USP Career Services is as easy as ABC - Josephine (USP Career Advisor) starts off by understanding your strengths and motivations, and recommends potential areas of work you can consider which you may find a better fit with. She organises bridging opportunities for you to learn from alumni and successful industry leaders, and will never stop encouraging you. This is what keeps you going when you face one rejection after another. A big thank you to Josephine in helping me secure the dream job.

– Liow Wei Quan (’13)
Business + USP
SingTel Management Associate
Partner Faculties

USP students come from seven faculties in NUS, namely:
• Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
• NUS Business School
• School of Computing
• School of Design and Environment
• Faculty of Engineering
• Faculty of Science
• Faculty of Law

In this section, deans from these seven faculties share their thoughts on USP.
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASS)

One of the oldest faculties in the university with origins dating back to the founding of Raffles College in 1928, FASS offers the most comprehensive education in the Humanities, Social Sciences, and Asian Studies in Singapore and the region. Its three divisions of Asian Studies, Humanities, and Social Sciences house 15 departments, 19 major subjects, a host of minor programmes, and a Centre for Language Studies that offers both Asian and European languages.

Dean’s Comments

USP offers enhanced opportunities for interdisciplinary learning to selected FASS students through its multifaceted yet interconnected curriculum, and in the context of a residential setting that fosters interaction and independence. There is no doubt that students gain both intellectually and socially from the interactions in small classes, and an academic culture that fosters the ability to think across disciplinary boundaries and to make connections between the classroom and the real world. FASS welcomes and supports the opportunities USP provides in broadening and enriching students’ educational experiences in NUS.

– Professor Brenda Yeoh, Dean, FASS
As Asia’s Global Business School, BIZ is a leading authority on business in Asia known for providing management thought leadership from an Asian perspective. The school offers a broad portfolio of academic programmes, including BBA, MBA, Executive MBA, MSc and PhD programmes in the fields of Accounting, Decision Sciences, Finance, Marketing, Management and Organisation, as well as Strategy and Policy. It also offers a wide range of customised and open enrolment Executive Education courses.

Dean’s Comments

The wide range of interdisciplinary modules and the overseas learning exposure offered by USP provide our undergraduate business students with solid grounding in critical analysis of issues from multiple perspectives. The cross-fertilisation of ideas between our Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) programme and USP sharpens our students’ analytical and reasoning capabilities, and fosters a deep understanding of the complexity of issues facing countries, economies, and businesses today. The rigour and diversity of our BBA and USP programmes will empower our business USP students to become impactful and socially responsible business leaders of tomorrow.

– Professor Bernard Yeung, Dean, BIZ School
School of Computing (SoC)

SoC offers six undergraduate degree programmes, as well as double and concurrent degree programmes offered in conjunction with other faculties. Courses offered include Communications and Media, Computational Biology, Computer Engineering, Computer Science, Computing, Electronic Commerce, and Information Systems.

Vice Dean's Comments

Knowledge in computing will amply equip people to work in many areas. If you are technically inclined and have broad interests, the combination of computing knowledge and the broad-based education of the USP will make you particularly suited to be an agent of change who can revolutionise the way things are done.

– Associate Professor Lee Wee Sun,
Vice Dean, Undergraduate Studies, SoC
School of Design and Environment (SDE)

SDE emphasises innovation and enterprise in the disciplines of Architecture, Industrial and Urban Design, Building, and Real Estate. Students are given opportunities to collaborate with relevant industries and gain valuable hands-on industrial experience both locally and overseas.

Vice Dean’s Comments

Whilst mathematicians can develop virtual spaces, and philosophers like Aristotle have defined communitarian values in shaping the soul of a city, architects are practitioners of a hybrid art. This art concerns an image that suggests an emotional, visual, and material experience shaped by culture, economy, politics, technology, and forces of nature. Architecture students learn from a breadth of disciplines in order to bridge experience with speculation, reality, and conjecture. This bridging process is interpreted differently by Building and Real Estate students who form the SDE community, but all are bound together by critical thinking that is essential to the everyday learning process. The USP experience brings about this critical and cross-disciplinary thinking, which is crucial to future environments and existences, and is a great opportunity for SDE students.

