On 13 November 2015, Yale-NUS was privileged to host our first-ever foreign state dignitary. President of Iceland, His Excellency Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson, visited Yale-NUS to deliver a public lecture on ‘Clean Energy, Climate and the Arctic’ as part of the President’s Speaker Series. His lecture had an overwhelming response, with more than 300 people packing the Performance Hall.

During the lecture, President Grímsson spoke about the very real and pressing issue of climate change, and the way in which it affects our lives. The former professor of political science also highlighted the global nature of the problem, emphasising the need for a collective effort to resolve the issue and employing solutions that transcend borders.

“Ice is neither left wing nor right wing. Ice has no political ideology; it simply melts,” President Grímsson quipped, reminding the audience that the effects of global warming would eventually be for all to endure.

President Grímsson shared about Iceland’s success in harnessing geothermal energy and their country’s move towards lowering carbon dioxide emissions. He urged the crowd to raise their awareness about climate change and the steps that can be taken to collectively fight climate change, so that Iceland’s story would not be a unique one, but a trend for the future.

President Grímsson explained that he decided to speak at Yale-NUS College because of a firm belief that there is a need for people in universities and institutions of learning to change the way in which they look at the world, and how they educate themselves, in order to constructively deal with the problems of climate change. He stressed that the effects of global warming are far-reaching and will eventually affect all nations. Hence, today’s youth have to bear the responsibility of collectively combating climate change.

He concluded, “That is why I am grateful to be able to talk to you during my visit to Singapore, in this great new university, because it is a message that above all, has to be heard by the new generation.”

President Grímsson was in Singapore for a three-day state visit, at the invitation of Singapore President Tony Tan Keng Yam. This was the first official state visit by an Icelandic President, and he opened the Arctic Circle Singapore Forum amongst other activities. The Yale-NUS President’s Speaker Series lecture concluded President Grímsson’s visit to Singapore.

For more talks and lectures delivered at Yale-NUS, please tune in or subscribe to the Yale-NUS College’s Youtube channel at www.youtube/user/yalenuscollege.
A regular day for staff at Yale-NUS College is typically a busy one – there is paperwork to be done, meetings to be had, decisions to be made, and problems to be solved. So it was truly a surprise when students visited each department’s office, serenading them with songs and gifting them with goodie bags filled with treats and a handwritten note, part of the student-initiated Staff Appreciation project.

Tong Xueyin (Class of 2018) first came up with the idea to have a staff appreciation day and posted it on a Yale-NUS student group on Facebook.

“I remembered how a staff member said that they were always receiving complaints from the students, so I felt that something needed to be done to affirm staff members of their hard work,” explained Xueyin.

Many people liked [the idea on Facebook], but only one or two people contacted me saying that they wanted to do something too.

She added: “Anyone can have good ideas, but an idea is useless unless executed. My greatest learning point is definitely how much of a blessing it is to have a great team.”

The team of students who carried out the project went around interviewing staff members about their jobs and taking photographs of them in the office. These were exhibited in the Saga Dining Hall for a few days in October, and aimed to highlight the various roles administrative staff members play in the College.

Several staff members were very touched by the effort put in by the students.

“[We] truly appreciate the effort put in by the students showing appreciation was quite touching!”

Likewise, Mrs Doris Sohmen-Pao, Executive Vice President (Institutional Affairs), greatly enjoyed the heartwarming gesture.

“It was such a treat to have students visit our offices and surprise us with thoughtful notes, bags of treats and beautiful music!” she said. “It’s community efforts like these that make Yale-NUS so great.”
It is hard to imagine a world without one of the most essential natural resources in industrialised nations today – oil. Many of our daily needs, from propelling vehicles to producing electric power, require oil as the energy source. In fact, many of our common products like toothpaste, washing powder and shampoo contain petroleum products.

However, in the era of climate change, such a world could become a reality in the near future once we reach “peak oil,” the point at which maximum rate of crude oil extraction is reached, after which petroleum production is expected to begin to decline forever. Many scientists warned that we needed to move beyond fossil fuels. In the mid-2000s, as oil prices were rising around the world, a subculture formed around those who fervently believed that peak oil was imminent. Assistant Professor of Social Sciences, Dr Matthew Schneider-Mayerson, studied this subculture in his recently-published book, Peak Oil: Apocalyptic Environmentalism and Libertarian Political Culture.

"Oil is a material substance for which there is a finite quality. This group of people, ‘peakists’ as I call them, became very concerned about the amount of cheap oil that would be available in the near future,” Dr Schneider-Mayerson explained. Over a period of five years, Dr Schneider-Mayerson studied this subculture of over 100,000 Americans, who were mostly educated white males, and delved into their backgrounds, thoughts and responses. In doing so, he explored related topics such as the rise of neoliberal thought in American political culture, the impact of the Internet on our ability to form social movements, and the influence of apocalyptic popular culture on conceptions of environmental change.

