



IDEAS FESTIVAL

INSIGHTS FROM THE HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES

HIGHLIGHTS 2024



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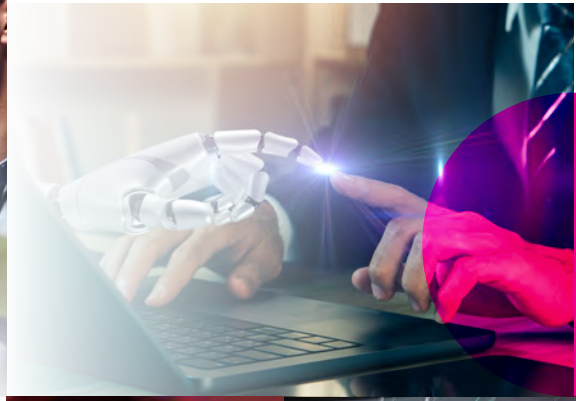


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Contents

- 3 Introduction to Ideas Festival 2024
- 4 Launch Event
- 6 Reflections

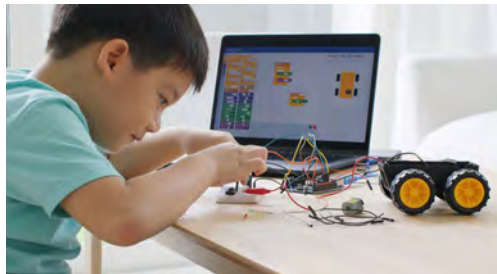


Event Summaries



- 8 Conversation on Computational Social Science: Issues, Insights and Applications
- 9 Gazing into the Metaverse
- 10 Helping the Youth Become Leaders of Sustainable and Climate Resilient Societies
- 11 Mental Health and Culture
- 12 How the Humanities and Social Sciences Can Help Us Hack the STEM Fields
- 13 After the PhD: The Early Years
- 14 Growing Up in an AI-Fuelled World: Reflections on Childhood Amid Digital Acceleration
- 15 Challenges and Opportunities of the Changing Workplace
- 16 Foundations for Home-Based Work
- 17 Whole-of-Society Approach to Well-Being

- 18 Singapura Before Raffles: Early Modern Asia in the Global Renaissance
- 19 Future Insights: AI x Workers + Making Sense of the Future
- 20 AI and Fake News



- 21 Media
- 22 Speech by Mr Chan Chun Sing, Minister for Education
- 24 Speech by Professor Wang Gungwu
- 26 Speech by Professor Lily Kong

Gathering the best minds & insights in Humanities and Social Sciences

In this rapidly-changing world, how do the Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS) help us understand and better our society?

HSS researchers across the Autonomous Universities (AUs) came together to organise the inaugural 'Ideas Festival 2024 — Insights from the Humanities and Social Sciences'. Drawing upon the work of the local HSS research community to look at complex challenges faced by Singapore society and the region in an age of disruptive change, the research community shared their insights on a range of topics, including navigating the challenges and seizing the opportunities brought about by disruptive technologies, and strengthening support for mental health and well-being.



20 March to
19 April 2024



14
events

more than



62

speakers

>800

attendees,

with participation from secondary and tertiary education students, the research community, and the general public.



"Our competition lies not amongst our peers, because our biggest challenge is to take Singapore forward, to compete with good ideas and to be a leading beacon for the rest of the world."

*Mr Chan Chun Sing,
Minister for Education*

The launch event ended with a panel discussion on supporting the development of the local Social Science and Humanities Research (SSHR) ecosystem. The panel comprised Social Science Research Council (SSRC) Leaders Mr Peter Ho, Prof Chan Heng Chee and Prof Wang Gungwu, President of the Singapore Management University (SMU) Prof Lily Kong, Permanent Secretary of the Public Service Division Ms Tan Gee Keow, and was moderated by the Ideas Festival Committee Chairperson Prof Elaine Ho. The panel shared their views on measuring research impact beyond publications, and how HSS researchers could overcome challenges faced when conducting interdisciplinary research.

Launch Event

20 March 2024

The Ideas Festival launch event signalled the government's commitment to supporting the development of the local HSS research ecosystem and scholarship about Singapore and the region.

Minister for Education Mr Chan Chun Sing graced the event, and in his opening address, he highlighted the importance of HSS research in enriching our understanding of social issues, which are inherently complex and dynamic, shaped by historical developments and disrupted by the latest technological advances.

He also emphasised the need for collaboration among the academic community, particularly in social science, as well as practitioners, including those in Government agencies.

Media Coverage *(click to view)*

[Channel News Asia \(CNA\)](#)

[Lianhe Zaobao](#)

[The Straits Times](#)

[Berita Mediacorp](#)



Photo credit: SMU

Keynote speeches were also delivered by Prof Lily Kong, SMU President and Prof Wang Gungwu, University Professor at the National University of Singapore (NUS).

Prof Lily Kong underscored the importance of SSHR in all aspects of life and its role as a strategic asset for Singapore. She also elaborated on the growing opportunities provided to the local SSHR ecosystem — postgraduate scholarship and postdoctoral fellowship schemes to support those interested to join academia, and the myriad of research grants available to support good research ideas. She encouraged HSS researchers to develop ambitious research projects.

"In my undergraduate years in the 1980s, there was but one FASS (Faculty of Arts and Social Science) in town. Today, five of the six Autonomous Universities (AUs) offer combinations of these disciplines... Aspiring academics in these domains have more choice than has ever been the case in Singapore."

Prof Lily Kong

Prof Wang encouraged HSS researchers to challenge themselves and offer new ways of thinking about Singapore and the region. Scholarship has long been dominated by theoretical findings drawn from societies which differed from Singapore — one which has always been open to diversity, with rich historical ties to great civilisations. He also encouraged researchers from the Humanities, Social Sciences, and STEM fields to work together, and suggested for researchers to give thought to having Co-Principal Investigators come from a mix of academic disciplines.

"What I envisage is that the research proposers be open-minded to different perspectives that could lead them to detect something fruitful they did not expect to find. A variety of insights coming from scholars with different backgrounds makes that possible."

Prof Wang Gungwu



Photo credit: Ray Photography

Reflections by Ideas Festival Committee



Prof Elaine Ho (Chairperson)

**Professor at the Department of Geography;
Vice-Dean, FASS, Research Division, NUS**

The festival helped showcase HSS research for the institution, raising the visibility of the research topics and sparking good conversations. The events attracted crowds from diverse backgrounds, enabling their research to reach a broader audience and facilitating the recognition of academic work beyond the academic community.

The event organisers for ‘Foundations for Home-Based Work’ highlighted that representatives from government agencies and research institutions had reached out to find out more about their research and to tour their exhibition.



Prof Luke Kang Kwong Kapathy

**President's Chair in Linguistics,
College of Humanities,
Arts and Social Sciences, NTU**

As far as faculty, researchers and students at the Nanyang Technological University (NTU) Singapore are concerned, this year's inaugural Ideas Festival was a resounding success. The festival provided an opportunity to not only showcase NTU's key areas of research in HSS, but also facilitate fruitful exchanges amongst scholars, professionals and industry partners in a variety of fields (e.g., healthcare, information technology, news media), and engage with members of the public in wide-ranging discussions of issues close to their hearts, such as mental health, climate change, and fake news.

