University Scholars Programme

Make company among trail-blazers and change-makers. Come apply for the University Scholars Programme at the National University of Singapore.

Ranked 30th in the world, the National University of Singapore (NUS) is a global university centred in Asia. The University Scholars Programme (USP) at NUS offers one of our most multifaceted undergraduate experiences. Collaborating with six partner faculties and schools, USP sharpens students in multidisciplinary learning and relentless critical thinking.

USP students come from Arts and Social Sciences, Computing, Business, Engineering, Science, and Design and Environment. They complete about one third of their university modules in USP and the other two thirds in their home faculty. Small classes ensure students engage in rigorous discussions and cross-faculty learning. They have the freedom to conduct their own independent study modules, with other learning opportunities in Singapore and overseas.

USP students graduate with intellectual, personal and leadership qualities honed. They receive direct honours from their home faculty, and a certificate recognising them as University Scholars, ready to make a difference in the globalised world.

From July 2011, USP will move to its new home—the USP Residential College at NUS University Town located across the NUS Kent Ridge Campus. The USP experience will be dynamically reinforced with an integrated curriculum, learning-beyond-the-classroom activities, and vibrant residential programmes.


[Image 0x0 to 652x652]
A rich education is more than hefty academic archives, excellent grades and high tech facilities. You may crave the freedom to probe secret worlds bigger or smaller than your own, or to discover unfamiliar cultures in faraway places. You may yearn to question norms and push boundaries. A rich education should fuel your passion to excel. It should liberate the person you think you are, and help realise the person you believe you can be. If you are driven by intellectual curiosity and passion, let the University Scholars Programme (USP) offer you the best in education within and beyond the classroom.

Meet some of the outstanding people shaped by USP, and determine if you have the desire not just to follow their footsteps, but to blaze a trail of your own.
Benjamin Lee breezed into USP and the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. He took university life by storm, diving enthusiastically into the rigours of USP curriculum.

"We were challenged to take full ownership of our learning, to find our own ways of making sense of things. USP provided as much support and resources as possible so that we could bring about our own interpretive learning experiences."

A particularly memorable "learning experience" was when Ben and his USP mates attempted to expound on social-political theories gleaned over the course of their Independent Study Module at USP. After a crash course on video-making techniques, they eagerly produced a documentary expose on marginalised groups and their role in mainstream Singapore society.

"In USP you don’t just passively upload content from lecturers then regurgitate the points at the end of the semester. Where else would you get to interview social deviants for homework?"

Ben’s whirlwind of activities also included panelling alongside billionaire financier George Soros at an Institute of Southeast Asian Studies dialogue session, and representing NUS at the 2004 ASEAN Young Speakers Forum in Bangkok. USP’s philosophy of developing intellectual curiosity to empower youth inspired his winning speech on “The Role of Asian Youths in the Knowledge Age”.

For Ben, effecting change went beyond an intellectual pursuit. In the wake of the Asian Tsunami, USP paved the way for him and a team of students to rebuild homes in Sri Lanka on a Youth Expedition Project.

"To be honest, we felt we benefited more from the experience than the communities that hosted us. Observing firsthand the villagers’ strength and tenacity to carry on despite their losses was humbling. That beat any shelter we could possibly have made for them."

Closer to home, on being elected President of the University Scholars Club, Ben set up “Chatterbox”, a retreat on campus for USP denizens to unwind. Living in USP’s residences also became the perfect base for Ben to build strong ties with his fellow USP mates.

The future looks bright for Ben, with clear skies too for USP students seeking financial help from the USP Alumni Fund mooted by him and other USP alumni. An optimist with a warm heart, Ben currently works at the Ministry of Finance. He also makes time to volunteer with several youth programmes including the National Youth Council and the International Olympic Committee’s “Young Ambassadors” Programme.