Dr Schneider-Mayerson found that many in the peak oil movement hoped that peak oil could lead to the end of industrial civilisation. The permanent decline of crude oil extraction and its consequential impact on the market could become the impetus that would drive mankind beyond the use of fossil fuels and to seriously combat climate change. Dr Schneider-Mayerson said, “These people understood that climate change needs to be addressed as communities, not individuals.”

While individual efforts such as those undertaken by peakists could not be sufficient to combat climate change, Dr Schneider-Mayerson argued that they might communicate the need for action as well as a commitment to the common good, as the world experienced the real effects of climate change. Dr Schneider-Mayerson highlighted the problem of oil being the centre of today’s economy, “I don’t believe that the world is going to end when we run out of oil, but it is problematic that our entire way of life is dependent on a finite substance. This now produces catastrophic consequences. An energy transition away from fossil fuels is currently underway, yet it remains difficult to imagine life after oil. Studying the actions of ‘peakists’ helps us understand that difficulty and navigate its potential pitfalls.”

At Yale-NUS, Dr Schneider-Mayerson teaches a class on Energy Humanities, which covers some of the issues raised in his book.

“I don’t believe that the world is going to end when we run out of oil, but it is problematic that our entire way of life is dependent on a finite substance.”
‘If we can’t bring the children to a country, we’ll bring the country to them.’

That’s the unofficial motto of KidsAccomplish Enrichment (KAE), a Yale-NUS student organisation that creates exciting non-academic enrichment classes for upper primary school students.

Modelled after the liberal arts and sciences education offered in Yale-NUS, KAE aims to cultivate children’s interest about the increasingly interconnected world by exposing them to diverse modes of thought in a fun and engaging manner. KAE charges a nominal fee for the programme to cover the cost of the course materials and tries to reach out to all within the community, including those from lower-income families, who may not otherwise have the opportunities or resources to provide such exposure to their children. The group is currently exploring partnerships with Family Service Centres to reach out to lower-income students in the coming year.

“Every week, we introduce a new country to the kids in our class,” explained Lim Chu Hsien (Class of 2018), Vice President of KAE. “What is special is that we actually get locals from those countries to come and speak to the kids… this is one approach towards multifaceted learning.”

KAE taps on the global student body at Yale-NUS, enlisting a volunteer from a country to help form a lesson plan including a suitable topic for discussion and a creative activity. For their first batch of 12 students, they covered 10 countries, including Bolivia, Sweden, Japan, Morocco, and India.

When they delved into Sri Lanka, they worked with a Sri Lankan Yale-NUS student, who explained to them that each major racial group in the country has a different kind of tea.

“We taught the students to make the different kinds of tea and used that to launch into discussions on why each race has different tea, and how the races interact with each other,” shared Yogesh Tulsi, co-founder of KAE and an incoming Yale-NUS student.

“A lot of our lessons involve giving the kids space to consider and come up with ideas,” he added.

To prepare students for each lesson and kickstart the learning process, KAE sends out a few simple questions about the upcoming topic for parents to discuss with their children half a week before the lesson. After each class, parents receive another set of questions – this time birthed from the discussions of that day – to continue the enrichment at home.

So far, the parents of the 12 students who enrolled have given positive feedback about the programme.

“We approach education holistically, always looking at avenues and means to expand my children’s exposure to global issues, social responsibility and health,” remarked Ms Vivien Kwek, a Program Director and Life Coach with Life Transformers, whose 11-year-old daughter Celestine graduated from the KAE programme this year.

“I believe KAE’s success lies in the way it conveys lessons in a hands-on, experiential way which most children appreciate and learn better from.”

Ms Kwek added that her daughter has enjoyed learning about different cultures, and was especially impacted by the lesson on bullying and what to do about bullies.

“Parents tell us the effects of KidsAccomplish may not be able to be seen immediately [after each lesson], but they can see their children’s growth from the beginning of the programme,” said Saza Faradilla (Class of 2018), Founder and President of KAE.

Saza first conceptualised the programme after volunteering at Tampines Family Service Centre (FSC) and an internship at Halogen Foundation, a leadership development organisation for youths and educators.

She soon realised the importance of experiential learning, and the gap that existed in school curricula that typically focus on grades and theoretical knowledge of English, mathematics, science and a second language.

“KidsAccomplish is very different [from other programmes] as we do not talk about grades at all, but we do promote skills such as critical thinking and public speaking, that will help them in their academics,” she shared.