Through focused interactions with practitioners from various industries, colleagues were able to identify opportunities for further collaboration, which could potentially amplify the social impact of their research. On the topic of ‘Mental Health and Culture’, for example, the panellists were able to jointly explore new ways of bringing together

creative writers, content creators, policymakers, practitioners, and patient advocates to raise awareness of mental health issues and to pursue more nuanced understandings of these issues in the community.



Assoc Prof Ngoei Wen-Qing

**Associate Professor of History,
College of Integrative Studies,
Associate Dean (External Engagement), SMU**

SMU developed three events which enabled inter-institutional collaboration. SMU's College of Integrative Studies organised a networking event for senior and graduating PhD students of the local AUs and brought together a panel of SSH academics from NUS, NTU and SMU to share their experiences navigating a career in academia. Prof Lim Sun Sun also delivered a public lecture on AI and childhood, which was moderated by Dr Jiow Hee Jhee from the Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT). Prof David Chan of SMU's School of Social Sciences co-organised a session on computational social science with the Agency for Science, Technology and Research (A*STAR) (led by Dr Quek Boon Kiat), the first of 13 events organised by the AUs in the Festival.

Prof Lim's lecture highlighted that since children are growing up surrounded by devices and frequently interacting with Artificial Intelligence (AI), there is concern about how parents can effectively guide their children's media consumption. Relevant research, such as Prof Lim's work on technology domestication by families and AI ethics, can shed light on people's lived experiences and inform the design of technology to better accommodate user needs. Her talk drew healthy media coverage from CNA 938, Channel 8, and The Straits Times, reflecting keen public interest in such topics.



Assoc Prof Jennifer Ang

**Associate Professor of Philosophy,
SR Nathan School of Human Development, SUSS**

The festival helped highlight the emphasis on social impact in the Singapore University of Social Sciences' (SUSS) overall approach to research. The two symposiums — on the essential topics of well-being and changing nature of work and learning

— generated interesting conversations between faculty members, alumni, postgraduate students, as well as the social service agencies. It raises the awareness of the complex and difficult nature of social questions, the need for multidisciplinary approaches especially the involvement of the humanities in social research, and the need for engagement from various stakeholders.



Asst Prof Rhema Hokama

**Assistant Professor of
English Literature, Humanities,
Arts and Social Sciences Cluster, SUTD**

Our three Festival events showcased the dynamic research that we do in the HSS fields at Singapore University of Technology and Design (SUTD).

The Lee Kuan Yew Centre for Innovative Cities (LKVIC) hosted a seminar that shed light on the rise of AI and Singaporeans' aspirations for their future. Mr Poon King Wang and Dr Thijs Willems called for a paradigm shift from mere skills acquisition to innovation creation, while Dr Harvey Neo, Dr Samuel Chng, and Dr Sarah Chan explored the complex and multifaceted nature of how Singaporeans make sense of the future.

Our Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (HASS) cluster convened an exciting conversation on how HSS and Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) researchers can work together to develop a happier, healthier, and fairer society. Prof Yow Wei Quin, Assoc Prof Alastair Gornall, Assoc Prof Lyle Fearnley, Asst Prof Setsuko Yokoyama, Asst Prof Andrew Yee, and Asst Prof Gordon Tan presented lightning round talks on topics ranging from speech-to-text translation, the digitisation of Buddhist manuscripts, consumer psychology, and pandemics.

At our roundtable on the Global Renaissance, Asst Prof Rhema Hokama (SUTD), Assoc Prof Walter Lim (NUS), Dr Melissa Tu (SUTD), Dr Roweena Yip (NUS College), Dr Emily Soon (SMU) Assoc Prof Andrew Hui (Yale-NUS College), Asst Prof Joshua Ehrlich (University of Macau), and Dr Hannah Smith-Drelich (NUS College) shared insights on early modern Asia, uncovering the untold stories that emerged from literature and historical texts. We will continue to work together on a follow-up event later this year featuring an international guest speaker, and will convene a roundtable on early modern Asia at the Renaissance Society of America in early 2025.



Hear from our participants!

On the event 'Singapore Before Raffles':

"Before the talk, I had never considered the geopolitical, and 'current affairs' that would affect a writer / playwright / artist's decision to include a place in a piece of work... I also think it's a really good idea to decolonise our view on history, and that it is important to recognise that there are huge cultural developments in various regions beyond that of the European Renaissance."

On the event 'How HSS can hack the STEM Fields':

"I found the roundtable to be rather eye-opening as it exposed me to more of the HASS faculty's research areas and interests. One idea I found particularly engaging was the concept of dark patterns highlighted by Dr Gordon Tan. The clear examples in his presentation emphasised just how effective these nudges and marketing strategies could be, and provoked me to be more aware of how product and interface designers want us users to (subconsciously or not) process and react to the platforms we interact with, so as to prevent myself from being unconsciously tricked by such dark patterns."

"That was a really inspiring session! The discussion of how the Humanities help shape the STEM fields reminds me of a quote from Steve Jobs, 'technology alone is not enough — it's technology married with liberal arts, married with the humanities, that yields us the results that make our heart sing.' It is one factor that led Apple to become the world's most profitable company."



Conversation on Computational Social Science: Issues, Insights and Applications

22 March 2024

The first of the 13 public events in the Festival was jointly organised by SMU and A*STAR, and focused on the theme of Computational Social Science (CSS).

Prof David Chan, Lee Kong Chian Professor of Psychology & Director of the Behavioural Sciences Initiative at SMU, opened the session with an engaging fireside chat highlighting the value of CSS in capturing real-time dynamics, and the opportunities it presents in today's highly interconnected and digitised world such as applications in urban planning and public sentiment analyses.

Dr Quek Boon Kiat, Department Director/Senior Principal Scientist and Dr Joe Simons, Deputy Department Director/Principal Scientist at A*STAR's Institute of High Performance Computing (IHPC) gave an overview of CSS research done at A*STAR, and shared its journey of building up CSS capabilities through cross-disciplinary collaborations and research engagements with both academia and industries.

All three speakers emphasised the growing importance of CSS to study social phenomena in an age of big data and rapid changes. Prof Chan encouraged the audience to use the following 3Cs approach to advance CSS research and practice:



1. Identify the **C**ontext of the issues, which helps to define and represent the nature of the problem,
2. Internalise the fact that **C**hange is constant and rapid, and both researchers and practitioners need to adapt and acquire new knowledge and skillsets to understand and assess the multiple facets of change, and
3. Initiate **C**ollaborations across disciplines and groups in research, policy, and practice, and work together effectively by approaching issues with humility and a learning orientation.

"I cannot think of an area in which CSS approaches cannot be applied. We now live in a digital world of nested, multi-level structures which are interdependent and dynamic."