"I hope to leave a meaningful mark on the community around me. I would love to set up a global youth movement—a Scouts movement...anchored in today’s situational realities. This would encourage the next generation to take a more active interest in their communities. Setting aside historical and political differences, we can really make this a better place to live in.”
THE NATURAL HABITAT OF THE INQUIRING MIND
A Study on the Effects of Environment on Mental Agility


Farhan Ali
Psychology Major
USP Scholar

“My mind is always darting about, harping on an issue, a theory, a problem — trying to understand it in a less superficial manner.”

PHENOMENA PROBLEMatised
Restless mind, resulting in an insatiable appetite for knowledge, inquiry and all things new.

HYPOTHESIS
The USP milieu is the perfect habitat to cultivate, challenge and sustain intellectual curiosity.

EXPERIMENTAL PROCEDURE

“My temperament and USP’s philosophy fed off each other. I was not satisfied with specialist knowledge in any one narrow field. I felt that knowledge had to be able to explain a variety of phenomena and, most importantly, create other new knowledge. USP’s curriculum showed me that indeed, all knowledge is ultimately connected.”

Food for thought was administered to subject at regular intervals, nourishing his creativity. Through USP, Farhan was able to research brain, behavioural and molecular evolution in primates — an endeavour that integrated his Psychology major with his interests in Life Sciences and non-fiction writing. Specimen reacted positively to USP’s novel and challenging stimuli, exhibiting heightened levels of interest and engagement with varsity matter.

“USP gives their students individual attention both in class and beyond. In particular, my USP supervisor Assoc Prof Rudolf Meier was a dedicated mentor to me for almost 4 years. His attitude towards overcoming problems inspired me to see the possibility of the impossible.”

Experimentation continued with Farhan collaborating closely with Assoc Prof Meier, co-authoring papers for scientific publications. Farhan also travelled extensively to India, China, USA and Scandinavia to present his research. Subject demonstrated significant personal growth and accrued numerous valuable experiences throughout the stated observation period.

HABITAT CONDITIONS

“Multidisciplinary approaches here in USP are not buzzwords — they are actually the way things get done.”

→ Challenging stimuli
→ Cross-disciplinary modules
→ Exciting overseas exchange programmes
→ Dynamic internships
→ Stellar research opportunities

RESULTS

“Being a USP student gave me a sense of belonging within a large university. The empowerment, in both intellectual and personal development, is something hard to find outside of USP.”

Farhan is currently on full, direct PhD Scholarship in Evolutionary Biology at Harvard. His research delves into birdsong and plasticity — how brain mechanisms in birds operate to remodel their tunes over time.

CONCLUSION

“USP exceeded my expectations in the amount of academic flexibility, the support for student initiatives, and the intellectual vibrancy of the USP environment. To me, it really was a life-changing experience.”

Farhan believes USP proved an ideal scholastic environment — one that routinely provoked, challenged and stretched his thinking within a natural sense of community. Affiliation to USP has also impressed the various bodies from which he received financial and professional support.

Material and intangible benefits accrued, hypothesis result is proven.

USP is the natural habitat of the inquiring mind.
Hanan Alsagoff transformed herself at USP through a myriad of global influences that expanded both her heart and mind.

Her forays outside the classroom took her beyond the seas to Yemen, India, South Africa and the States, strongly backed by USP. She even got to perfect her French on a semester abroad at the École Spéciale d’Architecture in Paris.

Back home, she set up the West Asian and North African Studies (WANAS) Interest Group. With WANAS, she introduced Arabic and belly dancing classes to the NUS community—successfully generating public awareness on the region’s culture.

Her studies in architecture were similarly global. Nurtured under the watchful eye and keen mentorship of NUS professors like Dr Lilian Chee, Hanan had the freedom “to learn what she liked and to explore what she wanted” from USP’s creative curriculum. Her architectural projects and influences ranged from site exhibitions to opulent Emirati Palaces to innovative sustainable housing in South Africa.

Speaking to the world in English, French, Malay, Arabic and Spanish, Hanan has both a compulsive wanderlust and a heart for ploughing back into local communities, wherever she is.