– Associate Professor Joseph Lim,
Vice Dean, Academic, SDE
Dean’s Comments

The USP is an excellent programme that enables our students at the Faculty of Engineering to enrich their experience. USP opens a world for them to further challenge their analytic abilities in abstract thinking and reasoning. These scholars emerge from the programme with fresh perspectives, knowledge, and interactive skills that place them in good stead as they embark on their new journey after graduation.

– Professor Chan Eng Soon, Dean, FoE
FoS offers a multidisciplinary education and prepares students to meet the increasingly complex needs of the future. Students have the flexibility to choose from diverse Science modules that cater to varied academic interests. Courses offered include Chemistry, Computational Biology, Life Sciences, Food Science and Technology, Mathematics, Quantitative Finance, Pharmacy, Physics, and Statistics.

Dean’s Comments

Beyond the single-minded pursuit of science, students who are admitted to USP concurrently can expect to receive education unparalleled in any other programmes. Within USP, they are given the space to venture into boundaries beyond the confines of their academic specialisation in the Sciences. This is achieved by providing a broad-based curriculum anchored in multidisciplinary studies and its interconnectivity. These aim to increase each individual’s propensity to view the world in broader perspectives, and to sharpen their powers of analysis and reasoning.

– Professor Andrew Wee, Dean, FoS
Established in 1956, NUS Law has a reputation as a law school of distinction, attracting the best students from Singapore and around the region. Today, the Law School is widely regarded as Asia’s leading law school and one of the most globally-oriented law schools. The NUS Bachelor of Laws (Honours) degree entitles its holders to practise law in many jurisdictions, including Singapore, Malaysia, the United Kingdom, Australia, and the United States. NUS law graduates can be found practising in top law firms in major cities around the world and making an impact in government agencies, international organisations, multi-national corporations, academia, non-governmental organisations, and arts and media groups.

Dean’s Comments

NUS Law offers a rigorous legal training, but we also teach personal and professional skills that enable our graduates to operate across boundaries. This includes national boundaries, but also disciplinary boundaries. The partnership with USP is a natural extension of that commitment and offers selected students even greater freedom to explore across disciplines and be part of this open and dynamic learning community.

– Professor Simon Chesterman, Dean, NUS Law
University Scholars Programme

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

NUS Business School

School of Computing

School of Design and Environment

Faculty of Engineering

Faculty of Science

Faculty of Law

PARTNER FACULTIES
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Our History, Vision and Mission

Our History

Created to provide intellectual, leadership, and personal development for highly motivated and talented students at NUS, USP evolved from the university's two predecessor programmes, the Talent Development Programme (TDP) and the Core Curriculum Programme (CCP).

TDP aimed to train future leaders who sought breadth and excellence in undergraduate studies, and had its first intake in 1996. TDP students were given opportunities to pursue enhanced or specialised courses through independent study and research in chosen fields of study, within their own faculties. In 1999, the CCP was launched. Modelled on Harvard's Core Curriculum Programme, it aimed to provide a broad-based education with an emphasis on writing and critical thinking, and an appreciation of the connections between different disciplines. In July 2001, USP was incepted as a fusion of these two programmes with the first intake of USP students.

Officially announced on 19 September 2000, USP was launched the following year in July 2001. The year 2010 marks the tenth anniversary of USP. In August 2011, USP moved into her new residential college premises in NUS University Town, offering students an integrated living and learning experience. USP continues to be a test-bed of new and creative ideas and approaches, both philosophical and pedagogical.

Our Vision

To be an open and dynamic learning community, in which students become self-motivated, independent, informed, thoughtful, and socially responsive, and to be a model of the benefits of a different approach to higher education for the broader NUS community.