Professor David Chan

[Watch the full conversation by Professor David Chan](#)

Gazing into the Metaverse

26 March 2024

Organised by Prof Tim Winter at the Asia Research Institute (ARI), this roundtable featured co-speakers Dr Chaewon Ahn (NUS), Dr Natalia Grincheva (University of the Arts Singapore) and Dr Cheng Nien Yuan (SUTD). The discussion focused on key questions and themes surrounding the metaverse.

The speakers discussed the possibilities afforded by the metaverse, which include leveraging the metaverse to preserve history and heritage, developing digital twins which could be used to simulate and analyse urban problems, serving as a platform for marginalised communities to voice their opinions, and allowing individuals to freely express their identity.



The panel highlighted challenges related to the metaverse, such as:

- How are digital representations curated, and whose views are included?
- What social and cultural implications arise when historical events and sites are recreated within the framework of a dominant ideological perspective?
- While the metaverse presents new frontiers for social interactions, does the lack of physical contact hinder the development of deeper physical connections?
- With biometric tracking used in Virtual Reality (VR) headsets to enhance user-experience, does this raise new concerns over heightened surveillance?

Ultimately, the metaverse is still an emerging concept that is evolving rapidly and opens new and interesting lines of inquiry for HSS research.



Helping the Youth Become Leaders of Sustainable and Climate Resilient Societies

1 April 2024

Anchored by the new Climate Transformation Programme led by NTU Singapore, this event convened researchers, educators, and youth representatives to discuss how the youth can be empowered to take meaningful action against climate change.

Asst Prof Yong Ming Lee highlighted the impact of climate change on youths' mental health, which manifests as eco-anxiety, ecological grief and solastalgia, and advocated for the positive psychological impact that climate action brings. Prof Benjamin Horton emphasised the importance of raising awareness among the youth about the environmental, economic, health and social impact of climate change.



It is also important to cultivate intrinsic motivation for long-term behavioural change, and Prof Shirley Ho shared her team's efforts to do so through the development of an immersive virtual reality game which encourages youths to make environmentally friendly decisions. Student environmentalists Rachael Goh and Isha Singh also shared their experiences identifying possible avenues for climate action and spearheading new environmental initiatives on campus.

Closing off the session, Asst Prof Janice Lee emphasised that a multifaceted approach involving diverse stakeholders is required to effectively address climate change.





Mental Health and Culture

2 April 2024

Organised by NTU Singapore and hosted at the National Library, Singapore, this roundtable brought together academics, mental health professionals, patients, caregivers and writers for an insightful discussion about the ethical considerations involved in the cultural representation of mental health in Singapore.

The panel agreed that televisual portrayals often influence how we perceive persons with mental health conditions (PMHCs), even through fleeting metaphors. PMHCs tended to be misrepresented as violent and dangerous despite them being more likely to be victims of aggression.

Writers were encouraged to help address the cultural stigma faced by PMHCs by depicting them with empathy and integrity. For example, writers could contextualise and create clarity on the multifactorial causes of mental health conditions, exercise consideration with the terms used to portray PMHCs and offer greater nuance in the depiction of treatment options.



How the Humanities and Social Sciences Can Help Us Hack the STEM Fields

3 April 2024

Researchers from the HASS cluster in SUTD gathered for an exciting conversation on how HSS and STEM researchers can work together to develop a happier, healthier, and fairer society.

The panel agreed that it was important for HSS researchers to be part of efforts to develop and implement technical solutions. Prof Yow Wei Quin highlighted that many tech-based solutions have been developed to support ageing populations across countries, but these have not been widely adopted as user-behaviour has not been well considered. Similarly, Asst Prof Andrew Yee's research showed that it was important to understand varied user experiences on social media platforms and video games to inform the development of policies around their use.

Assoc Prof Lyle Fearnley emphasised the importance of understanding the socio-cultural context behind live animal markets in China in order to implement effective interventions that address concerns about the spread of animal-borne diseases.

HSS must also play a key role in addressing the ethical considerations surrounding technological development. This can be demonstrated by Asst Prof Setsuko Yokoyama's research, which demonstrates that different cultures and races must be taken into consideration when rendering speech sounds in text in order to avoid marginalising some vernaculars. Asst Prof Gordon Tan added that HSS research could influence ethical interface design and support greater user protection through design elements.

Technology developments have also supported HSS research. Assoc Prof Alastair Gornall shared how the digital humanities can enhance the study of Southeast Asian palm leaf manuscripts by allowing researchers to preserve palm leaf inscriptions and analyse the relationships between palm leaf manuscripts.

Event Recap: [Ideas Fest — “How the Humanities and Social Sciences Can Help Us Hack the STEM Fields”](#)

