On 7 October 2016, Yale-NUS College hosted a talk by Chairman of the Economic Development Board (EDB), Dr Beh Swan Gin.

Organised by the Office of the Executive Vice President (Institutional Affairs), the audience in the packed lecture theatre were given insights into Singapore’s economy, as well as the job market here, a key area of interest for Yale-NUS students especially those due to graduate next year.

A statutory board under Singapore’s Ministry of Trade and Industry, EDB is responsible for planning and executing strategies that go towards shaping the city-state’s business and economy.

Dr Beh started with a broad overview of how Singapore built up its economy, highlighting its diversified nature, and why it was intentionally structured in this manner. A diversified economy helped ensure that everyone has a place in Singapore’s economy, matching the needs of the economy to the varied strengths and expertise of the workforce.

“However, countries and companies now have to contend with an extremely volatile and uncertain world,” he said, moving on to discuss the changes in the global economy, including a widespread slowing growth rate that is “the new normal”.

In spite of this, Dr Beh stressed that Asia is becoming the “growth engine” of many businesses and that Asia is the place to be in at this point of time.

“To be very candid, all of you have made the right choice in coming to Singapore and to Yale-NUS,” Dr Beh remarked, drawing laughter from the audience.

Dr Beh also highlighted that with this repositioning, the demand for liberal arts graduates, like those from the College, is growing. “Suffice to say, employers are looking forward to graduates from your College,” he said in his opening remarks.

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Dr Beh also highlighted that with this repositioning, the demand for liberal arts graduates, like those from the College, is growing.

He added, “Hearing it from the Chairman of the EDB himself was an opportunity not to be missed.”

Dr Beh is a medical doctor by training and a father of two. He was also formerly the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Law and the Managing Director of EDB. Dr Beh also sits on several boards across multiple sectors, including Singapore Technologies Engineering, Ascendas-Singbridge Pte Ltd and LucasFilm Animation Pte Ltd.
On 15 July 2016, Director, Division of Social Sciences and Professor of Urban Studies, Professor Jane Jacobs, was elected by the British Academy as one of 20 new Corresponding Fellows from overseas universities, in recognition of her outstanding contribution to research in urban and cultural geography.

The British Academy is the United Kingdom’s national body for the humanities and social sciences, with a fellowship of around 1,300 leading national and international academics elected for their distinction in the study of peoples, cultures and societies, past, present and future.

As Fellows are nominated by their peers, Professor Jacobs shared that the news came as a complete surprise. “I had no idea that this was happening. I can only surmise that this was the outcome of existing Fellows of the Academy nominating a peer whom they think is worthy of recognition as a Fellow and I am very honoured to be so recognised.”

Professor Jacobs added that the nomination by her peers could have arose from her research which has contributed significantly to the field of urban studies.

Trained in geography, she has explored the interface between cultural and urban geography.

Taking a multi-disciplinary approach to her own research, Professor Jacobs applied her expertise in human geography to questions in urban studies.

Her early research focused on indigenous rights and cultural property.

She published on the postcolonial politics of cities, including her monograph Edge of Empire: Postcolonialism and the City (1996), which examined the struggles over urban space in three contemporary First World cities, in an attempt to map the real geographies of colonialism and postcolonialism.

“The book and my research reflected a question that was very alive at that time – how do cities incorporate the interests of deeply marginalised groups in the way they structure and plan public spaces and developments?” Professor Jacobs shared.

Her more recent work is closer to her current home in Singapore, focused on high-rise housing knowledge and infrastructures, comparative urbanism, and the relationship between architecture and society.

Professor Jacobs sought to move away from the thinking of buildings as simply infrastructure, and to instead consider the relevance of social relations.

“I started to think about buildings not just as symbolic things but as something that works in conjunction with people and their lives,” she revealed.

Based on that thinking, Professor Jacobs studied two high-rise buildings, one in Singapore and one in Glasgow.

The research culminated in the publication of A Geography of Big Things published in 2006, which introduced a new wave of scholarship and thinking about architecture in an urban environment.

Also borne out of her love for architecture was her book, Buildings Must Die: A Perverse View of Architecture, published by MIT Press in 2014, which she co-authored with her husband Stephen Cairns.

