



## New Dean of Educational Resources & Technology

Text by Melissa Wang | Image by Alyson Rozells

In December 2016, Yale-NUS College welcomed Mr Ronald Milne, Yale-NUS' first Dean of Educational Resources & Technology (ERT).

In his role, Dean Milne helms the College's largest staff department, providing leadership to four key areas: the Library, Educational Technology, Arts & Media, and Information Technology (IT) Services.

Dean Milne will lead the team in providing for the College's ERT needs, and aims to proactively develop more robust capabilities to further support learning, teaching and research within the College in all four areas of ERT.

With over 30 years of experience working in research libraries, Dean Milne's wide-ranging career has seen a particular interest in collaboration across universities and in the development of library collections.

His extensive library experience will help him to better understand the needs and priorities of a young college like Yale-NUS, and find the best solutions that ensure the College community is well supported in its work.

Executive Vice President (Academic Affairs) Tan Tai

Yong said: "Ronald has deep and extensive experiences managing large libraries and complex organisations. With his knowledge, experience and network, he will be able to help build the College's library resources and also link us up with major collections in Singapore and beyond."

and the various arts and performance spaces. This, he hopes, would enable the College community to make full use of the rich resources available on campus.

While he has separate goals for each of the four key ERT areas, synergy across them will also be one of Dean

co-curricular activities in the College."

As the work of ERT affects all aspects of the College, Professor Tan highlighted that Dean Milne will play a major role in shaping policies and operational processes.

This is Dean Milne's second stint in Singapore. Earlier in 2016, he was based here for six months, when he took up the George Lyndon Hicks Fellowship at the National Library, Singapore where he worked on a framework for the development of the Library's Singapore and Southeast Asia collections.

Dean Milne said: "It was not only a special library experience for me, but also introduced me to Singapore, and to the history and cultures of the city-state and the region."

Originally from Scotland and having lived the past seven years in New Zealand, Dean Milne is a lover of the outdoors and has scaled many mountains, including the highest peaks in New Zealand. His spirit of adventure also led him to try working on an oil-rig for six months, prior to his career in research libraries. No stranger to (extreme) changes in environment, Dean Milne is looking forward to a fulfilling experience at Yale-NUS.

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While he hopes to rapidly build up a Library with more extensive collections to do this, Dean Milne also highlighted the wealth of resources that the College is able to tap on.

"We have to be sensible about collection development and take account of resources, both electronic and print that are already provided, in particular, by NUS libraries," he noted.

Dean Milne will also be looking into developing a robust IT infrastructure within the College. Other priorities include optimising the use of technology in existing College facilities, including classrooms

Milne's most immediate priorities. "I intend to provide leadership and vision for the whole of ERT, such that we work cohesively as a team. Good communication, top down, bottom up and across the team is essential," Dean Milne surmised.

Professor Tan is confident that Dean Milne will be able to do this, and attested to his strategic vision and leadership, as well as considerable managerial skills.

"He is a good bridge-builder, and will be working closely with faculty, staff students to optimise the use of our resources to support education, research and



## Yale-NUS student accepted as Schwarzman Scholar

Text by Clare Isabel Ee

A member of the inaugural Yale-NUS Class of 2017, Mollie Saltskog, has been accepted to the second class of Schwarzman Scholars, a highly competitive master's degree programme at Tsinghua University, Beijing, China. She will enrol for the course in August 2017, after completing her undergraduate education at Yale-NUS College.

"It feels incredible. Incredible and unreal, at the same time," shared Mollie, who was one of the 129 scholars selected through a rigorous and thorough process.

"I am beyond excited to work on further developing my leadership skills. I want to better understand how I can make use of my leadership skills in order to empower and inspire other people to join in an effort, and how I can keep working on cultivating my leadership skills throughout the rest of my life, both in a professional and personal setting."

While she did not originally plan to pursue postgraduate education immediately after graduating from Yale-NUS, Mollie was elated to discover the Schwarzman Scholars programme which "ticked every box" on her wishlist for a master's degree.

A fully funded, year-long master's programme founded by Blackstone Co-Founder, Mr Stephen A Schwarzman, the Schwarzman Scholars programme is designed to meet the challenges of the 21st century and beyond.

Enrolled scholars will live on the state-of-the-art Schwarzman College at Tsinghua University for a year of immersion in an international community of thinkers, innovators and senior leaders in business, politics and society.