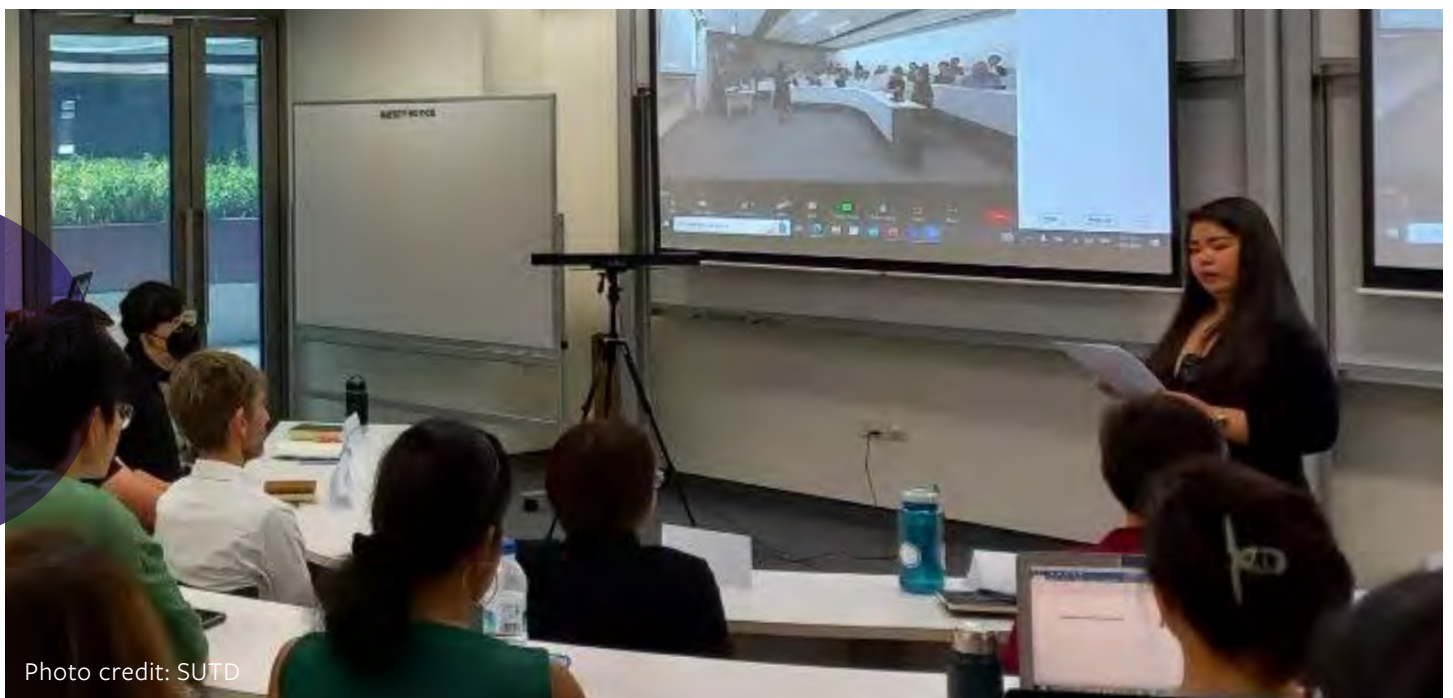


Photo credit: SUTD

After the PhD: The Early Years

4 April 2024

SMU's College of Integrative Studies hosted a networking event for senior and graduating PhD students in HSS, which included a panel discussion on navigating the post-PhD journey.

The panel comprised Assoc Prof Setoh Pei Pei (NTU), Asst Prof Ng Teng Kuan (SMU) and Asst Prof Kung Chien Wen (NUS). Each shared their experiences of preparing for, and diving into, the academic or alternative academic (alt-ac) job markets, a process that began for all of them even before completing their PhD.



- Assoc Prof Setoh encouraged early career academics to craft an elevator pitch for the work that they do, thereby communicating the unique selling point of their research, crystallising their identity as a scholar, and developing a clear brand while networking with others.
- Asst Prof Ng highlighted how, in his experience, the formal and informal pursuit of research and knowledge creation opened doors towards a career in academia. Nonetheless, he highlighted that there remain many other opportunities for PhD holders beyond academia where their training will be valuable, such as bridging the gap between administrators and faculty in universities.
- Asst Prof Kung shared candidly about his experiences with the challenging realities of the academic job market, securing a research position in a Singapore AU, and the extent to which one's diligence and industry can affect one's employment opportunities.

An enlightening Q&A followed, wherein the discussions and sharing from the panel and senior scholars in attendance highlighted the importance of PhD students pursuing research projects independent of their doctoral advisors and the value of building a global (not only regional) network of scholars from their field.

Growing Up in an AI-Fuelled World: Reflections on Childhood Amid Digital Acceleration

5 April 2024

Informed by her research on technology domestication by families and trends in digital literacy and inclusion, Prof Lim Sun Sun delivered an enriching talk at SMU that shed light on emerging challenges around the rise of AI and its impact on parenting and childhood.

She outlined three types of risks arising from AI and emphasised the importance of parental supervision and guidance to inculcate the critical skills required for young people to navigate an AI-fuelled world safely and ethically. The three types of risks are:

- Content Risks — exposure to adverse and age-inappropriate content, including misinformation and disinformation.
- Contact Risks — interacting with trolls, cyberbullies and predators.
- Conduct Risks — behaviours which may cause offence or break the law

Despite these risks, there are also clear gains, such as having access to support and communities via the Internet, especially when feeling isolated or ostracised, which can help young people find affiliation, affirmation and awareness. Learning can also be enhanced by the dynamic possibilities enabled by AI.



“Go into the platforms your kids are using, so you know how to speak their language and what is at stake.”

Professor Lim Sun Sun

Prof Lim identified five T's for parents when using technology with their children:

1. Know the **T**echnology by using it themselves.
2. Mind your **T**one by being authoritative rather than authoritarian.
3. Build **T**rust to keep the communication channels between parent and child open.
4. Be prepared for **T**ensions, which Trust helps to ease.
5. Utilise the **T**oolkit of resources available online offering useful advice and information.



Photo credit: SMU



Challenges and Opportunities of the Changing Workplace

11 April 2024

SUSS faculty gathered to discuss the impacts of the changing nature of work, the workplace, and the workforce, informed by their respective research projects.

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the traditional office setting and made work-from-home (WFH) arrangements prevalent. Assoc Prof Ada Wong found that WFH arrangements were increasingly important for employees, and when employees felt that their work arrangements supported their personal and family goals, this led to an increase in well-being and reduced intention to change jobs.



As Singapore is also experiencing an ageing workforce, it is therefore important to harness the full potential of the talent pool regardless of age. Through her research, Dr Sheryl Chua highlighted the importance of addressing the challenges and opportunities for mature workers to stay in the workforce. Younger employees could tap on the wealth of knowledge older workers have, as many older workers mentioned that they would like to take up mentorship roles to pass on their knowledge to younger colleagues. On a related note, Assoc Prof Fang Zheng's study underscored the value of encouraging lifelong learning among older workers, as they found that lifelong learning attitudes were positively associated with well-being.

On the other end of the age spectrum, young people could set themselves up for career success by approaching internships with the right attitudes. Dr Wang Jiunwen found in her research that students who viewed internships as learning opportunities instead of a platform to perform were more likely to do well in their internships, and that adaptability and curiosity were key traits to help them excel.

Foundations for Home-Based Work

12 April 2024

A multi-disciplinary research team (Assoc Prof Lilian Chee, Assoc Prof Natalie Pang and Prof Audrey Yue from NUS and Prof Jane Jacobs from the University of Melbourne) shared highlights from their project Foundations for Home-Based Work, which explored the social, spatial, and technological dimensions of Home-Based Work (HBW).

The team identified the following trends in HBW:

1. The word 'home' in HBW has become a misnomer. Younger people preferred to work in places such as libraries, community centres, and cafes instead, a term Prof Yue defined as the 'liminal or interstitial space between home and work'. It would be helpful for urban planners to consider how these co-working spaces can add to the neighbourhood's vibrancy as it offers opportunities to foster social interaction and intercultural exchange.



2. Motivations for HBW varied, and factors which individuals considered include:
 - (i) seeking greater flexibility to meet family needs;
 - (ii) health-related issues;
 - (iii) aspirations, particularly for creative workers.
3. Home-based workers were able to creatively improve the designs of their homes to accommodate HBW.

These findings on the use of space, social dynamics, work patterns, as well as the personal aesthetics and quirks of those working from home, can help inform policy to better support home-based workers. Assoc Prof Chee also said that the audience can look forward to a documentary on the struggles and resilience of home-based business owners, and the impact their work has on their families and surrounding communities.





Whole-of-Society Approach to Well-Being

13 April 2024

This roundtable brought together SUSS researchers from different disciplines to share research highlights on the issue of well-being. Prof Robbie Goh, SUSS Provost, gave opening remarks and said that SUSS’s whole-of-society approach to well-being aims to solve some of the broad spectrum of social issues that have to do with our well-being, and emphasised the importance of academics collaborating with stakeholders to address these issues.

National Council of Social Service (NCSS) — Ngee Ann Kongsi (NAK) 360 Panel Research

This research project is interested in understanding how Singaporeans spend their time and its implications on well-being. Assoc Prof Emily Ortega said that preliminary findings showed differences in time-use between genders, which could be useful in informing policy and office guidelines. The team also plans to study differences in time-use during the pandemic and endemic COVID-19.

