

WINGSPAN

THE YALE-NUS ALUMNI NEWSLETTER
ISSUE 02



GIFT OF READING

Twenty of the best
books for the holidays



MESSAGE FROM THE VICE PRESIDENT

Trisha Craig, VP of Engagement

We are so happy to bring you the last alumni newsletter of the year, and hope it brings you joy and cheer. We could all use those at the end of a tumultuous semester that saw the College's future irrevocably changed but that brought out the best of the community.

My favourite holiday, Thanksgiving, happens this week, and reflecting on the many things I am thankful for this year, our alumni community is at the top of that list. Many of you signed on for our first alumni mentor program (see the story in this issue), reached out to students, faculty and staff to see how they were doing in light of the merger announcement, and are actively and creatively thinking about ways to honour the College's legacy and preserve its best elements in perpetuity.

I'm also thankful for the team at Alumni Affairs – Kevin, Aly and Cole plus our newest member, Mpiwa Gwindi ('24), our student writer for the newsletter. As a team, we put together the programming that helps connect and support you. We are all looking forward to some presenting some exciting opportunities in the new year and can't wait to announce those.

In the meantime, we wish you a wonderful end to 2021 and a happy and healthy year ahead. We hope you take pleasure in this end of year newsletter with some great stories of our amazing alums, news from campus, and (my favourite) our holiday book list. Enjoy!

Warmly,

Trisha

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RECTOR'S CORNER

Assoc Prof Lynette Chua, Elm College Rector

At Elm, we continue with as many events and activities as we can in the midst of persistent challenges and ongoing restrictions related to the pandemic. I carried over my Rector's Tea theme from the previous year to focus on raising awareness about socio-legal issues in Singapore and its surrounding region.

We held three Rector's Teas this semester. The first featured the short film *Plague* and a conversation with director Boo Junfeng and the real-life character who inspired the film, Iris Verghese, a nurse who looked after HIV/AIDS patients in Singapore when the epidemic was first recorded in Singapore in the 1980s. The second was a talk by Dr Harry Tan on his research into homelessness in Singapore. And the third was a panel discussion on recent legal and political developments in Myanmar with NUS Law Professor Andrew Harding, NUS Law alumnus and Rajah & Tann associate Khine Khine Zin and Institute of Southeast Asian Studies researcher and former Myanmar diplomat Moe Thuzar.

Of course, the announcement of the Yale-NUS and USP merger remains on everyone's minds as we get on with our daily lives. Two weeks after the announcement, I wrote my usual Rector's message for the Elm newsletter and included a classical Chinese poem by Bai Ju Yi (白居易). The English translation is highly imperfect, but I hope it at least conveys some of the poem's meanings.

賦得古原草送別

Bidding Farewell on the Grass Plain

離離原上草	The plain is covered with grass all throughout
一歲一枯榮	Every year the grass withers and every year it thrives
野火燒不盡	Wild fire may burn the grass but cannot wipe it out
春風吹又生	When the spring wind blows, it comes back to life again
遠芳侵古道	The fragrance of the grass permeates far along the ancient paths
晴翠接荒城	Its jewelled green reaching the desolate city
又送王孫去	Once again I bid you farewell, my friend
萋萋滿別情	My sorrow is as profound as the grass is abundant

YALE-NUS COLLEGE DIGITAL ARCHIVES OUR COLLECTIVE HISTORY

Dear Yale-NUS Alumni,

The Library is seeking contributions of items for the Yale-NUS College Digital Archives (CDA) as part of a College-wide archival initiative.

The objective of this initiative is to collect, preserve, and provide access to items that paint a picture of campus life as well as chronicling the developments of the College since our establishment in 2011.

Items can include publications, student posters, photos, videos, documents, brochures, booklets etc. If you have items that are related to campus activities, events, or happenings, they will be great additions to the College Digital Archives. Refer to the steps shown below on how you can easily contribute your items to the CDA!

How to contribute your digital items?

1. Scan the QR Code below (or click this image) to go to the digital archives submission form.
2. Complete the copyright clearance section, and fill in your basic details and contact information.
3. Upload your digital materials! Make sure to take note of the accepted file formats, and combine them into a .ZIP or .RAR file if you are submitting multiple items.
4. Alternatively, you can paste the sharing link to your materials in the respective form field. Do ensure that your sharing settings will allow us to download the files.
5. Write a short description of your submitted materials.

If you have questions about the Yale-NUS College Digital Archives or would like to contribute physical items, please reach out to James Wong at james.wong@yale-nus.edu.sg.



Scan QR Code or Click Here to submit your digital items

GRAD SCHOOL BOUND

'Tis the season of grad school applications. We caught up with some alumni who have started their graduate studies in the past few months, to see how they were doing.

Click on the alums' profile photos to read more about their graduate school experiences

What topic or subject are you most enjoying learning right now?

How has it been starting in a new environment?

What has been your favourite experience so far?

SPEAKING WORDS OF WISDOM

There is a tradition of sharing wisdom and advice among the Yale-NUS community, and it doesn't stop upon graduation. In June 2021, Yale-NUS College launched a pilot of the Alumni Mentorship Programme. It ran for 12 weeks until the end of August 2021.