Our Mission

To help able students learn to think and to do, both as supporters and leaders, in order to realise their full potential as individuals and as members of society.

The USP mission has two complementary elements:

A distinctive and forward-looking education, which emphasises and exemplifies breadth, questioning, connections, creativity, and exploration; and

A diverse and scholarly residential community, which both nurtures its own members and engages in different ways with others in NUS, Singapore, and the world.

USP Student and Alumni Networks

Two important networks contribute to USP's close-knit community. They are the University Scholars Club and the Scholars Programme Alumni Network.

University Scholars Club

All USP students are represented by the University Scholars Club (USC), USP's student representative body. The club is entirely run by USP students for USP students. Besides contributing to a vibrant USP student life, USC serves as an additional out-of-classroom platform for USP students to develop their leadership, intellectual, and personal capabilities through the many events and activities that USC organises and implements. USC also serves as an important bridge between the USP student and USP administrative and academic staff.

Scholars Programme Alumni Network

USP students benefit greatly from the USP alumni network, Scholars Programme Alumni Network (SPAN). Not only do USP alumni provide industry links for career opportunities, they return to USP on a regular basis for sharing sessions, workshops, and help with outreach visits and admissions interviews. USP students obtain firsthand accounts of what life is like after university and the many options available from the perspective of the USP graduate.
USP Advisors and Peer Mentors

At the start of each academic year, newly matriculated students are assigned USP academic advisors for the years that they are students in the USP. They are welcome to make a connection with their advisors as early as possible, and keep their advisors updated on their developments throughout their USP journey. This will enable their advisors to render the most appropriate form of assistance when needed.

The USP academic advisory system helps students to take ownership of their education, thus supporting and enabling them to play an active role in creating an individualised learning journey.

In addition to an academic advisor, each newly matriculated student is assigned a peer mentor. Peer mentors are senior USP students, usually from the same faculty, who help first-year USP students figure out their way around university by providing advice, especially regarding academic and curriculum matters.

More specifically, the USP Mentorship Programme, or UMP, seeks to help freshmen transit to university life in the USP, facilitate their access to academic information and resources, and foster a sense of community through peer guidance and connection.

USP Student Grants

USP is committed to providing wide-ranging opportunities for its students to stretch their creative and critical faculties, to hone their intellectual and leadership qualities, and to cultivate a global outlook. To enable students to take advantage of local or overseas research and learning opportunities, USP has in place the USP Student Grants System, which serves as additional resources available specifically to USP students, beyond the resources that they can tap on from their home faculties or the university itself.

This grant provides funding for USP students to pursue research and learning opportunities on an individual basis. Funding will enable students to:

- Present a paper at an academic conference
- Participate in a conference, course or workshop that has clear leadership or research components
- Participate in an internship or attachment
- Pursue research opportunities.

USP Facilities

USP General Office
Cinnamon West Learn Lobe, Level 1
USP administrative staff are available at the USP General Office to assist USP students on a wide range of student needs. Students approach staff on matters such as academic advice, student grants, internships, career and postgraduate opportunities, and residential room allocation. Staff members help students access opportunities which are available at the university level, as well as those for USP students.

USP Classrooms
Cinnamon South Learn Lobe, Levels 1 and 2
Cinnamon West Learn Lobe, Level 2
Most USP classes are conducted in tutorial and seminar rooms located at Cinnamon South Learn Lobe and Cinnamon West Learn Lobe.

USP Faculty Offices
The offices of USP faculty are located at Cinnamon South Learn Lobe and Cinnamon West Learn Lobe. This is where USP students meet USP faculty for academic advice and one-to-one tutorials and discussions.

USP Writing Centre
Cinnamon South Learn Lobe, #01-02
The USP Writing Centre offers USP students assistance with academic writing through one-to-one sessions with trained student writing assistants. It is modelled on established centres at leading universities such as Harvard and Cornell. These sessions help students negotiate the writing and thinking process from brainstorming, to drafting, to revising.