Intergenerational Support and Subjective Well-Being of Older Parents in Singapore

Dr Hu Shu shared her team’s research project that intends to find out how the type of support provided to older parents varies across families, depending on adult children’s available time and monetary resources, and the older generation’s ability to look after themselves.

Ensuring Resilient and Sustainable Supply Evaluation for Humanitarian Organisations

Assoc Prof Tay Huay Ling shared her team’s research on enhancing humanitarian aid delivery to be more swift, sustainable, and effective. Her team was working on a framework to support humanitarian organisations in their supplier evaluation. The framework comprises four key aspects — economic, environment, social, and risk, and would be weighted according to the type of aid required.

Social Label Nudges for Pro-Sociality and Well-Being

Dr Victor Seah’s research aimed to identify whether the use of positive or negative labels could encourage pro-social behaviours and consequently influence psychological well-being. More research in this area needs to be done, as preliminary findings showed that social labels did not lead to significant differences in pro-sociality.

“HSS research should not exist in an ivory tower, but should be interactive and engaged with crucial stakeholders.”

Professor Robbie Goh

Singapura before Raffles: Early Modern Asia in the Global Renaissance

17 April 2024

Asst Prof Rhema Hokama (SUTD), Assoc Prof Walter Lim (NUS), Dr Melissa Tu (SUTD), Dr Roweena Yip (NUS College), Dr Emily Soon (SMU), Assoc Prof Andrew Hui (Yale-NUS College), Asst Prof Joshua Ehrlich (University of Macau), and Dr Hannah Smith-Drelich (NUS College) shared their insights on early modern Asia, uncovering the untold stories that emerged from literature and historical texts.

Dr Soon demonstrated that literary references to Singapore surfaced in European literature as early as 1572. In *The Luciads*, widely regarded as the national poem of Portugal, which traced Vasco de Gama's voyage from Lisbon to India, Singapore appeared as Cingapura, suggesting that the island was already known as a location along the sea route and that maritime trade was already taking place.

More broadly, the role of Asia in maritime trade has been described in literary and historical texts.



Dr Smith-Drelich showed how many early Western accounts and narratives of the East centred around food, which was portrayed as both mythical and practical for survival. For instance, early accounts by Isidore of Seville's *Etymologies* (c. 626) spoke of pepper being guarded by serpents — a myth that was capitalised on by sailors who facilitated the sale of pepper from Malabar to Venice.

There were also philosophical equivalences drawn from cross-cultural exchanges between the West and China during the early modern period. For example, Assoc Prof Hui argued that Matteo Ricci, a Jesuit missionary in China, described Confucius as another Seneca in morals, and saw Stoicism and Confucianism as necessary preconditions of the Christian faith. Similarly, Dr Tu offered a comparative reading of lyric poetry by Tang Chinese and Middle English women poets. In her analysis of the lyric poems of Yu Xuanji and the anonymous Findern lyrics, Dr Tu showed how the lyric — a short poem that is often personal and exhibits intense emotion of feeling — was used by both the East and the West as a space for marginalised women to voice their opinions.

Event Recap: [Ideas Festival 2024 | Singapura Before Raffles — YouTube](#)

Future Insights: AI x Workers + Making Sense of the Future

18 April 2024

The LKYCIC hosted a double seminar featuring two presentations that shed light on highly pertinent topics of our time — the rise of AI, and making sense of the future.

AI x Workers

Mr Poon King Wang and Dr Thijs Willems called for a strategy shift for a future of work where AI advances means that being highly skilled and having human skills offer less resilience. To strengthen resilience, individuals, companies, and countries must instead focus on building a Resilience Stack. The Resilience Stack first identifies the tasks where humans can outperform AI and then determines the skills, domain knowledge, and people-people and people-technology interactions needed to achieve that outperformance.

The team also called for two more strategy shifts to account for the nature of AI advances. The accelerating pace of change means individuals, companies, and countries must also shift from ‘learning to do’ to ‘doing to learn’. The expanding creative possibilities of AI also means we must shift from ‘learning to learn’ to ‘learning to create’.



An Eye to the Future or Back to the Future?

Presented by Dr Harvey Neo, Dr Samuel Chng, and Dr Sarah Chan, the seminar shed light on how we made sense of the future. The team exemplified the complex and multifaceted nature of thinking about the future, as Singaporeans tended to think about the future in different time frames, and also had different cognitive biases and time-discounting tendencies.

The team urged for a more nuanced understanding of temporal dimensions when developing programmes, interventions and policies. It was important for initiatives (e.g., encouraging climate action, upskilling and reskilling) to engage in the here and now so that individuals are able to relate and thus more likely to participate.

The speakers concluded the seminar with reflections on the future — while visions for the future may differ, these divergences are not a cause for worry, as long as individuals are enabled to achieve their authentic, desired futures.

Event Highlight: [AI x Workers + Making Sense of the Future](#)





AI & Fake News

19 April 2024

NTU Singapore hosted a panel discussion with academics Prof Edson Tandoc (NTU), Prof Lee Mong Li (NUS), Assoc Prof Lee Chei Sian (NTU), Asst Prof Saifuddin Ahmed (NTU) and industry partner Mr Chuang Shin Wee, founder and CEO of Pand.ai. The panel discussed issues associated with the prevalence of AI and fake news, and the vital role HSS plays in navigating the resulting complexities.

The panel highlighted that the growing prevalence of misinformation, disinformation, and mal-information has been intensified by advancements in Generative AI (GAI), which has implications on our everyday lives. For example, the growing prevalence of deepfakes undermines viewers' ability to discern fact from fiction, leading to consumer distrust.



The panel shared the following views on how to help users discern fake news:

1. In addition to the use of technical interventions to prevent the spread of fake news, more targeted interventions could be used for vulnerable groups to enhance AI literacy. The design of these interventions should consider how users consume and respond to information, based on user behaviour, beliefs, and biases.
2. Survey participants from a local study suggested possible regulations such as including disclaimers and consent for data usage by companies for greater transparency, and guidelines for proper use of AI in advertisements.

Nonetheless, GAI can be leveraged for good; for example, deepfakes can be used to create immersive storytelling experiences and simulations in training and education.



Media

Ideas Festival speakers and panelists also featured in videos and podcasts, sharing more about their areas of research and expertise. Click to view or listen!

Big Ideas Video Series



Episode 1:
AI & the Metaverse

What is the metaverse, and how might AI affect our lives? How can HSS contribute to these techs? Hear from Prof Edson Tandoc and Prof Tim Winter as they discuss the social implications of these emerging technologies.



Episode 2:
Society & Well-Being

What are the top 3 social media apps for Singaporeans? Can screen-time be used to improve our well-being? Hear from Prof Lim Sun Sun and Assoc Prof Emily Ortega on the impact of technology on our well-being.