Challenging the common notion by architects that buildings are works of art, her book contends that buildings often do not last forever, and architects now need to consider their work in collaboration with other city builders, and how buildings must be designed to change.

Being elected as a British Academy Fellow is a prestigious recognition for Professor Jacobs, and an affirmation from peers within the discipline about the importance of her work to the field.

Professor Jacobs’ scholarship and her influential research work have been grounded in her constant questioning of why the environment we live in means things and matters to us. She hopes to also imbue in students this critical thinking about the world.

A member of the inaugural faculty at Yale-NUS College, Professor Jacobs has been an integral part of the development of the Urban Studies major in the College and is using her rich understanding of the field and its links with architecture, to enrich the major in a way that would best benefit student learning.

She sought to develop the Urban Studies major largely as a social science programme, but with a studio culture, which is usually more common in architectural programmes.

This meant that students had more hands-on experience, and were in closer proximity to their professors, as compared to a traditional classroom setting.

As an example of how they sought to make classes multi-disciplinary and interesting, Professor Jacobs shared, “The Urban Spatial Reasoning class offered last semester was especially interesting for faculty, as that module combined Science, Social Sciences and creative thinking. Students had both a productive and creative moment in the modelling and production of fabricated installations of their sample areas as well as a diagnostic and analytical experience where they had to learn to grapple with technologies involving the computer-based Geographical Information Systems (GIS) and computational modelling.”
Dialogues with Minister Ng Chee Meng
Text by Daryl Yang | Image provided by REACH

On 6 September 2016, Acting Minister for Education (Schools) and Senior Minister of State, Ministry of Transport, Mr Ng Chee Meng visited Yale-NUS College for a student dialogue, organised by the Yale-NUS International Relations & Political Association (YIRPA) as part of its Coffeehouse Conversations series. The event was supported by REACH (reaching everyone for active citizenship @ home).

According to Rachel Hau (Class of 2018), YIRPA’s Vice President (Political Affairs), the series is designed to host “thought-provoking dialogue sessions where participants get to interact with high-profile speakers in a fairly informal and intimate setting”.

“The Coffeehouse Conversations series is one of our signature programmes where we try to bridge the gap between students and industry leaders. We always try to approach speakers with varying opinions on current issues and with different professional experiences, so that participants can be exposed to a range of different perspectives and beliefs.”

Rachel added that much of the group’s focus is on their Community Outreach and Special Project divisions. These divisions “encourage students to discuss and engage with pertinent issues that Singapore faces”, she said.

During the dialogue with Minister Ng, student moderator Daniel Ng (Class of 2018) posed the first question to the Minister to kick off the discussion: “If you could, what would you change about the education system?” Daniel explained that this was a question he was asked himself during his Yale-NUS admissions interview a few years ago.

Minister Ng shared that one area he has thought extensively about is strengthening the education system by creating “incubating spaces”, which are exploratory and experimental opportunities for students to learn through experiments and applying knowledge learnt from the classroom in novel ways.

“It is important for the younger generation to have the entrepreneurial spirit to try, fail and fail again but to keep trying until you succeed. You are all capable and smart, but do we need a more innovative, creative stance for Singaporeans at large? Do you dare to try new things? My humble submission to you is that we do,” he said.

The Minister then fielded questions from the audience, ranging from the quality teachers in the Singapore landscape to resource equity. Some also asked questions beyond the Minister’s current portfolio, on ASEAN cooperation and the necessity of conscription. Minister Ng was previously Chief of Defence Force of the Singapore Armed Forces before he was elected to public office.

Joshua Tan (Class of 2019) was interested in the Minister’s views on how to improve education in our society. “I agree wholeheartedly with one sentiment he raised and that he kept repeating: about how it is important to have conversations and be challenged by people we disagree with, about how this process of debate and respectful discussion can lead to a better, more just society,” Joshua said.

As moderator, Daniel particularly enjoyed the diverse range of questions asked. “There were almost no pauses throughout the whole dialogue and many came with interesting issues and opinions to raise. In the short span of time, we covered issues from the education system, sexuality, race, National Service, ASEAN and even the presidential election system. Minister Ng engaged well with the range of topics and often wanted to hear what students thought,” he shared.