USP Reading Room
Cinnamon South Learn Lobe, #01-01
The Reading Room is open for USP students to
embark on self-study in-between classes. It is equipped with a wide range of reference books, fiction, magazines, and videos for loan. It also houses Brainfood, a collection of readings and books recommended by USP faculty, students, alumni, and administrative staff.

**The Chatterbox**
Ground Floor, USP RC (Cinnamon College)
The Chatterbox is a 24-hour study lounge area for USP students, where students interact with one another, study and discuss projects, or relax. It is located on the ground floor of the USP RC and accessible to all USP students and Cinnamon College residents. The Chatterbox is also home to USP’s student club, the USC.

**USP Multimedia Lab**
Cinnamon South Learn Lobe, #01-03
Equipped with 20 personal computers, the lab allows for USP students to do general computer work, internet surfing, and picture scanning. The lab also houses a pay-per-use printer and pay-per-use photocopier for students to do printing and photocopying.

**Theme Rooms**
Cinnamon South Learn Lobe, #02-06, #02-07
Accessible only to USP students, the two theme rooms on level 2 of Cinnamon South Learn Lobe are spaces that students may book to use on a first-come-first-served basis. The rooms are managed by the USC.

**Project Room**
Cinnamon South Learn Lobe, #02-08
The room is located on level 2 of Cinnamon South Learn Lobe. Managed by the USC, the room is used to facilitate projects undertaken by the USC.

**Dining Hall**
The USP RC (Cinnamon College) and Tembusu College share this communal dining hall that is connected to both residential blocks. The dining hall seats 600 people at any one time. During semester time, meals are served during the following dining hours: (Breakfast) 7am – 10am, (Dinner) 6pm – 10pm. During the examination period, the dining hall is open 24/7.

**Student Meeting Spaces**
Cinnamon South Learn Lobe Level 1
Cinnamon West Learn Lobe Level 2
These are open lounge spaces for USP students.

**Multi-purpose Hall**
Named Chua Thian Poh Hall, the USP RC multi-purpose hall is open to all students to book for sporting and other types of activities, events, training, and occasions.

**Educational Resource Centre (ERC)**
Located at UTown, the ERC is open to all USP students. Students have full access to the wide range of resources that the centre has to offer, including research facilities, computer labs, lecture theatres, seminar rooms, e-learning cafes, and clusters of study spaces.

**Residential College Housing Management Office**
The Housing Management Office is located on the ground floor of the residential block. The management office handles the maintenance and cleanliness of the residential block as well as administers room check-in and check-out of residents throughout the semesters and vacation period.

**USP Awards, Certificate, and Testimonial**

**USP Awards**
In recognition of the diverse talents and achievements of USP students, the following medal, awards, and prize are given to outstanding USP students or graduands on an annual basis.

**Joanna Wong Gold Medal Award**
This award is presented to the graduating student from the USP who best embodies the ethos of the programme. The student has been evaluated for academic excellence and for commitment to co-curricular activities. Academic excellence is assessed by Cumulative Average Point. Co-curricular involvement is evaluated based on participation and leadership in activities that foster “learning beyond-the-classroom”.

**President’s Honour Roll**
(Previously Vice-Chancellor’s List)
The President’s Honour Roll recognises excellence in intellectual and leadership qualities among students who graduate from the USP according to the following criteria: outstanding academic accomplishment (first-class honours degree awarded by the student’s home faculty); and outstanding contributions to student-led activities.

**Sung Kah Kay Memorial Prize**
The Sung Kah Kay Memorial Prize is presented to the graduating student from the USP who best exemplifies scholarship and academic excellence. The Sung Kah Kay Memorial Prize identifies the graduate as a leader in independent and interdisciplinary scholarship.
Scholars Programme Recognition Award
The Programme Recognition Awards are presented to students from non-graduating cohorts in recognition of their contributions to the USP through both academic accomplishment and/or co-curricular activities. Criteria for excellence may include exceptional academic talent, exceptional leadership in co-curricular activities, or a strong combination of both.