Episode 3: The Road Ahead and the Journey Before

What are the biggest challenges facing us in the future, and are we even thinking that far ahead? How about our past — how far do we look back, and what can we discover? Dr Roweena Yip and Dr Harvey Neo discuss these issues and more.

CNA Podcast Series



Work It — How older workers can add value to their companies

With retirement and re-employment ages set to be raised, the truth is that there will be more mature workers in our workforce. What are some unique challenges senior workers face and how can companies help them feel more valued? Prof Yow Wei Quin shares her thoughts.



Work It — Is flexible work shaping the office of the future?

With new guidelines for flexible work arrangement requests kicking in by the end of the year, how can living and working spaces change to make hybrid work more accessible for all? Assoc Prof Lilian Chee and Assoc Prof Ada Wong share their research.



Climate Conversations — Must climate communication be so dense?

Explaining climate change can be an exercise in frustration and futility when jargon gets in the way. Climate academics Prof Winston Chow and Assoc Prof Terry van Gevelt defend themselves against Liling Tan and Jack Board, who dial in from scorching Bangkok where the “feels-like” temperature hit 52 degrees Celsius.



Climate Conversations — Why a complex problem like climate change needs multi-disciplinary expertise

Studied history or philosophy in school? Your knowledge can help to solve the biggest problems of climate change. Prof David Taylor and Dr Janice Lee share their perspectives.



Speech by Minister Chan Chun Sing at the Inaugural Ideas Festival Launch Event

A very good morning to all of you.

I am particularly happy to be here today, because, as Mr Peter Ho has said, this is the first time we have gathered the social science research community together.

It is a significant milestone not just for the research community, but also for Singapore when we gather researchers and the practitioners together. It is a unique combination, and not a run-of-the-mill academic conference.

Today, through this conference, I hope to see researchers and practitioners, including many from the Government, coming together to look at the common issues we face, facilitate an exchange of knowledge and come up, as a team, with new ideas and approaches on how we look at issues and how we find solutions.

So on that note, I must first congratulate the organisers who have been working very hard behind the scenes to bring to life the Ideas Festival. Thank you so much for establishing this milestone for Singapore.

I would like to share three points with everyone here this morning. My first point is that academics form quite the small community, whether in Singapore or in the world, and we would do well to remember to always collaborate, collaborate, and collaborate.

The strength of our community is not determined by our size, but rather by our ideas, our ambitions and our networks. This is why I always encourage the universities, particularly in social science, to come together as a community and work collaboratively. We must always remind ourselves that our competition lies not amongst our peers, because our biggest challenge is to take Singapore forward, to compete with good ideas and to be a leading beacon for the rest of the world.

Our competition is not within but rather, beyond Singapore, and these challenges are beyond what any one particular institution can overcome. So, my first point is to remind

everyone to keep collaborating so that we keep coming up with good ideas. These collaborations must go beyond just the academic community to include the practitioners, including many in Government agencies.

My second point is that we must never be constrained by the size of our community. We must be bold in the way we look at how we do our research, how we come up with solutions, how we define problems and so forth.

Let me just take a leaf from our own history. Singapore may be small, but this has never hindered us from coming up with new and innovative solutions to our own challenges. We have not only done well for ourselves, but we have become interesting case studies for the rest of the world.

While we consciously and expeditiously learn from others, we never shy away from inventing our own solutions.



What are some of these examples that we can think about?

For example, how we run our HDB system with the CPF system is unique. We built up our public housing program — that combines not just financial planning at both the individual and the macro level — but determines how we build communities.

This comprises not just the hardware of the buildings that are being built by HDB but also a lot of the software. For instance, policies like the ethnic integration policy — people looked at this policy with bewilderment when it was first introduced, but it has now become a case study on how one might create communities that, regardless of race, language, or religion, transcend the enclaves that many cities are stuck with.

What about other social policy innovations? From how we manage our road pricing, our public transport system, how we build a sense of identity in our schools, to how we help our people to keep pace with the rapid changes in technology and business models through SkillsFuture.

If we think back on our own history, there are more than sufficient examples to say that we have never been shy from taking the bull by the horns and asking ourselves, how do we look at this problem afresh? How do we come up with solutions? We study how others have resolved similar issues, but we do not just copy these solutions in an unthinking manner without consciously asking ourselves if it is applicable to us, whether it is unemployment insurance, minimum wages, and so on. We must be able and be prepared to come up with our own innovations, whether it is the progressive wage



model or the retraining allowance. So, we need to continuously find breakthroughs in our own model for our own challenges.

This is where the Social Science and Humanities Research community comes in. Our job is not just to study what people have done and copy them. Our job is to study what we need and what others have done and to come up with new solutions that can even inspire the world. Both challenges and opportunities are out there. I look forward to you inspiring us with a new generation of policy innovations and solutions.

I come to my third point, which I have spoken with many of you in the social science community about before. I know that many researchers feel hard-pressed because though you do so much good work, it is hard for you to get published in world-renowned journals as many people think that Singapore is some little place somewhere in Asia whose solutions may not be applicable to others. But that is the furthest from the truth; the power of our ideas can transcend our size and that is what we must aspire to do.

I have discussed this with the university leadership and with the public service; if you do good research and come up with good solutions, even if you don't get published, you will be recognised. You will be recognised because you have helped us to advance Singapore's agenda, because you have helped us to bring about better solutions for quality of life for fellow Singaporeans. This is what we are committed to do.

So I want to assure all the social science researchers here today. The benchmark of your success will not just be about whether your work is published in renowned journals. Of course, if you can do that, it's a bonus. But even if you cannot do that, Singapore, within our own ecosystem in the universities and the public service, will recognise you.

In order for us to do substantive work and distinguish our social science research community from any other communities across the world, we must be able to marry our researchers with our practitioners because it will give us tremendous advantage. If any country in the world can get this done, it must be us. If we come together, we'll be able to recognise each other's work, respect each other's work, and this will in turn transcend what many other countries that are bigger, and with more resources can do.

So this is what I promise you, and this is what I hope that you'll keep striving towards; your aim is not just to publish, but to bring about tangible benefits to the Singapore community. If we can do that, as a living testimony of what we can do with social science research, then you will inspire many more to come and join us, and it will also inspire others to look at the solutions unique to Singapore, challenge us, cross-pollinate ideas with us and help us to improve even more.

So those are the three simple messages I have for you today.

First, always remember, collaborate, collaborate, and collaborate. The competition and challenges are not within, but rather, beyond Singapore.

Second, never be hindered or constrained by the size of our community. Instead, be inspired by the size of our challenges and what we can achieve by coming up with our own innovative solutions for the good of Singapore.

Third, never look at recognition for your work just in terms of publications, but in terms of how you can translate your research into tangible outcomes for the good of Singaporeans. That is the uniquely Singaporean way of how we approach the development of our social science research community.

You can be rest assured that the Ministry of Education and the Government will continue to support everyone doing good work for Singapore and Singaporeans.

I hope many of you will come together not just amongst yourself in academia, but also together with the practitioners. Look at the big challenges coming our way, define those challenges and ask ourselves how we can work collaboratively to bring up new solutions.