The first edition of KAE classes ran over two semesters from February to October 2015 and were conducted weekly on the Yale-NUS campus.
On 7 December 2015, Yale-NUS student Mollie Saltskog (Class of 2017) was awarded the fourth annual Emirates NBD Middle East Essay Prize.

Mollie’s winning essay, titled ‘Supportive to Active: The evolving role of women in al-Qaeda’, was praised for its originality and quality of research, and won her S$1,000 cash and a one-week stay in Dubai.

“The paper was a comparative study between central al-Qaeda and two al-Qaeda affiliates – al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and Jabhat al-Nusra in Syria – and their recruitment and employment of women,” explained Mollie.

“There is very much to be explored in this field of female recruitment, not only in al-Qaeda’s organisation but other jihadist organisations as well.”

At the prize presentation, Dr Brian Shegar, Emirates NBD’s General Manager of the Singapore office and Head of Asia Pacific, said the competition aims to encourage discussion on topics related to the Middle East among tertiary students.

It is open to students from the National University of Singapore (NUS) and Yale-NUS College, Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore University of Technology and Design (SUTD), Singapore Management University (SMU), Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT), and Singapore Institute of Management (SIM).

“Research module counts for 2 Modular Credits (MC) and allows upperclass students to explore topics that they are interested in as part of their Major.

“It’s exciting because we can use the 2 MC modules for students to study any region in the world that interests them,” said Dr Gleason. “We have a lot of professors at Yale-NUS who will be able to focus on the minutia of interest areas for students in the upper years.”

In January 2016, Mollie will travel to Yale University in New Haven for a semester, under Yale-NUS’ Semester Study Abroad programme, where she plans to take up more modules related to Middle East studies.

“This research is not only the product of my passion for Middle East security studies, but also the product of knowledge, mentorship and support from a number of individuals.”

gratitude to,” said Mollie after receiving her award.

One such person who was pivotal in guiding Mollie was Yale-NUS Political Science lecturer and Associate Director of the Centre for Teaching and Learning, Dr Nancy Gleason.

“Mollie has a great interest in the Middle East and she wanted to be able to cover the issue more,” shared Dr Gleason.

“As we currently do not have modules at Yale-NUS that specifically focus on the Middle East, I suggested that she and I do an Independent Reading and Research module together.”

The Independent Reading and
Making science a serious business
Text and Image by Jeannie Tay

Fancy wearing a suit that can store energy or using an eco-friendly phone with biodegradable parts to reduce your carbon footprint? Or doing your part to help the earth by using a bio-friendly nanocellulose-based material in place of the current bandage, or a reusable nanostructure antimicrobial film that can prevent the spread of diseases? Besides being innovative, these solutions are also commercially feasible – two qualities that deeply impressed a group of corporate executives who were at Yale-NUS College in September and November to listen to business plans on sustainable solutions.

A group of Yale-NUS sophomores got a taste of the business world as they put together a business plan detailing their innovation, market analysis, implementation plan and marketing strategy, as they pitched their nanotechnology enabled solutions to a panel of industry representatives. The panel comprised corporate executives from the Agency for Science, Technology and Research (A*STAR), National Research Foundation (NRF), World Wildlife Fund (WWF), ACA Investments, CeEntek Pte Ltd, TechBridges Ventures, and United Overseas Bank (OUB).

The business plan presentation is part of the “Nanotechnology and Sustainability” class in the Foundations of Science module, a key part of the Yale-NUS Common Curriculum. Taught by a team of scholars with expertise in diverse fields such as astronomy, chemistry, nanotechnology, and physics, the Foundations of Science module gives students access to essential concepts of science and trains them to employ that knowledge when looking at interdisciplinary issues.

Just like in a real business setting, each team had only 10 minutes to make their pitch, and convince their ‘clients’ why their products are innovative and feasible. During the presentation, they had to field pointed questions such as “Your product seems simple, why hasn’t it been made available already?”, “Who is your competitor?”, and “Who is going to buy this product?”

One panellist who was sold on the innovations was Dr Lu Yuan, Technology Director of Institute of Materials Research Engineering (IMRE), A*STAR who said she would put her money in the ‘Nano-healer solution’, which is a bio-friendly nanocellulose material that can be directly applied to skin and replaces the current cloth bandage.

Students in the class also appreciated the opportunity to develop a business plan and the exposure to the business world.