USP Senior Honour Roll
The USP Senior Honour Roll recognises excellence in intellectual and leadership qualities among USP students who have fulfilled eight USP modules as part of their curricular requirements. The placement criteria for the USP Senior Honour Roll are as follows: meritorious academic performance; active engagement in USP beyond-the-classroom learning; and significant contributions to the USP community.

USP Honour Roll
The USP Honour Roll recognises excellence in intellectual and leadership qualities among USP students who have fulfilled at least four USP modules (including the Writing and Critical Thinking module) as part of their curricular requirements. The placement criteria for the USP Honour Roll are as follows: meritorious academic performance; active engagement in USP beyond-the-classroom learning; and significant contributions to the USP community.

NUSS Medal for Outstanding Achievement
This award is given to a USP graduating student with outstanding all-round achievements. The winner is presented with a gold medal and a NUSS membership with a one-year waiver of the monthly subscription. The winner is recognised for academic excellence, as well as significant participation in NUS student activities and/or impactful contribution in community service/voluntary work, preferably in leadership capacities.

USP Certificate and Testimonial
The USP Certificate is awarded at the USP student’s commencement upon:
- Completing all USP academic requirements
- Completing the honours requirement of the home faculty/school
- Receiving at least a second lower honours degree.

USP students are expected to maintain a Cumulative Average Point (CAP) of 3.5 and above throughout their course of studies. This USP CAP requirement of 3.5 is a stepping stone for USP students to achieve the academic goal of honours in their home faculty.

Recognising that performance in the USP involves more than grades, USP has an internal testimonial (different from the NUS transcript) that reflects and documents the co-curricular achievements of each USP student, along with his/her academic achievements in the programme. The USP testimonial is a valuable addition to a USP student’s curriculum vitae as the student moves on to pursue further professional and academic endeavours.

A USP Testimonial will be issued upon request by a student after his/her graduation as a Scholar or when he/she leaves the Programme, whichever is earlier.

Applying to USP and the Selection Process

Applying to USP
USP admissions open every year with NUS’s general admissions exercise. In addition to their NUS application, applicants submit a separate online USP application, together with an essay and a personal statement. Please refer to usp.sg/apply. Applications are to be submitted before the closing date of 2 April each year. NUS students in their first semester may also apply to join the USP during USP’s second admissions process from October to November each year.

Students applying after the closing date of 2 April will be considered on a case-by-case basis, subject to availability of places. National Service men who are successful in the admissions exercise to join USP, will have a place reserved for them in USP in the year that they matriculate into NUS.

There is no monetary scholarship associated with admission to USP.

Selection Process
Shortlisted candidates are contacted to attend an interview. Applicants are assessed on the basis of an essay, a personal statement, and the interview, in addition to academic and co-curricular achievements.

USP seeks applicants with the following:
- Academic aptitude
- Leadership potential
- Passion, motivation, curiosity
- Passion to learn beyond a narrow field of specialisation
- Passion to forge interdisciplinary understanding and possibilities
- Motivation to pursue active and independent learning
- Interest to make a positive contribution to society, in Singapore and beyond.
Frequently Asked Questions

Can any NUS applicant apply to USP?
USP admits students from these seven partner faculties and schools in NUS:
• Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASS)
• Faculty of Engineering (FoE)
• Faculty of Science (FoS)
• NUS Business School (BIZ)
• School of Computing (SoC)
• School of Design and Environment (SDE)
• Faculty of Law (FoL)

How much does USP cost?
NUS tuition fees are based on the home faculty you join. There are no extra tuition fees to enroll in USP. For students who join USP from Academic Year 2011 onwards, there is a residential college fee component.

What is USP residential college?
From Academic Year 2011 onwards, USP includes a residential component: USP students live and learn together in the USP residential college (RC), also known as Cinnamon College, at the University Town. All USP students will stay at the USP RC in year one and a second year of their choice. There are various choices of rooms with differing rental rates. All RC residents will subscribe to a meal plan so as to participate in the dining hall experience. For more details, please see the “Residential College” section in the earlier pages.