There are many challenges, on how our population is ageing, to the advent of AI and new technologies that will continue to disrupt our social system. How do we build an identity in a world where we are constantly subject to the larger forces, larger civilisational forces beyond us that threaten to pull us apart? How do we build a uniquely Singaporean sense of identity upon all these other identities that we are also proud of? Many challenges lie ahead of us, but with it comes many opportunities.

On that note, thank you very much and I wish you all the very best in your journey and for the success of the Ideas Festival.

Thank you.

Keynote Speech by Prof Wang Gungwu

I am delighted to be part of this launch of the Ideas Festival of the Social Science Research Council (SSRC). During the past seven years, I had the chance to see what the Council has done and that has made me believe that Singapore's efforts to extend and strengthen Humanities and the Social Sciences (HSS) research can offer ideas for more people to think about.

I must say that the decision to set up the SSRC in 2016 was timely. It reflected the concerns of those who saw a weakness in knowledge building for Singapore as a global city and as a nation-state that faces uncertainties beyond its control. For example, the Council started work just before the United States saw its rules-based order being challenged. This had led to a rise in tensions in its relations with the People's Republic of China that has directly affected our region. Then came a pandemic that exposed the fragilities of life and death for everybody.


Our HSS fraternity responded enthusiastically to the call for new research. They saw the opportunity to use their skills to gain new knowledge and were encouraged to take on issues that could also help with policymaking. After reviewing their proposals over these past seven years, the SSRC decided to organise this Festival. The coverage will be very wide and covers the research possibilities of a multiplicity of perspectives in response to global conflicts and rapidly advancing technologies. I shall focus on what the study of the humanities faces in that larger context.

The first idea I offer draws upon my own experiences as someone who started in a university some 77 years ago in an environment that I have called one of "post-imperial knowledge and pre-social sciences". For Arts students like me, no labels were used to distinguish the humanities and the social sciences. I recall this background today to compare with the proliferation of

academic disciplines that have taken place since then. By the 21st century, there was concern that the pressure to be scientific had made the humanities almost irrelevant to the task of knowledge-building that the world really needed. I remember a time when any appeal to cultural factors to explain any development was seen as regressive and useless for original research. The SSRC projects these past seven years suggest that some new needs have emerged. For example, separating the social sciences from STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) research is no longer rigid and narrow. Furthermore, many multidisciplinary centres and institutes have been established in all the institutions in Singapore to deal with new sets of life and work questions.

Having worked in universities all my life and observed how they adapted, however painfully, to new realities while trying to protect the core values of academic disciplines and traditions, I am not surprised by what I see. Hence the idea that independent Singapore's experience to ensure survival in a hostile world should be reviewed for the lessons it taught. How did it master the knowledge and technology that enabled a plural immigrant society to become a global city? High priority had been given to education to prepare students to acquire the skills needed to develop a modern industrial economy. The best and brightest were encouraged to train as scientists and engineers.

This continued for some 30 years. The problems of social change and cultural adaptation were left largely to community wisdom, individual dedication, and the use of regulatory laws to protect the citizenry from dangerous external influences. Singapore thus gained recognition in STEM fields, which they had concentrated on for so long, while local HSS research was seen as falling behind. I recall having this pointed out to me in the 1990s and the early 2000s when higher education was fast expanding and there had to be great dependence on imported talent. Where HSS research was concerned, it was dominated by theories and methods that were developed outside the region. The pool of scholars rooted in the country was very small.



More work needed to be done to understand its multicultural society as well as the complicated region that it has to live in. This has become urgent as the world is changing rapidly and in very uncertain directions.

The second idea that I offer: how can we add to the theoretical findings that were based on the habit of separating West from non-West and using premises drawn from societies that are culturally different from those of our region? This includes the dependence on scientific methodologies to study society. Can we take advantage of our experience of social science research to develop the explanatory potential of humanities research?

The challenge comes from our location in a region that has never had common roots but has always been open to great diversity. There had been the expectation that modern critical standards imposed and forced upon its communities by colonial powers in the past would drive them all towards a single cultural model. That now looks unlikely to succeed.

If this resultant diversity that marks the foundation of each national entity in our region continues, that would be a good place to start studying how that diversity could transform new nations, how that openness could turn some of those nations from weakness into strength while leading others to decline. Here I suggest that humanities research that throw light on spiritual needs, differentiates moral values, and uncovers the multiple layers of social sensibilities, can supplement the explanatory power now available to scholars and the public sector. Social scientists and STEM researchers could find some of that illuminating when called upon to analyse scientific data, and even the AI-stimulated data that are yet to be collected.

Recalling my own mixed background of imperial progress and pre-social science, I confess to being very excited by the fact that the capacity to acquire insightful knowledge is not linear nor uni-directional but can be reflexive. I can see how that has brought the universal applicability of science to the point where scientists appreciate that creativity and innovation do not depend on science alone.

This brings me to my third idea, a simple and practical one that builds on what is already happening. Wherever feasible and appropriate, I suggest that researchers be encouraged to give thought to having Co-Principal Investigators come from a mix of academic disciplines. It is not necessary here for every scholar to be multi-disciplinary. I am referring to having humanities scholars sharing responsibilities with their social science and STEM colleagues.

I am also not suggesting that the practice should be mechanically followed. What I envisage is that the research proposers be open-minded to different perspectives that could lead them to detect something fruitful they did not expect to find. A variety of insights coming from scholars with different backgrounds makes that possible.

Another benefit that can come from that is that it could develop the habit of crossing boundaries when scholars are driven wider and deeper in their search for new knowledge. I am aware that universities are now transforming their curricular structures in a similar direction. They are preparing students to learn beyond the confines of academic borders and do so not only while they are students but also prepare themselves to continue learning all their lives.

This is a huge challenge to the next generation of Singaporeans. I cannot help returning to my first idea, what Singapore had to do when it became independent. It had to make unforeseen decisions and implement new policies swiftly to survive. The lesson is still a vital one even though the realities today are totally different in nature and carry even greater risks. When these realities change, the country must respond intelligently and efficiently. Today, the mind changes required could be even more unforeseeable. We must look to new ideas and study them carefully to ensure that the knowledge acquired can help us deal with what is to come. For that, it seems to me that this Ideas Festival is a good place to start.



Keynote Speech by Prof Lily Kong

Social Sciences and Humanities: Everything Everywhere All At Once


Some years ago, in conversation with colleagues about research and its relevance to society, the discussion turned to how important it was for a wider audience to understand the issues and developments in various academic disciplines, so that they can see relevance in what we do.

The scientists in the group pointed to the weekly dedication of two pages in the Straits Times to science and technology. They saw how useful it was that the world of scientific discoveries and technological innovations had dedicated attention.

In a spirit of generous sharing of good practice, my scientist colleagues encouraged the social scientists in the group to lobby the Straits Times for dedicated space to address issues germane to the social sciences. A fellow social scientist piped up at this juncture. With a wry smile, he said, “No need. The rest of the papers *is* about the social sciences.”