Dialogues like this are an important part of students’ learning at Yale-NUS. “Coffeehouse Conversations, such as the one set up this week with Minister Ng Chee Meng, is an excellent student initiative that provides an important platform for both leaders and students to test assumptions, communicate ideas and spur new ways of thinking,” said Executive Vice-President (Institutional Affairs), Mrs Doris Sohmen-Pao, who attended the talk. “This creates a much-appreciated avenue that can help to impact real-time policy making for our students.”

In fact, the learning goes beyond the dialogue itself. “Such dialogues also open more conversations – since then, I’ve had a number of conversations about the topics raised during the dialogue and most, if not all, of those I’ve spoken to mentioned that they learnt something during the dialogue, even if they disagreed with Minister Ng,” Daniel noted.

As the organiser, Rachel was heartened by the enthusiastic student response for the event.

“There is nothing more encouraging for us as organisers than seeing people bravely asking difficult questions and openly sharing a variety of perspectives,” she said. “Our dialogue eventually overran by more than half an hour, and I think this speaks to the quality of the exchange between Minister Ng and the audience, as well as participants’ wide-ranging interests towards social issues in Singapore.”

In the coming months, the student group will be hosting another Coffeehouse Conversations dialogue with a senior staff member from Facebook, as well as a +SixtyFive forum titled ‘Envisioning SG100: Towards an Age-Friendly Community’. The forum will critically discuss how Singapore is currently managing its ageing population and how our society can better work towards an age-friendly community.

Find out more at www.yirpa.org
Raising awareness about living with HIV in Singapore

Text by Michelle Soto | Image provided by The G Spot

On 23 August 2016, about 70 students and members of the public attended Being Positive: Living with HIV in Singapore.

The event aimed to shed light on HIV, a disease so highly stigmatised that it is rarely spoken about.

Being Positive featured a panel of HIV-positive individuals who talked about their experience living with HIV in Singapore.

They shared with the audience the heartwrenching moment they found out their diagnosis, the support networks they reached out to, and improvements they would like to see for individuals with HIV in future.

Students who attended the event agreed that it was very powerful to learn about HIV from people who are HIV-positive, as opposed to hearing secondhand information through a presentation.

“I think it’s important to learn about people who come from a diverse range of backgrounds, who may have perspectives and deal with problems you may never have thought about before,” commented Michelle Lee (Class of 2019), a student who attended the event.

“It’s important to know and care about issues that affect everybody in your community.” She added: “As liberal arts students, we should all exhibit intellectual curiosity... We have the ability to change the world in some way and therefore have a responsibility to educate ourselves both within the disciplines we care about and over a wide range of social issues.”

Being Positive was organised by The G Spot, a Yale-NUS student organisation focused on raising awareness on issues of gender, sexuality and feminism through community dialogues.

Daryl Yang (Class of 2018), Coordinator of The G Spot, shared that one of the reasons the group chose to organise this event was to illustrate that “every number has a story”, particularly with a disease like HIV that is often misunderstood.

“I wanted to create a space where people living with HIV could share their stories, allowing attendees to see beyond the numbers and statistics, and learn about the people affected by and living with the disease,” Daryl said.

Paul Jerusalem (Class of 2019), Social Co-Chair of The G Spot, noted that the structure of the discussion “allowed the disease to be humanised in a way textbooks are often not able to do”.

“I think events like these are important so that awareness is raised and people can make lifestyle choices with more consciousness about possible risks and how to prevent them,” Paul said.

For Cheryl Cossett (Class of 2018), conversations on these kinds of subject matters are “rare opportunities” in society.

She’s happy that Yale-NUS students are working to initiate these conversations and hopes Being Positive will spark even more thought and discussion on campus about health and wellness.

“I think events like these are important so that awareness is raised and people can make lifestyle choices with more consciousness about possible risks and how to prevent them.”
Over the weekend of 7 to 9 October, Yale-NUS students invited their loved ones to the College for Family Weekend 2016, a time for families to participate in a variety of discussion sessions, get-togethers and student performances.