“After the class, I now have a better understanding of what nanotechnology entails, in particular carbon nanomaterials, which is what my group focussed on. Also, our class was very hands-on and I felt that I learnt much through the site visits we went on. That said, the part I enjoyed most would be the business plan project, where groups had to come up with an innovative product that could be marketable and sustainable at the same time. It was very challenging and stretched us to our limits,” said Luke Ong (Class of 2018), whose team designed a wearable suit that is capable of storing energy based on nanocarbon technology.

The Nanotechnology and Sustainability class also brought students to leading R&D institutions and start-ups. Image provided by Dr Lerwen Liu

The class was led by Dr Lerwen Liu, who is also the Managing Director of NanoGlobe. She believes in the importance of helping students connect science and technology to the real world and gain an experience of innovation and entrepreneurship with sustainability in mind.

“Nanotechnology is transforming how things are made and consequently transforming every aspect of our lives. Over the past 10 years, during my journey in nanotechnology, I have learnt more and more every day the responsibility of being able to help our planet become more sustainable, ultimately sustaining humanity. The world is not short of scientific innovation, but what is missing, is transferring those great innovation to design solutions for solving real world problems,” added Dr Liu.

In the spirit of big thinking, the Foundations of Science module also posed a “Grand Challenge” to the students to come up with solutions to the world’s problems. The solutions were presented at a poster fair in November, and students and faculty alike appreciated the opportunity to discuss the ideas in an open forum.

From solutions to reduce acidity levels in the ocean, mitigate jellyfish blooms and arrest the problem of a declining honeybee population, the students also came up with designs for a wearable rescue device, nano-inspired material to reduce UV rays at children’s playground, a cocktail solution to ‘eat up’ oil spills, and many more innovative solutions to address the world’s most pressing issues.

Professor Bryan E Penprase, who led the class on “Find and Maintaining a Habitable Planet”, said, “The ‘Grand
One unique aspect of a Yale-NUS education is the broad-based multi-disciplinary curriculum, which allows students to delve into topics across the social and natural sciences, humanities and the arts.

Unlike other higher education institutions, Yale-NUS does not organise its faculty into traditional academic departments. Rather, it groups them into three interdisciplinary divisions, namely Social Sciences, Science, and Humanities. This encourages a multi-disciplinary approach to teaching, especially in the Common Curriculum, where classes are taught by teams of scholars with different expertise.

For example, the Comparative Social Institutions course under the Common Curriculum allows students to investigate central questions about society and the human condition from the perspective of a variety of social sciences such as economics, psychology, anthropology and more.

The intellectual focus of the social sciences is the systematic study of the social world, from individual human behaviour, to collective social formations, to enduring social institutions, such as the family, markets, and the state. At Yale-NUS, the Social Sciences curriculum is integrated into both disciplinary-defined and interdisciplinary majors. Students thinking about doing Social Sciences have the choice of a range of approaches to understanding social phenomena. As Divisional Director of Social Sciences, Professor Jane M Jacobs, explains, “Some disciplines, such as psychology, use a science-based, experimental methodology to better understand the individual in society. Other disciplines, such as economics, use quantitative reasoning to understand economic behaviour. While others, such as anthropology, are more qualitative in their approach.” In addition, the Yale-NUS programme boasts a number of exciting cross-disciplinary majors in Global Affairs, Urban Studies and Environmental Studies.

The various majors housed in the Division of Social Sciences offer students the opportunity to inquire deeply into specific questions and to acquire relevant skills for conducting research. Moreover, scholarship in the Social Sciences often has an explicit “moral imagination”, meaning that the science is conducted for the purpose of social or environmental benefit.

Professor Jacobs is excited about the next important developments in the Social Sciences curriculum. Primary among these is the delivery of the capstone experiences to the inaugural Class of 2017. The capstone experiences being finalised will offer students many options – some will provide students access to laboratory work, field experiments and ethnographies, while others will support scholarly reviews of literature and policy. The Division is also working closely with the Centre for International & Professional Experience (CIPE) to better integrate study abroad opportunities with the requirements of the majors.

Professor Jacobs is confident that students graduating from a major in the Division of the Social Sciences will “be equipped to make a difference in the world” and she encourages students who are not majors in the Social Sciences to pick up one of their courses as an elective. As she notes, “Many of our courses provide students with training in social scientific methods and perspectives that are relevant to the real world and much sought after by employers”.

All Yale-NUS students select a major at the end of their second year of study. The majors are designed to give students ample scope and flexibility to explore their interest in a chosen area of knowledge, while providing direction and depth to their studies.
“Singapore is a long way to travel for this conference!” the woman sitting next to me proclaimed when I answered her question on where I was from.

We were both sitting in the Rees room of the High Country Conference Centre in Flagstaff, Arizona with about two dozen other writers waiting to listen to a panel titled “Meditations on Monstrous Characters”, which was about writing on monsters, whether human or not. She lived just down the road and the closest she had ever been to Singapore, she said, was Hong Kong.