The programme aims to give Schwarzman Scholars the chance to develop their leadership skills and professional networks while pursuing a degree in Public Policy, Economics and Business, or International Studies.

The selective admissions process includes a round of interviews with a distinguished group of interviewers, including Jared Cohen, Founder and President of Jigsaw, Alphabet Inc.; David Petraeus, Former Director of the CIA; Brian Mulroney, Former Prime Minister of Canada; Jeremy Wright, Attorney General for England and Wales; among many others.

Dr Trisha Craig, Yale-NUS College's Dean of International & Professional Experience said: "We are thrilled that the Schwarzman Scholars programme has selected a member of our first graduating class for admission. Like those who become Schwarzman scholars, Yale-NUS students are internationally-minded, adaptable and engaged. We expect the very talented members of our inaugural cohort, such as Mollie, to

be leading global voices in their chosen fields in years to come. The Schwarzman Scholarship, by providing intellectual rigour, extraordinary real world experiences and deep mentoring, offers students an incredible opportunity as they forge that path."

Mollie, who hails from Sweden, is currently majoring in Global Affairs at Yale-NUS, and will be studying International Studies at Tsinghua University.

"Mollie's drive, her commitment to leadership, and her academic intellect make for an interesting combination of talent," commented Dr Nancy Gleason, Senior Lecturer of Social Sciences and Acting Head of Studies for the Global Affairs major. In 2015, Dr Gleason guided Mollie on an Independent Reading and Research module, investigating female roles in al-Qaeda affiliates – for which she was awarded the Emirates NBD Middle East Essay Prize.

It was during her time at Yale-NUS College that Mollie realised she was interested to work on transnational issues and challenges on a global scale.

Assistant Professor of Social Sciences Chin-Hao Huang, who taught Mollie in the Chinese Foreign Policy module last semester, has observed her "astute passion for her research", having mastered and applied theoretical concepts into her

research and tested them for their logical consistency with empirical observations in the ongoing conflicts in Syria and the Middle East.

In her upcoming final semester at Yale-NUS, Mollie will focus on completing her capstone project, which seeks to evaluate Jabhat al-Nusra's operational capabilities post-al-Qaeda affiliation.

"Studying Global Affairs at Yale-NUS in Singapore is a unique opportunity to prepare for the discontinuities of our changing world while being at the main crossroads of Asia," explained Dr Gleason. "We have developed a curriculum that teaches students to problem-solve, applying interdisciplinary tools from across the social sciences amongst an exceptional international body of students."

As part of the inaugural batch of Yale-NUS students, Mollie says her time at Yale-NUS has been "transformative". "First, to live and learn in a global environment has broadened my perspectives and changed how I view the world. Second, pursuing a liberal arts education, which is not commonplace in Sweden, made me discover what I am truly passionate about. Third, being part of the inaugural class and helping to build a new community of learning has allowed both my entrepreneurial spirit and leadership skills to flourish," Mollie explained.



## Win at Modern Aging Short Film Contest

Text by Clare Isabel Ee and Daryl Yang | Images provided by Modern Aging 2016

When Rachel Quek (Class of 2018; photo above, left) returns to her home in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, she lives with her extended family – this includes her grandmother, granduncle, uncle and aunt, who are all aged 59 and above.

Recently, she made a short film that focused on a day in the life of her uncle, who is home-bound after he lost consciousness and collapsed some months ago, and her grandmother, whose mobility is restricted.

Her winning film, titled *For my dearest kuku and amah*, clinched the first prize and S\$5,000 in the Modern Aging Short Film Contest.

“What I learnt about aging from my uncle and grandmother is that growing old can get really lonely as you are physically less mobile

uncle and listening to him talk about his life for two hours. I think it was very special to me because he was willing to open up so much to me despite us being like strangers

for so many years.”

Rachel shared that she was “very happy” as it was her first time winning a short film contest and will give her the opportunity to create more films with the prize money.

Next semester, Rachel will

beautiful place in Singapore”.

Janel Ang (Class of 2017), who won second place and S\$2,000 with her film *Balek Kampung*, made a documentary on her

and closer to the end of her life, and I sometimes wish I’d recorded more,” she added.