The College hosts Family Weekend annually in the middle of its first semester to facilitate a deeper engagement between students, their families and the College. Through this, the Office of the Dean of Students aims to connect families to their loved one’s lives at Yale-NUS, and give them a glimpse of the college experience, from the curriculum to residential life.

Dr Dimple Srivastava, who resides in India, has visited her son Angad Srivastava (Class of 2020) on such occasions. She shared that the best part about Family Weekend is the opportunity to see her son. “I’ve realised that he is so happy and comfortable here—within two months, the place is like home for him,” she said. “For a parent, it’s the best thing when your child tells you that he or she is not homesick.”

“Having families around was reassuring as he readjusted to the rhythm of classroom studies,” said Angad, referring to the Week 7 [Learning Across Boundaries (LAB) programme], a week in which first-year students embark on learning projects within Singapore and abroad, to learn outside of the traditional classroom setting.

For Angad, having his family around was reassuring as he readjusted to the rhythm of classroom studies. “This naturally creates a point of intersection for parents and students to talk about... We were able to see parents become students again, and ask questions,” commented Ms Sara Amjad, Manager (Diversity & Inclusion) in the Office of the Dean of Students, who organised the programme.

Family Weekend is also an avenue for students to connect with their families, explained Ms Amjad. “For us first-year students, this is the time when we had devoted a lot of attention to the Yale-NUS experience. Members of the faculty and College administration were also present at many of the meals and tea receptions to engage with families and answer questions.

“We were able to address some academic and personal inquiries we had,” said Dr Srivastava. “The President, the Rectors and Vice Rectors, the faculty, the Dean of Students—everybody was at hand, and it was a good way to meet them one-on-one.”

Similarly, Ms Poni Leong enjoyed speaking with Vice Rector (VR) Suyin Chew of Elm College, one of the three Residential Colleges (RCs) at Yale-NUS.

“VR Chew was very helpful in telling me about the Semester Study Abroad programme,” said Ms Leong, whose daughter Kit Ling Leong is in the Class of 2020. She also talked to several faculty members who were in attendance with their families. “I learned a lot about the faculty residences, and how this truly is a residential learning environment, both for students and faculty,” she said.

Family Weekend included opportunities for students to perform for their families in the Performance Hall, such as the Gala Concert by the newly established Yale-NUS Orchestra, spoken word poetry, and ballroom dancing.
A good part of learning at Yale-NUS College takes place in the classroom. But learning does not stop at the classroom. Being in a young liberal arts college, students have the flexibility and opportunity to initiate their own learning pathways, while receiving support from the College to pursue their interests. In fact, some students are finding success outside of the traditional classroom setting, taking the initiative to acquire new skills and knowledge that cannot be found from textbooks and lectures.

In the words of Elson Ong (Class of 2017), an Urban Studies major, practice-based learning is “learning through activities to acquire practical skills, in contrast to learning in the classroom”.

Last semester, Elson took a course titled “Urban Spatial Reasoning and Visualisations”, in which he learned how to create representations through data mediums such as maps and 3D modeling. The course was jointly conducted by the College and the Future Cities Laboratory, an external think tank. In the course, Elson was trained to use a geographic information system (GIS) and software such as Adobe Illustrator and Photoshop. He also learnt how to make models using 3D printers and laser cutting equipment in the College’s Fabrication Studio.

His final project involved constructing models for spaces in Singapore represented by 1 cm by 1 cm squares on a map, which was then showcased in an exhibition. “The course bridged the gap between learning theoretical knowledge in the classroom and acquiring practical skills,” said Elson.

Having benefitted from the hands-on training provided by the urban visualisation course, Elson, who is co-founder of the Fashion Society at Yale-NUS, decided to initiate a co-curricular course on sewing to bring this experience to his fellow schoolmates. The course arose from the desire to have a strong foundation for sewing. Elson began planning the workshops towards the end of the summer break, coordinating with the Arts & Media team of the College’s Educational Resources & Technology (ERT) Department, which supports students and faculty to learn, teach, conduct research, and express themselves creatively.

In the first workshop held on 20 August, workshop participants learnt to sew reversible book covers using a sewing machine. For the subsequent workshop, students took their learning outside of campus and visited Hwa Seng Textiles, a local tailor with over 40 years of experience. They learnt to make pocket squares, with hand rolled hems and cross stitching, as well as practical knowledge like how climate affect the quality of wool and woven cloth.