Han is currently an architect with ar+d. Her recent projects include designing large-scale projects for high-profile clients in Abu Dhabi. In her spare time, she commits herself to freelance writing, contributing articles to magazines like the Singapore Architect.
Confessions of a Journalist

BRYNA SIM: PIONEERING USP-SPH SCHOLAR TO THE PRESTIGIOUS YUANPEI COLLEGE, Peking University, Under USP’S YEAR-LONG CULTURAL IMMERSION PROGRAMME.

A day in the life of Bryna Sim at Beida Yuanpei College

Entry #57

“What did you mean that some Taiwanese see themselves as different from mainland Chinese?” His knitted eyebrows and curious gaze arrested themselves intently on my face.

Placed in another situation, I would have relished any debate on cross-strait identity. But now under pressure to answer a sensitive political question with limited Mandarin capabilities, I’d suddenly become a prisoner...to my own words. I blinked, thinking quickly as my Chinese classmate pushed up his spectacles and leaned forward, ever so slightly. “He’s waiting for an answer.” I thought, nervously. “What’s it going to be?”

Thankfully, my sufficiently morose expression was enough to convey that the faux pas was more a matter of my limited vocabulary than anything else. But it did get me thinking about the fragile balance between intellectual curiosity and cultural sensitivities. I was used to adrenaline-pumping, free rein discussions at USP. But this was a whole new world in which learning meant ‘sensitising my tongue’ to a different culture. It was equally enriching, just as challenging. (And necessary! Better now than when I write for Singapore Press Holdings later. Right?)

Being USP’s pioneering scholar at Yuanpei College certainly packs in a host of brilliant cultural experiences. Take registering for course modules for example: It’s been a very steep learning curve. The seamless “efficiency” I’m so used to back home manifests in such different ways here. In Beijing, you take and make time to foster relationships—to help get things done. Thank God USP helped facilitate my module mapping—taking my dream classes was made that much easier. But still, that’s just one example! Let loose in a culture at once similar to and different from Singapore, EVERYTHING—from the food, language, toilets, weather, even bus rides—is thrilling, and certainly eye-opening.

Talk about thrill—I was pleasantly surprised when Prof Pang (the head of USP, no less) took time off his busy schedule to check in on me. He came even though he was having a cold, so it was really touching to see him waiting for me outside my dormitory with his wide smile and gift to boot! To see this familiar face from home during a bleak winter season warmed the cockles of my heart. I was reminded that though far away, I was far from forgotten by USP 😊.

5th December ’07, Wednesday, 10.27pm
Weather: slight sprinkling of snowflakes
Currently listening to: whistling wheels and ringing bicycle bells 😊
Snack of the moment: Smacking sweet 冰糖葫芦
RAMEEZ ANSAR
TAKING STOCK AND
APPRECIATING VALUE

Rameez Ansar is a mature stock that has grown exponentially, paying substantial dividends back to those who invested in his abilities. Among the first cohort of Pakistani students admitted to NUS, Rameez and his friends felt so strongly about the incredible opportunities they had that they established the NUS Sajjad Foundation Pakistani Bursary Fund to enable youths from home to follow in their footsteps.

Herewith, we chart Rameez’s meteoric rise.

“I remember my USP writing class; the professor would beat me down sentence after sentence, grilling me on how to really say what I wanted to say! The quality of discussion in USP classes was so high that you didn’t want to miss a single lesson—every class was valuable.”

USP

USP

Rameez makes it to the Vice Chancellor’s Honours List – awarded to the top 1% of the graduating class. He receives multiple job offers six months before graduation.

NUS

NUS

Strategic move to NUS. While peers go to the States to further their education, Rameez decides “the East is the new West” and embarks on an adventure in Singapore.

DRUMS

10-year old Rameez plays cricket for the first time, a Pakistani rite of passage. He wins his first game ever.

ENTREPRENEUR

At 14, Rameez earns a little extra pocket money by building and selling PCs.