According to Vice President (VP) for Engagement Trisha Craig, the programme provides mentors the opportunity to share their experiences and advice with a younger generation of Kingfishers. "Students will get professional and general life advice from mentors who have been in their shoes, and thus are in a great position to help," she said. "Whether it's industry-specific kinds of questions, a sounding board when thinking about graduate programs or simply wondering how to make the most of Yale-NUS, students are able to tap into the collective wisdom and experience of our alumni."

Echoing the sentiment of many alumni, Christina Ho ('17) and Evan Ma ('18) felt the need to give back to the College for the nurturing moments they personally experienced by encouraging current students. Christina was also excited about connecting with current students on campus, and said that she was "also *kaypoh* (curious) about how everything at Yale-NUS has become since 2017!"

For sophomore Cathy Choo ('22), the mentorship opportunity was serendipitous. She realised that she no longer wanted to do the pre-medical course that she had her mind set on for a long time. After chatting with her mentor Florence Feng ('17), Cathy

By *Mpiwa Gwindi* ('24)

developed greater clarity about her future career prospects.

She also learnt the importance of being appreciative of the current moment. "I became more aware of how tightly-knit the Yale-NUS community is and how valuable my college years are," she said. "I'm always thinking about the future and my mind often wanders to what is going to happen next, but Florence helped me realise that I should be in the present more and value what I have at Yale-NUS right now."

The programme was not only transformational for students. For many alumni, mentorship was an introspective experience that gave them insights into themselves. Evan felt that he became more aware of "the skill of bringing clarity though thinking simply".

Florence said she did not expect the mentorship experience to be as value-added as it was. "Although the focus was on Cathy and her career change, the discussions helped me process my own decisions about my new job," Florence said.

Chelsea Ho ('22) found her mentor, Evan, to be a profound person who is "curious and well-versed in many topics" and has inspired her to reach out to other people for her passion: technology-enabled healthcare (healthtech). Likewise, Evan was inspired by Chelsea's intention to set up her own start-up healthtech company.

MENTOR

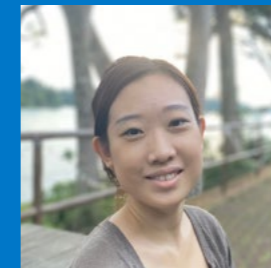
CHRISTINA HO
('17)



EVAN MA
('18)



FLORENCE FENG
('18)



MENTEE

LECARL LIM
('24)



CHELSEA HO
('22)



CATHY CHOO
('24)



Images provided by Christina Ho, Evan Ma, Florence Feng, Lecarl Lim, Chelsea Ho, and Cathy Choo.

Although their interactions were online, Florence had a fruitful experience with her mentee, Cathy. "It's worked very smoothly; we spoke about Cathy's journey at Yale-NUS College, her majors and concerns, her extracurriculars," Florence said. "The process gave me a lot of perspective, and it has helped me put myself in her shoes and reflect how I have grown personally." Similarly, Christina reflected about her own growth as a mentor and how she learned to "guide her mentee to introspect and arrive at their own answer".

Some mentors and mentees have also become fast friends. Christina found Lecarl's ambition to be heartening. "I want to bring the same attitude of unbridled enthusiasm, curiosity, and thirst for knowledge with me wherever I go," she said. Likewise, Lecarl received guidance from Christina about pursuing his

passion in environmental studies, and said that Christina was "hands down the best mentor I've ever had."

When asked to summarise her experience in a single word, Chelsea enthusiastically said, "Discovery!" The mentorship programme was more than just a platform to facilitate the sharing of advice, but has also contributed to the development of both mentors and mentees, and forged strong relationships between alumni and students. As the programme is planned to be continued next year, we invite all Kingfisher alumni to apply to mentor a current student, and maybe make a new friend along the way.

HOLIDAY READING

Who doesn't like to curl up with a good book? This holiday season, we asked twenty staff and faculty to recommend their favourite books this year. May you find some time to rest, check out these books, and get lost in a novel or learn something new.

Click on the thumbnails to read the recommendations.

“

”



(‘17), who leads the Intercultural Engagement (IE) department at Yale-NUS College.

INSPIRATIONS

When asked what inspired her to pursue the path of counselling, Tara talked about how she has always had a heart for reaching out to people and offering care, especially during difficult times. During Singapore’s Circuit Breaker, the country’s COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in 2020, Tara started offering pro bono online counselling services in a bid to connect with people affected by the pandemic. While she originally intended for these services to be short-term, she discovered that she loved working as an online counsellor.

Tara registered her business in July 2020. Since then, she has been a full-time online private therapist. In this stressful pandemic period, Tara felt it was essential for support to be made available to all, and implemented a sliding scale fees structure, allowing clients to choose from tiered prices and pay for their counselling based on their financial situation.

Annette currently devises initiatives and events that promote inclusivity within the diverse community at Yale-NUS. But she was not always familiar with how such concepts related to mental health.