“How do you sew a uniform seam? How do you hide the seams? What is a mother-of-pearl button and buffalo-horn button? They were introduced to all of those concepts in a three-hour session,” explained Mr Gurjeet Singh, Associate Director of Arts & Media who provided support to Elson in developing the workshops. Elson hopes to incorporate more skill-based workshops in the future, so that students can be trained to operate a sewing machine comfortably.

Elson said the benefits of practice-based learning are in the “do while you learn” approach, in contrast to the theories in traditional classrooms. The College’s Arts & Media team supports curricular and co-curricular activities at the College, such as creating a ‘maker space’ for students who want to do tinkering for course projects or individual pursuits, or providing consultations on how to put together a production. Mr Singh’s goal for his team is to develop the ‘individual, group, and cohort voice’ of Yale-NUS students.

For example, several students who had no prior experience but wanted to study film, started out by stitching together video clips they filmed on their smartphone cameras. “As they worked with us, we started introducing them to DSLR cameras, and as they get more exposure to professional equipment, they become more sophisticated in how they approach their projects,” said Mr Singh.

During the initial stages, the students created thematically similar films when starting to use the new equipment and techniques. Now, Mr Singh notes that the films shown at each Film Society screening have become unique as students are starting to develop a distinct style – a transition from the student group’s voice to the individual’s voice.

“What we do is not just the teaching of skills. It is also about extending inquiry beyond what they thought they knew,” said Mr Singh. After the initial exposure and excursion, the Arts & Media team guides students as they take ownership of their learning and experiences, and ultimately creating works of their own.

“Eventually, we want them leading the workshops, and operating the machines confidently,” he said.

Mr Singh believes that there should be less of a focus on goals and obtaining immediate results, and more practice-based engagement. At Yale-NUS, students have the opportunity to be exposed to different types of techniques and among these include practice-based learning. Practice-based programming at the College ranges from curricular courses such as creative music composition and drawing methods, to co-curricular workshops such as dance demonstrations and writing classes.
Week 7 experiences across Singapore and beyond

Text by Daryl Yang | Image by Yasunari Watanabe

Earlier this month, Yale-NUS freshmen were dispersed across Singapore and the world for the College’s flagship Week 7 experience.

Facilitated by the Centre for International & Professional Experience (CIPE), the Week 7 Learning Across Boundaries (LAB) is a faculty-generated initiative. This one-week trip, which takes place in the middle of the first semester, seeks to encourage faculty collaboration across disciplines and introduces first-year students to the research specialties of Yale-NUS faculty.

This year’s Week 7 LAB comprised 13 project teams, including four in Singapore.

One of these projects was “Stories of Ourselves”. Jointly developed by Assistant Professor of Humanities Robin Zheng and Assistant Professor of Social Sciences Christopher Asplund, students visited different sites around Singapore, where they explored the different meanings and functions of memory and its relationship with identity.

For Anthea Chua who has always been interested in the lesser-known narratives of Singapore, the visits to different places in Singapore were particularly useful as they offered an opportunity to engage with the concepts of memory, identity and narratives both on an individual level as well as on a collective, or national level.

“The most memorable experience for me was walking around Bukit Brown Cemetery with dedicated volunteers who conducted weekly tours on a wide variety of topics such as the flora and fauna of the cemetery, the architectural features of the tombs, and the pioneers buried in the cemetery,” she shared.

Another Singapore-based project was “Far Food Nation: Food Sustainability in Singapore” where students visited places like Open Farm Community (OFC), Quan Fa Organic Farm, Edible Garden City @ Hort Park and Sky Greens Vertical Farm to learn about food sustainability. The project concluded in a cooking session held at OFC, where students worked with OFC staff to create six food items with locally sourced ingredients.

Some students began their Week 7 experience with a flight out of Singapore. One of them is Rahul Naidu who was in Cape Town, South Africa, for his project titled “Apartheid in South Africa: Understanding the Psychological and Political Mechanisms of Prejudice and Discrimination”. The project was jointly conceived by Assistant Professor Paul A. O’Keefe and Assistant Professor Chin-Hao Huang from the Social Sciences Division.