And so it is — that the sorts of research that we undertake in the humanities and social sciences deal with every aspect of our lives — fertility rates, bilateral relations, crime, social cohesion, inflation, unemployment, healthcare accessibility, legal reforms, sports, arts, food, and the list goes on. Even in the domain of science and technology, the social sciences and humanities are integral to an understanding of how science and technology is relevant to humanity, and how it is to be harnessed for the betterment of society. I am reminded of the movie title *Everything Everywhere All At Once*. The social sciences and humanities deal with every aspect of our lives.

Investment in social sciences and humanities research is thus critical. We neglect it at our own peril.



Social sciences and humanities research is a strategic asset that can help Singapore navigate increasingly complex and interrelated challenges confronting our society. Technologies will undoubtedly be part of the solutions the world needs, but technologies alone, without an understanding of individual psychologies, societal values, political relations, legal and policy frameworks, regulatory regimes and workable business models will simply not suffice.



It Wasn't Always Like This: Opportunities in the Local SSHR Scene

There was a time when getting into the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASS) at NUS was not something to shout about. While I had qualified for a number of Faculties, I chose FASS, and had to apologetically explain why to well-meaning friends and family. This was so even though the government had already recognised the value of attracting bright teenagers into what was then called the PROMSHO programme, today called the Humanities Programme. While PROMSHO and its successor programme has been in place since 1981, there is still a gap today in Singapore academia of sufficient bright and talented young scholars to replace older ones like myself when the time comes for me to retire.

And so it is fitting that, over the years, more has been done to increase the opportunities and up the attraction quotient for an academic career in the social sciences and humanities, and to support the work in these domains.

Increased Opportunities

In my undergraduate years in the 1980s, there was but one FASS in town. Today, five of the six autonomous universities offer combinations of these disciplines. In fact, with a more expansive notion of humanities and social sciences, all six autonomous universities house some of these disciplines. Aspiring academics in these domains have more choice than has ever been



the case in Singapore. There are also postgraduate scholarship and postdoctoral fellowship schemes to support those interested to join academia, including the social sciences and humanities.

Funding Support

Three decades ago, as my colleagues and I sought to apply for a grant to support a project on Singapore's globalisation efforts, to the tune of \$250,000, we had to fight hard because a grant of this scale in the social sciences was unheard of.

Today, we are exhorted to go for grants in the seven to eight digits, and thought to be unambitious enough otherwise. There are myriad schemes that provide funding, as you will see on the screen. From 1994 when MOE's Academic Research Fund was started, to a "stepped up" version in 2006 that came with oversight by an internationally renowned Academic Research Council, to the introduction of Tier 3 grants (of \$5-25m) in 2011, investment in research has been on a positive trajectory for three decades now. The turning point for the social sciences in particular may well have been the 2016 establishment of the Social Science Research Council that now represents a dedicated resource.

Researchers have risen to the challenge, but insufficiently so. In the last 13 years of MOE Tier 3 grant availability, only two have been awarded in the social sciences. Both have supported research on ageing at the Singapore Management University, which has allowed the Centre for Research on Successful Ageing (ROSA) to run the Singapore Life Panel. This is likely the largest high-frequency longitudinal survey globally, collecting data on different dimensions of well-being for Singaporeans aged between 50 and 70 at baseline (which was July 2015). The SLP surveys an average of 7500 monthly respondents, out of a base of 12,000 individuals, and has involved nearly 500,000 interviews to date. With such comprehensive data, ROSA's research informs evidence-based policies and interventions to enhance the quality of life for older Singaporeans. We need more ambitious long-term projects such as this.


The Social Science and Humanities Fellowship has seen more successes. In 2022, four promising early career colleagues have been supported up to \$1m each over five years, in interesting areas, as you see on the screen. They join 12 others who have been awarded the Fellowship since 2018. Together, these represent the promising next generation for whom funding support is now competitively available for more ambitious projects as long as there are good proposals.

Still further along the succession pipeline, SSRC has now introduced the SSRC Graduate Research Fellowship (GRF). The scheme targets outstanding early-career Singaporean social science and humanities researchers who have been accepted for their doctoral or postdoctoral training at leading overseas institutions. They have access to a research grant and an opportunity to be mentored by an experienced researcher here in Singapore. These were unheard of in my time. Clearly, more resources have been made available to support social sciences and humanities research over the years, and universities need to continue working in concerted ways to build the pipeline of Singaporean scholars.

What is Impactful Research?

Let me turn now to another issue close to my heart. With more opportunities for HSS scholars, the question is 'research to what end'. Academia has developed its own system of assessing research quality and impact, and as with many things, the system has taken a life of its own. Publications in top-tier journals, with university presses, garnering high citations, fine-tuned in analysis to h-indices and field-weighted citation indices, and more — this is the dominant language of impact. What they seek to capture is in effect academic impact. But at its most meaningful, academic impact comes when research shifts academic understanding by advancing theory and method or when it changes received wisdom about something. Where we publish and how many cite us are proxy indicators.

But what about impact beyond academia? The UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)



defines research impact as “the demonstrable contribution that excellent research makes to society and the economy”, benefiting individuals, organisations, regions or nations. The ESRC further categorises research impact in terms of instrumental impact, conceptual impact and capacity building. Instrumental impact comes when we influence the development of policy, practice or services, shape legislation and change behaviour. Conceptual impact occurs when researchers contribute to the understanding of policy issues and reframe debates. And if our research gets taken into technical and personal skill development, we would have contributed to capacity building.

I often encourage my students to undertake research because they see a societal challenge to address, for which the desired impact of their work is to contribute to a different perspective or be part of the solutioning. This is in contrast to starting a research project because there is a gap in the literature. This gives our work greater purpose. It entails identifying key stakeholders, understanding their needs, and working with them to frame the research from the start. It extends to engaging stakeholders in translating research findings into actionable outcomes.

Similarly, it behoves us to think, from the beginning, who we want our research to speak to. All too often, our assumption is that we should speak to other academics only, and those in the Global North at that, through our publications and conference presentations. But we might also determine, from the get-go, that we want our work communicated to policy makers, business leaders, non-profit sector

actors, and communities, and in formats more palatable than the standard academic publications. Examples include podcasts, videos, exhibitions, performances, popular books, toolkits, and training manuals. These channels invite more wide-ranging feedback, foster dialogue and open up opportunities for use. How do we account for them in our standard way of assessment?

Time is short, so I have to conclude. There is no question that there is much more going for social sciences and humanities academics and researchers now than in the last few decades. There are more career options, more funding opportunities, more recognition of the importance of these domains, and more willingness to collaborate. This is the first and easier part.

The greater challenge is for us to think about how we can begin a movement to value demonstrable impact in both academic and societal terms. Academically, this means we look for evidence of how a particular work has shifted the ways in which other academics think and do their work; in societal terms, this means looking for evidence of how we make a difference to society, economy and humanity. We have come a long way in the first mission, and must press on. We are not quite yet at the starting line for the second mission, but what a meaningful challenge it is for us to embrace.

Thank you.