“It is a sobering realisation as a filmmaker and a young person that no matter how

**“It is a sobering realisation as a filmmaker and a young person that no matter how much we rely on our devices to help us remember, our memories are constantly slipping through our fingers like delicate sand.”**

grandmother whose memory is weakening with age.

“I didn’t really know how to cope with her waning memory other than laughing together with her and spending as much time with her as possible – and then I realised I could use my

much we rely on our devices to help us remember, our memories are constantly slipping through our fingers like delicate sand.”

Janel is currently attending a training course on animation therapy in the United Kingdom, and plans to explore using the skills learnt as a therapeutic practice in future.

“I’ve found art to provide an incredible release, where I am able to express things that go beyond the verbal or written.”

The contest was held as part of Modern Aging Singapore, a business accelerator initiative that educates and inspires entrepreneurs to create businesses that serve the needs of the aged and their caregivers.

A team from NUS received the top award of S\$50,000 for their invention of a smart insole solution for diabetic foot ulcers.



and it is difficult to connect with the younger generation,” Rachel shared.

“The most memorable moment in producing this film is sitting down with my

embark on a documentary film project in Pulau Ubin as a National Geographic Young Explorer, “to share the stories of people who dedicate their whole lives to protect this

camera to record them,” Janel said.

“Every time I re-watch my film, my heart grows heavy thinking that she is closer



## Filling gaps in existing research on social issues

Text by Wen Kin Lim | Image provided by Wayne Xu

Stacey Yuen (Class of 2017) was working on what seemed like just another college assignment for her Human Rights class. However, while searching for information on the 2013 Little India Riots, the topic of her paper, Stacey was struck by how challenging it was to find information on how foreign workers are managed in Singapore. This made her increasingly intrigued by migrant rights in Singapore and the levels of rights awareness among migrant domestic workers.

To explore her interest in migrant rights, Stacey took up the 2016 Summer Independent Research Programme offered by the Centre for International & Professional Experience (CIPE).

“For my project I aimed to quantify and study the levels of rights awareness among migrant domestic workers in Singapore to understand if any differences in levels of awareness exist across nationality lines, age, education, and other demographic variables,” Stacey shared.

The programme gives students the opportunity to craft and propose a project for the summer with guidance from Yale-NUS faculty members. Assistant Professor of Social Sciences Anju Paul, guided Stacey through her project and linked her up with several professional contacts from other universities

and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to further her research.

Stacey was not the only student who strove to learn more about pressing social issues that she witnessed. Employing what they learned through research to understand these social issues better, students at Yale-NUS can choose to do their own projects or contribute to a larger project led by a faculty member or another professional. For example, Ruchika Goel (Class of 2019) collaborated with Assistant Professor of Social Sciences Parashar Kulkarni, to lay the foundations of his research on gender rights of women in India and their relationship to religious belief and social status from 1871-1971. To do so, Ruchika stayed in New Delhi, India over the summer of 2016 to collect data from the National Archives of India. Explaining her work, Ruchika said: “The research will overlay patterns of occupational inclinations and land ownership by women in many districts of colonial India, and through observing the relationship between these features, across ethnic groups, we will be able to understand better the status of women at that time.”

The low faculty-to-student ratio of about 1:8 at Yale-NUS means that students have more opportunities to work closely with faculty members, which increases their chances to participate in research

work that will be published.

Another such student is Avery Simmons (Class of 2019), who collaborated with Assistant Professor of Social Sciences Chin-Hao Huang to study the Chinese Coast Guard (CCG). Being extremely interested in the international relations of East and Southeast Asia, Avery wanted to learn more about the issue of disputed islands in the South China Sea and how China is deploying the CCG to assert territorial claims.

As the CCG’s work is relatively unknown, Dr Huang and Avery’s research involved creating a database of all reported CCG activity since its establishment in 2013. Avery said: “Our research paper fills a gap in existing literature. No one else has done such a comprehensive study of what the Chinese Coast Guard actually does.” Avery and Dr Huang are in the process of co-authoring a paper that they are submitting to an academic journal for publication.

CIPE also offers a Summer Social Science Research Programme, through which Celine Khoo (Class of 2019) chose to explore psychology in communication and technology, specifically how mobile and online dating applications affect the perceptions of partners. Celine’s interest in the topic was sparked by a conversation with her friend about communication and

technology, which she later brought up with her faculty supervisor, Assistant Professor Jean Liu, who encouraged her to pursue it as a research project. “One of the things I like about Yale-NUS is that it gives students the opportunities to do research with a professor, which are harder to find at other larger universities,” said Celine. Celine’s research, which she is continuing throughout the year, has complemented her Psychology course, helping consolidate her learning as she is able to apply what she learned in research to her class.