Is USP a scholarship?
No, but USP students may apply for NUS or other scholarships. USP students who stay at the USP residential college may also tap on various financial assistance schemes available.

Can I apply to join USP if I am doing a double degree programme?
You can apply to join USP if the two degrees are offered by USP’s partner faculties and schools, excluding Faculty of Law.

Can I apply to USP if my first choice of faculty is Medicine or Dentistry?
We encourage you to submit your application to USP even though Medicine and Dentistry are currently not USP partner faculties. In the event that you are not offered a place in your first choice faculty of Medicine or Dentistry, it is possible for you to join USP if you are offered a place in a subsequent choice that is a USP partner faculty.

If I will be serving my National Service in the next two years, when should I apply?
We encourage you to apply now, such that your application can be evaluated against applicants from your own cohort. If successful, your place will be reserved for the year you matriculate into NUS. A reconfirmation package will be sent during your matriculation year.

If I am currently serving my National Service and have already been accepted into NUS or another university, can I still apply?
Yes, prospective students who are currently serving their National Service can still submit their application to USP. If you are offered a place at USP, you may keep your original position at NUS if it is with one of our partner faculties. However, if it is with another faculty that is not currently one of our partner faculties or with another university, you will have to relinquish your original position.

Do you allow accepted students to defer admission?
Yes, but such decisions will be made on a case-by-case basis.

How many students are admitted each year?
We admit 180 students each year.

When do I apply to live in the USP residential college?
You may proceed to apply to live in the USP residential college after you have accepted USP’s offer of admission.

To what extent are grades considered?
The selection process is holistic. While academic performance will be considered an important indicator of your capacity to thrive in USP’s rigorous intellectual environment, it will not be the sole determinant of the success of your application.

What is interdisciplinarity?
An interdisciplinary approach examines a subject using knowledge and methods from multiple disciplines.

Why is interdisciplinarity important?
Many significant problems are believed to be solvable only by interdisciplinary approaches. For example, a solution to global warming is likely to involve science, economics, and international relations. Apple attributes the success of the iPad to the way it integrates design, engineering, and marketing.
What is a writing module?
All USP students choose one of USP’s renowned writing modules in their first year. The writing module provides the tools to craft compelling arguments and expositions, and forms a foundation for pursuits both in university and beyond. Writing modules are taught seminar-style with a maximum of 12 students per class, and include ample one-on-one tutorials with USP professors.

What is the faculty-to-student ratio?
Class sizes range from 12 to 35 students. The seminar style of the classes seeks to facilitate maximum interaction and engagement between professors and amongst peers.

What are the academic expectations of USP students?
USP students are expected to maintain a Cumulative Average Point (CAP) of 3.5 and above throughout their course of studies. This USP CAP requirement of 3.5 is a stepping stone for USP students to achieve the academic goal of honours in their home faculty. USP students are also expected to participate in USP activities and contribute to USP.

Can I switch major?
USP students may apply to switch major and/or faculty up until the end of their second year. (Non-USP students may apply to switch faculty up until the end of their first year.) For advice on switching criteria and process, simply consult your USP academic advisor and administrative staff.

What other for-credit options can I pursue in USP?
Apart from USP’s interdisciplinary modules, students also earn academic credit in the following ways:

- **Academic Research**
  USP students with an interest in research may embark on independent study under the mentorship of a professor. This gives a head start in a research or research-based career. Other academic options open to USP students include double degree and double major programmes
- **Cultural Immersion**
  USP students who are keen to develop cultural capabilities and networks in a foreign country have the option to pursue cultural immersion at an overseas partner university
- **Entrepreneurial Development**
  USP students who want to experience an entrepreneurial culture have the option of spending a year in one of NUS’s Overseas Colleges in leading entrepreneurial and academic hubs in the world such as Silicon Valley and Philadelphia (USA), Stockholm (Sweden), Beijing and Shanghai (China). They may also do so locally at NUS Lead.