THE FUTURE

What’s next for this burgeoning stock?

MOUNTAIN

Rameez sets up the ‘make-a-wish’ volunteer programme at his workplace Temasek Holdings. Targeted to help terminally-ill children, he raises money with his colleagues by climbing Mount Kilimanjaro, the highest peak in Africa.

TRAVEL

Employed by the Boston Consulting Group, Rameez proves his viability as an international asset, working in 6 different countries by age 26. His training in USP affords him the flexibility to undertake projects in fields ranging from corporate finance to telecommunications to logistics.

2011

2019

Rameez Ansar
Computer Science Major
USP Scholar

2005

1999

2011

2005
ABSTRACT

A successful prototype of renaissance man Veerappan Swaminathan was first produced in 1985, then developed extensively over the next 24 years. The initial model has gained considerable dexterity through the USP.

(1) Always thinking ahead  
(2) Great eye for detail  
(3) Big appetite for learning  
(4) Handles all challenges deftly  
(5) Steps boldly towards goals

Fig. 1. Diagram of Veerappan Swaminathan

MULTIFACETED UTILITY

“I have a beef with scientific education’s compartmentalisation of subjects into ‘Chemistry’ or ‘Physics’... In the old days, scientists did everything! Poetry, philosophy—if it was interesting they would go pick it up and make use of it.”

Mechanical Engineering major Veerappan signed on to USP to gain exposure to other domains of knowledge. With no background in biology, Veerappan’s interest in the subject was first piqued by USP module Evolution. Armed with his engineering training and new found enthusiasm for biology, he leapt at the chance to intern at Voyage Medical Inc. and study at Stanford, via the NUS Overseas College programme.

“We actually make stuff that is used during surgery to treat cardiac conditions. It seemed like a really cool company doing important things and I decided I wanted to be a part of that.”

Veerappan’s innovative entrepreneurial zeal paved significant inroads to improving community health. He is now listed as co-inventor of four United States provisional patent applications for biomedical devices.

FURTHER APPLICATION

Veerappan’s contributions towards a better global community extended beyond biomedical applications. In his freshman year, he found himself drawn to fellow USP mates cum Engineering majors.

“They expressed themselves in class and I felt they were very passionate, capable people. I like the people in USP. I mean seriously, the diversity and skill sets of the community here are so great that there is always someone interesting to meet around the corner.”

A hotbed of ideas soon ripened to fruition as Veerappan co-led these USP compatriots in collaboration with students from the University Institute of Chemical Technology, Mumbai. Together, they developed a solar fruit dryer to aid debt-distressed rural Indian farmers lengthen produce life. Among 809 entries from 89 competing countries, their invention so impressed judges of the prestigious UNESCO Mondialogo Engineering Award 2006/2007 that they clinched top prize—20,000 Euros in seed funding.

SUMMARY

“Although it was an engineering design competition, we spent a lot of time dissecting the economics of the system and the psychological behaviour of villagers responding to a new innovation.”

Applying the USP approach to problem solving compelled Veerappan and his team to consider multiple perspectives and engage with diverse communities. Interacting with schoolmates, foreign peers, conservative villagers, and hard-nosed judges, patent model Veerappan Swaminathan was rigorously tested in global outreach capabilities, flexibility and maturity.

References confirmed. Steadfastness, durability and entrepreneurial tenacity tried and tested.

These are the hallmarks of the patented USP scholar.
Charlene's educational experience was crafted at USP and the NUS Business School to suit her ambitions and values completely. Coupled with opportunities to study at some of the top business schools across Asia, Charlene was given the platform to excel, integrating Confucian ethics with business savvy to navigate international work systems. Here, we look at Charlene's unique positioning as a truly global player:

"With USP, I was able to co-author an educational experience that was uniquely 'me', while still going through rigorous broad-based interdisciplinary programmes truly suited for today's knowledge economy."

**HER VISION**
To provide unparalleled, culture-specific business consultancy competencies to international clients and local communities at large.