“I don’t think the words ‘mental health’ were ever mentioned at home,” she said. She explained that her family tended towards behaviours she now identifies as “toxic positivity”: where problems were acknowledged only through the need to devise a solution, or dismissed via articulating a bright side or silver lining.

Annette discovered the relationships between inclusion and mental health through the life stories of others at Yale-NUS. She was moved by a fellow alum’s experience, who helped her realise that mental health involves not just resilience, but also mutual support. Annette said that the moments of “collective grief” that she experienced as a student solidified her commitment towards providing support in her capacity as a staff member. Of the College, she said, “It is so important for

P.S. WE STILL CARE

By *Mpiwa Gwindi* (‘24)

It is a pervasive mindset that addressing mental health is a one-time solution to alleviate stress. However, today’s increasing awareness of proper mental health practises is not only shining a spotlight on how wellbeing is a daily aspect of one’s life, but also inspiring a passionate few to start careers related to mental health. We got a chance to speak to two Yale-NUS alumnae who are currently working in mental health spaces. Tara Dear (‘17) is a private practitioner in her own counselling business, and Annette Wu

Alums Annette Wu (left) and Tara Dear (top) both work in careers related to mental health. *Images provided by Annette Wu and Tara Dear.*

institutions to create space for solidarity and healing.”

Tara also credits Yale-NUS for setting her on her current path: she was the co-founder and peer counsellor of the student-led mental health support group P.S. We Care, which provides confidential one-on-one peer counselling.

Tara shared that she learned so much through the late-night counselling service that was provided in P.S We Care: about mental health, people’s joys, struggles, and sensitivity. The sessions also helped her realise her passion for mental health: “I wanted not just to be the person who gently suggested, ‘Have you considered seeing a therapist?’, and actually be the therapist myself.”

RELATIONSHIP WITH MENTAL HEALTH

We asked what mental health meant, personally, to each of them. For Tara, mental health is not a singular aspect of our lives, but involves a combination of our social, emotional, physical and spiritual wellbeing

“I think there’s often far too great a divide between physical and mental health,” she said.

Referring to her communal experience, Annette said that collective action is also important. She believes that mental health involves creating safe spaces for people who would otherwise not be able to express themselves because of a fear of being discriminated against.

“When it comes down to systemic oppression, it’s really about addressing the larger root problem,” she said, advocating for a mental health movement that was “a shared responsibility, shared ‘trouble’ for all of us, with all our privileges or lack thereof”.

WORK-LIFE BALANCING

As a professional therapist, Tara is often asked how she manages the burden of hearing other people’s struggles. On a practical level, she finds that boundaries are essential to

maintaining a sustainable work-life balance – being able to clearly define when and how she provides support to those she works with. From a bigger picture perspective, though, she would rather reframe the question: it’s less about the heaviness of working with people’s challenges, and more about the sense of fulfilment she experiences with the honour of connecting with people at their most authentic and vulnerable.

Annette, on the other hand, is still figuring out how to balance her personal mental health with her work. “I have learned to expect emotional peaks and troughs in life,” she said, describing how she had also done some personal reflection to better articulate her needs when she arrives at a low point.

“This kind of reflection requires large amounts of emotional labour that can be draining, but at the same time can also be greatly satisfying and energy-giving as well,” she said. “It is definitely worth the time invested to discover how to take better care of yourself as you work.”

“IT’S OKAY, TAKE 5”

10 October 2021 was World Mental Health Awareness Day. In Singapore, the message was “It’s Okay, Take 5”, a reminder for people to take a break, just as they would do so in a sports practice or dance rehearsal.

When asked what their “Take 5” would look like, Annette said she takes time to change her physical location and speak to a friend or colleague. This, she said, helps her acknowledge the blessings that are present in her life: the compassionate people around her.

When things feel overwhelming for Tara, she turns towards her favourite definition of self-compassion: being able to acknowledge pain and respond with kindness. “Rather than trying to get rid of uncomfortable thoughts and feelings, see if you can open up to them and understand what they might be trying to tell you,” she encouraged.

“Learn to listen to yourself.”

A LITTLE BIRD TOLD ME...

Click on the images to read more about what alumni have been up to

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU

BE FEATURED

Want to be featured in upcoming issues of *Wingspan*? We're always on the lookout for interesting things that alumni are doing. If you are doing something cool or exciting that you want other alumni to know about, let us know! If you know a friend who is doing cool stuff but is too shy to blow their own trumpet, let us know as well!

PITCH IDEAS

This newsletter is for alumni, and we also want to feature things that you are interested in. If you have an idea for a feature or an article, please feel free to write in as well, and we'll see if it's a good fit!

SEND US YOUR FEEDBACK

We're trying out something new for the alumni newsletter, and we want your feedback! Do you like it? Do you hate it? What do you want to see? And what do you want to see less? Let us know!

You can contact us at alumni@yale-nus.edu.sg.

SHARE YOUR STORY

For our new year issue, we're looking to feature recipes from around the world! If you have a recipe that you'd like to share, and photos of your delicious food, please contact us at alumni@yale-nus.edu.sg.

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