“The main aim of our Week 7 was to study the psychological underpinnings of prejudice and discrimination, and the political institutions that legitimise and preserve them,” Rahul shared. To get an in-depth understanding of these issues, students travelled to South Africa to learn more about the history and impact of Apartheid.

The trip spanned both Cape Town and Johannesburg, two major sites of the Apartheid.

“We studied the Apartheid by visiting various historic sites and museums in Johannesburg and Cape Town. This included Robben Island, where Nelson Mandela spent 18 of his 27 years in prison, as well as the various sites around Soweto including the homes of Nelson Mandela,” said Rahul.

During the trip, students were introduced to the intersections between psychology and political science. For Rahul, this was most poignant in examining how the apartheid regime was borne out of colonialism.

“One of the psychological themes we learnt was the self-fulfilling prophecy. This means that when an individual is subjected to prejudice, they’ll unconsciously mould themselves to fit that same prejudicial conception, thus confirming the belief. We clearly saw how when the colonial powers invaded these lands, the way they perceived the natives to be inferior and constricted the natives’ potential, and that perpetuated the concept of OneHealth, the notion that animals, humans and the environment are all interconnected and that affecting one would result in a change in the other two.”

One of the central philosophical concepts of the trip was anthropocentrism, which treats human beings as the central or most significant entities in the world. For Leon, he was struck by the realisation of how pervasive this idea is in our everyday life.

“Most people don’t realise how anthropocentrism permeates every aspect of their decision-making until it’s pointed out to them. For instance, we tend to feel entitled when it comes to resource usage and even though we know that we need to protect and conserve it, ultimately we’re still doing it for our own ends,” he shared.

Week 7 culminated in a symposium held on 1 October on campus. Each project team presented their key takeaways through creative methods to share their Week 7 experiences with their peers and family.
Many at Yale-NUS College call the little island of Singapore their home, including those who hail from far away.

Singapore is seen as a perfect haven – a combination of urbanisation and multicultural traditions.

This was particularly true for a young boy named Tizian Schenker, who called Singapore home for several years.

Originally from Switzerland, Singapore was where Tizian probably spent the “happiest time of his life”, according to his family.

In memory of this, Tizian’s family has established the Tizian Schenker Scholarship, named after this outstanding youth who passed away on 1 January 2016, just three days shy of his 21st birthday.

The family also intends to continue supporting the scholarship indefinitely. Such support from the community will help ensure that deserving students have the opportunity of a Yale-NUS education in spite of financial constraints.

The scholarship was launched this academic year with the support of friends of the family and has already benefited its first recipient.

From a young age, Tizian was excited to learn about and explore his environment. A bright child, he eagerly picked up writing in Chinese, his favourite subject in pre-school, and was also extremely keen on outdoor sports.

He also honed other skills such as drawing, drums and piano, but he was particularly interested in using technology.

Along with his brother Constantin, Tizian was passionate about exploring the Internet from a young age, eventually becoming particularly proficient in locating and organising web content in an efficient and systematic manner.

Tizian was known to be warm and friendly, easily charming others with his smile.

To his parents, however, his best characteristics were his kind heart and firm commitment to ethics.

“He was uncompromisingly upright and honest and thoroughly ethical,” said his family.

“He was a good sport, always ready to help and had a great sense of humour. He had a very friendly and generous nature.”

With wisdom beyond his years and an open, inquiring spirit, Tizian’s curiosity eventually led him to learn about the programme at Yale-NUS College, a new liberal arts and sciences college in Singapore, and he had shared with his family his aspirations to enroll in Yale-NUS.

The College features a unique holistic model of education that integrates the best of Western and Asian intellectual traditions through a broad-based, multidisciplinary curriculum.

“Tizian studied the online information about Yale-NUS and liked the concept, which he thought was exceptional; it was one of the few schools that really interested him,” his family explained.

Each year, a student will be awarded the merit-based Tizian Schenker Scholarship.

Through the scholarship, Tizian’s parents and his brother Constantin hope that other similarly eager learners will benefit from Yale-NUS’ unique pedagogy, and this will help further his legacy of curiosity.