**HER BUSINESS SPECIALISATION**
Charlene is skilled in harnessing extensive Chinese networks and delivering up-to-date, cutting-edge financial information. Her specialisation includes providing consultancy services to individuals and companies alike eager to enter the Chinese market for the highest returns.

**HER HERITAGE**
NUS's global tie-ups with top partner universities provided Charlene with the leverage needed to actualise her keen passion for business in Asia, while rooting herself in specific, local business climates. We look at her numerous achievements at a glance:

**MILESTONES**

- **2009**
  - Partnered USP Prof Albert Teo in an inaugural research project on philanthropy in Singapore
  - Documented history, players and changing landscapes

- **2008**
  - Spearheaded Shanghai House of Entrepreneurs
  - Managed key events in collaboration with the National Arts Council and the Singapore Tourism Board

- **2007**
  - Founded NUS Biz Network Group
  - Organised networking sessions with Goldman Sachs, Merrill Lynch and Credit Suisse among others
  - Joint venture with Fudan University in Shanghai
  - Nurtured vital networks in the Chinese markets

- **2006**
  - Strategic partnership with Peking University
  - Accrued cultural and intellectual asset gains unique to the Chinese market

**BEYOND THE INDIVIDUAL, INTO THE COMMUNITY**
USP's community-centric focus further motivated Charlene to engage actively in international dialogues and community projects—diligently serving both clients and beneficiaries alike. As a winning contributor in the prestigious Business Case Competition on "Ethical Leadership in the New Generation", and a Singapore representative in the Lee Shau Summer Leadership Programme in Hong Kong, discussing "China Tomorrow: Perspectives from Three Cities", Charlene is an exemplar of ethical leadership through her active participation in socio-economic dialogues. Talk continues to translate into action with her history of active community involvement, where, following in the footsteps of USP's commitment to social responsibility, Charlene invested in building schools specifically for disadvantaged children in Cambodia.

**BUSINESS MAJOR USP SCHOLAR**
Charlene is currently based in Hong Kong, actively accruing assets for leading investment bank RBS. With her keen eye for local details and experiences in the region, Charlene honours her competencies to integrate the best of Asia's systems, within the global finance industry.
"USP has provided a wonderful environment for multidisciplinary learning ... the entire class is captured by the topic, actively thinking and voicing out their opinions."

"Why adventure?" I asked. From contemporary Islamic societies like Kuala Lumpur and Istanbul, to the heights of the Himalayas and the plains of Uttaranchal in India, Bing Xun's USP experience has been nothing but adventure for him. Investing in projects firm in humanitarian and social values, Bing Xun strongly believes in forging links between developed and developing worlds, amongst the religious and non-religious alike.

Certainly it must have been difficult fulfilling USP’s rigorous course schedule with Pharmacy’s unrelenting syllabus? The cynical among us would have called it impossible. And yet, Bing Xun’s incredible track record simply forces a double take on any skeptic. When prodded for his secret, he shrugs his shoulders and laughs, “It’s really about keeping motivated and taking things one step at a time.” His enthusiasm for life is palpable, his work-ethic infectious. (I am secretly starting to suspect this man is Superman in disguise, a veritable Clark Kent...)

It is precisely that earnestness and humility for someone who has much to boast about that leaves such a deep impression. In a world of ‘talkers’, he is a man of action with a deep sense of purpose and humanity. At the end of the interview, I couldn’t help thinking that in a world increasingly stratified, we could certainly do with a few more ‘Bing Xuns’ around.

Comfy on carpets. Bing Xun and fellow USP mates at a carpet shop in Turkey, learning about the finer intricacies of Islamic carpet weaves.
My notes...

...and scribbles.
So What’s Your Story?

Want to explore the furthest reaches of your imagination?
Seize the opportunity with USP!

Apply concurrently during admission applications to NUS, at usp.sg/apply

For more information, visit us at usp.nus.edu.sg or at

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