How do I embark on Independent Study Modules (ISMs) as part of USP’s curriculum?
You may embark on ISMs through the following ways:

- Individual or Small Group Study: A student or a group of students designs and completes a project under the guidance of a faculty member
- Masters or higher level course-based modules: A student completes a Masters or higher level course-based module
- Enhanced Year 3 or 4 modules: A student signs up for and enhances a Year 3 or 4 module into an ISM. In addition to the standard requirements, the student undertakes additional research at greater depth. Compared to non-USP students, USP students taking this route may have the weightage on examinations lessened, with greater weightage placed on continual assessment on their project work and term papers.

Does USP offer overseas learning opportunities?
Yes, USP strongly encourages and provides financial support for students to pursue learning opportunities outside of the classroom. Some places that USP students have travelled to include USA, China, Switzerland, Greece, India, Vietnam, Japan, South Korea, Norway, Poland, Malaysia, Philippines, France, Netherlands, Laos, Cambodia, and Turkey.

What is the difference between the curricular workload of a USP student and a non-USP student?
The total curricular workload of USP students is the same as that of other NUS undergraduates.

What facilities does USP offer?
In addition to other campus facilities, USP students have access to:

- USP Writing Centre
- USP Reading Room
- Chatterbox (a 24-hour study lounge in the USP residential college)
- USP Multimedia Lab
- Educational Resource Centre
- Dining Hall
- Multi-purpose Hall
- Seminar rooms
- Theme rooms

What is the USP community like?
USP students, professors, staff, and alumni have diverse backgrounds and talents, yet are united by their passion and motivation to pursue their interests and create significant outcomes. The USP community bonds over intellectual and
social activities and events held in the residential college, many of which are organised by the USC, its student club, and SPAN, its alumni society.

**What degree will I graduate with?**
USP students will graduate with an honours degree in their home faculty. They will also receive a USP certificate designating them as a University Scholar.

**What do USP graduates go on to do?**
Amongst recent USP graduates, more than one-third go on to do postgraduate studies at both local and overseas universities, including top universities such as Oxford, Cambridge, MIT, Imperial, Harvard, Berkeley, Stanford, London School of Economics, Tsinghua, Karolinska Institute in Sweden, and medical schools such as Duke-NUS Graduate Medical School. Many have also gone on to pursue successful careers in major organisations in the private and public sectors, and in non-profit and non-governmental organisations.

For a chance to interact with USP faculty, students, and staff, drop by at the NUS Open House that is held annually following the release of the GCE ‘A’ Level examination results. USP faculty, students, and staff are present at the USP booth to share their experience and answer any questions you may have.

If you are interested to visit the USP, email USP Outreach at usphelp@nus.edu.sg or call 6516-4425.
How to Apply

USP application is submitted at the same time as the NUS application. Each application is processed separately. To apply to USP, complete and submit the USP Online Application Form (that includes a 400 – 600 word essay, and personal statement) available at [usp.sg/apply](http://usp.sg/apply). Please also submit your co-curricular activities (CCA), community involvement, and leadership supporting documents.

**Application Timeline**

The application timelines for applicants with ‘A’ level results, local polytechnic diplomas, and international qualifications are shown below.

**Applications with ‘A’ level results**

- Apply to **NUS** by 1 Apr
- Apply to **USP** by 2 Apr
- Apr - Jun: USP interviews

**Applications with local polytechnic diplomas**

- Apply to **NUS** in Feb
- Apply to **USP** by 2 Apr
- Apr - Jun: USP interviews

**Applications with international qualifications**

- Apply to **NUS** as soon as possible
- Apply to **USP** by 2 Apr
- Jun - Jul: USP interviews

You will receive full consideration when you apply to both NUS and USP by the respective dates. If you are unable to meet the USP closing date, please call USP at 6516-4425 to enquire on possibilities available.

Contact Us

For more information, please contact:

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