Several students, such as Dave Lim (Class of 2019) and Cheryl Cosslett (Class of 2018), also took part in Assistant Professor of Social Sciences Guillem Riambau-Armet’s project, gathering information from residents living in Housing Development Board (HDB) flats in Singapore.

One of the takeaways for Cheryl was how research often “starts with tedious and uncertain processes”. “I think the experience was also valuable to prepare me for when I similarly need to do research, either for my capstone, or for my career in the future. This experience wasn’t just about data collection; I gained a lot of insight on designing survey questions and also on the processes and bureaucracy of research.”



## American Politics & 2016 Presidential Election course

Text by Yasunari Watanabe | Image by Haroun Chahed

The 2016 presidential election in the United States proved to be tumultuous, unpredictable and relevant for people around the world.

Over the past semester, 18 students from Yale-NUS took a course on American Politics and the 2016 Presidential Election, taught by Dr Catherine Sanger, Lecturer, Social Sciences (Global Affairs) and Vice Rector of Cendana Residential College.

The course provided students with a broad overview of the institutions and ideologies of the American political system, in the context of the presidential election.

“My challenge in developing this course was to create one that would have the breadth of an introductory survey course, but enough depth that a student interested in American politics could get a deeper toehold into the field,” said Dr Sanger. The first half of the course focused on the founding ideology and primary institutions. The second half examined the presidency, particularly the elections. Students learned how parties have become polarised to understand the contentious nature of this year’s election.

Lionel Kuek (Class of 2019) decided to take the course following a Yale Summer Session in Washington, D.C. After visiting the Smithsonian museums and attending a courtroom lecture in the Supreme Court, Lionel was

motivated to learn about the American political system in depth. “When this course became available, I was really excited,” he said.

The real-time nature of the election posed some challenges for Dr Sanger in designing the course. “The syllabus was developed before we knew who the candidates would be,” she said, adding that the class had to be flexible and adaptive to the election news. She added that students were expected to stay up to date with the news in their own time. “Students really had to take a

lot of ownership and initiative to educate themselves about the election.”

voices in the class meant that students had their unique takes on the course, based on the politics of the student’s home country. “When you have a classroom filled with people from different political systems, it’s going to fundamentally enrich your understanding of the material,” said Dr Sanger.

For example, Regina recalled interesting perspectives from her British classmates who compared Britain’s parliamentary democracy with the American presidential democracy, as well as related topics like

background. “It speaks to how consequential the decisions that the American people make for their leadership are for the rest of the world,” said Dr Sanger. “It also speaks well to the global engagement we have here at Yale-NUS.”

Throughout the semester, students maintained a blog, which they populated with both original analysis and links to scholarly and non-scholarly sources. “The role of the media was a consistent theme throughout the course,” said Dr Sanger, who emphasised the importance of not just understanding the events, but also “how the sources we use influence the way we think”.

Regina said the course taught her the importance of institutional design. She found that the Singaporean political system emphasises education and encourages qualified individuals to go into public service and become politicians. American politics, however, have a system of checking power against power. “It’s not about who goes into these institutions, but once they go into these institutions, they have curbs on how they can exercise their power,” she said.

“Our students are curious and attentive and feel invested in the state of the world,” said Dr Sanger. “We aim to equip them with the skills, knowledge and compassion to do something about it.”

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The course was centred on discussions of the readings and election news. Regina Marie Lee (Class of 2018) noted that many of the students did not have enough knowledge at the beginning of the course to apply the information, but by half-term, the class had covered the main details, and discussions were a lot more productive.

The international array of

Brexit. “The insights that the participants brought were quite varied,” she said.

During the presidential and vice presidential debate screenings, as well as the final election viewing on 9 November, the sharing of perspectives was even more interesting. Led by Helena Auerswald (Class of 2019), the course participants were responsible for organising these screenings which attracted a wide spectrum of students and faculty, across different nationalities and



## Career services at Yale-NUS

Text by Jeannie Tay | Image by Yasunari Watanabe

In six months, Yale-NUS College will be graduating its first class of students. While the College prepares for its first graduation event in 2017, the Career Services team at the Centre for International & Professional Experience (CIPE) has been steadily intensifying its programmes, especially over the past year, to provide career-related support to the upper-level classes.