I had indeed travelled a long way to attend the NonfictioNOW 2015 conference, held in October. Together with four fellow schoolmates, we had travelled over 20 hours by plane and another two hours by bus up the winding mountain roads.

NonfictioNOW 2015 was hosted by Northern Arizona University, in partnership with Yale-NUS College and RMIT University. The conference was attended by over 400 nonfiction writers, teachers, and students from around the world in an effort to explore the past, present, and future of nonfiction. Professor Robin Hemley, director of Yale-NUS College’s Writers’ Centre, was one of the three co-chairs for the conference.

I was involved with the conference from its planning stages, helping primarily to put together the website, so actually being on the ground in Flagstaff was both exciting and terrifying. Before leaving, I remember telling my friends, “This is a whole year’s work come to fruition”. Being at the conference itself felt strange — like an abstract concept was coming together in the 500-odd participants and over 60 panels.

NonfictioNOW 2015 was both exciting and terrifying. Before leaving, I remember telling my friends, “This is a whole year’s work come to fruition”. Being at the conference itself felt strange — like an abstract concept was coming together in the 500-odd participants and over 60 panels. I spent the entire conference being surprised and inspired by not just the talent, but the humility of the panelists and keynote speakers. Brian Doyle, one of the keynote speakers, declared, “Stories are food!” before telling the audience that the stories we needed to write are all around us. Michael Martone and Ander Monson cleverly played on the “key” aspect of “keynote” to entertain all in attendance with a collection of stories about, well, keys. Tim Flannery proved to everyone that writing about science does not have to be flat and mechanical, which I am sure my fellow liberal arts and sciences peers can appreciate. I walked away from the conference with a sense of awe, which after a month has translated into countless nights putting pen to paper (or fingers on keyboard), applying everything I’ve learnt, both technical and spiritual. I feel like I’m a better writer for having attended the conference. Here’s to NonfictioNOW 2017!
A unique scholarship with a special focus on female students, the Kewalram Chanrai Scholarship has been established with a generous gift from the Kewalram Chanrai Group. Priority is given to female applicants in a bid to empower and inspire female undergraduates to be future leaders and entrepreneurs, who will help to grow societies and economies of tomorrow.

Three Yale-NUS students, Iwani Mawocha (South Africa), Alexia Davidson (Jamaica) and Callysta Thony (Indonesia) are the inaugural recipients of the scholarship, which has enabled them to study in Singapore. Through this opportunity, each of them is committed to give back to their communities, and to make a difference in the lives of others, especially women who may not have similar opportunities.

For Callysta, Class of 2019, this scholarship has given her access to an education that she would not have been able to afford. She is a member of the Yale-NUS International and Political Association (YIRPA), where she serves as the executive for community outreach. As part of YIRPA, she will be participating in the Water for Life project, which will see her building bio-sand filters in Kampong Speu, Cambodia, to bring clean drinking water to the community. There, she will also be conducting a hygiene education presentation at a primary school. Callysta is also a member of Yale-NUS’ KidsAccomplish, where she is working on their global penpal project which helps kids learn about other cultures.

Beyond her efforts in Singapore, Callysta also started The Pathway Project in 2013 to help high school students attain corporate internships back home in Indonesia. She also embarked on a venture with the Global Issues Network club in her high school, which saw her going to nearby villages in Indonesia to teach English. She says, “I hope to take the experiences that I have gained from all the opportunities here and the lessons learnt from the people around me, to do more minorities to give them a voice through the stage. In addition, she is one of the pioneering female students in YNC Hacks, a student group that participates in hackathons. Her team recently won first prize in the IdeasInc startathon and the club engages in computer science, an area that she hopes to major in.

Iwani, Class of 2018, is also a Computer Science major. She will be working in collaboration with ConnectHer, a non-profit organisation that helps with mentorship, connecting female students here to other women coders and professionals, and helping to facilitate coding courses throughout the semester. She is also the co-founder of Mustard Seed Africa, an organisation that focuses on female development. The organisation concentrates social and economic empowerment initiatives, helping women to generate income through activities such as handcraft, agriculture and entrepreneurship.

In her free time, you can find her on the airwaves as a host for NUS Radio Pulze and making videos for her YouTube channel. These ladies are making the most of the liberal arts programme here, cultivating intuition, innovation and learning with critical and creative thinking, all the while keeping in mind their end goal of helping those around them. And this is exactly what the Kewalram Chanrai Group hopes to achieve with the scholarship, to encourage active learning and giving back to the community through generations.