The career services available for students include advising, internships, and providing resources such as career information and toolkits, workshops and events such as talks by companies and recruitment fairs.

In addition to the existing programmes, CIPE's Director of Career Services Norvin Ng (right in photo) and his team also rolled out new initiatives in 2016 such as the Self-Sourced Internships, in-class career sessions for specific majors for the graduating class, on-campus recruitment events, and a Students' LookBook. The LookBook is a database that provides an overview of the inaugural class in a more personalised format than a traditional resume, this will be shared with selected employers and partners to showcase the diversity of interests and skills of Yale-NUS students.

On internships, Mr Ng explained these comprised internships that are coordinated by CIPE as well as those sourced by students.

Yale-NUS students have displayed a wide range of interests, so CIPE has piloted the Self-Sourced Internships programme, where students source for their own internships with support from CIPE.

For self-sourced internships, students are encouraged to do a self-assessment and identify job functions that would be a good fit for them. Thereafter, they undertake their own search for these opportunities, and CIPE would step in to provide support through funding and reviewing of application materials. Recognising the importance of empowering students in the process of researching, exploring and planning their internships, CIPE is looking to enlarge the number of places in the Self-Sourced Internships programme next year.

Mr Ng said: "Besides coordinating internships for students, we also encourage them to source for their own internships. We believe in putting students in the driver's seat and letting them take the initiative to research on what they want to do and identify opportunities that are aligned with their interests." He added that exploration and taking ownership of one's career are important life skills and they tie back to the career skills that CIPE is trying to equip the students with through its various programmes.

In 2016, CIPE also hosted a number of industry professionals for talks and career events on campus. These events provide students with different perspectives from a variety of industries, and insights into the professional world. Some of the organisations include Walt Disney International, Kimberly-Clark, Bank of America Merrill Lynch, Citibank, Microsoft, Channel NewsAsia, and more.

With the impending graduation of the pioneer class of Yale-NUS, the CIPE career services team has started a series of in-class career information sessions for the seniors, specially tailored to their majors. Through these sessions, CIPE keeps students informed of the career opportunities relevant for their respective majors and works with them to identify their interest areas and provides support for those who want to enhance their job hunting skills.

Christopher Tee, a Literature major from the pioneer class, found the new initiatives innovative, especially the in-class career services talks because the graduating seniors had to practise introducing themselves in a networking setting. In addition, the CIPE advisor also provided helpful advice on the different industries that they could look at.

"The breadth of industries covered both the 'traditional'

and 'non-traditional' ones because CIPE will match our skillset to job openings. He also talked us through the next steps that CIPE was going to take, and how we could use the centre in the months to come," added Christopher.

Elaborating on how Yale-NUS tailors its career services to students, Mr Ng said: "Leveraging on our small class size, we are able to customise and tailor our support for freshmen to seniors, and take into consideration their diverse interests and needs. Furthermore, as students have different starting points, our ability to offer regular 1-1 sessions will allow our students explore their interests, equipping them with skills such as resume writing, or supporting them in practical areas such as internship placements."

In Yale-NUS, every student is assigned a CIPE counsellor who will work with the student to craft an individualised portfolio of learning opportunities. CIPE counsellors will provide support for navigating the available opportunities, help identify areas for improvement and connect students with the best matches for maximising their growth. Over the next few months, CIPE will continue its employers' outreach efforts and prepare the Class of 2018 for their summer internships.



## Yale-NUS Writers' Centre hosts literary luminaries

Text by Daryl Yang | Image provided by Writers' Centre

On 11 November 2016, the Yale-NUS Writers' Centre hosted two eminent writers, Vijay Seshadri and Nicole Walker, for the final instalment in this semester's reading series.

The two literary luminaries were invited as guests of the Writers' Centre Reading Series, and each held a writing workshop with a small group of Yale-NUS students while here.

Mr Seshadri held a poetry workshop while Dr Walker focused on non-fiction writing.

"It was an immense honour to attend a workshop by someone who won the Pulitzer Prize for poetry," shared Paul Jerusalem (Class of 2019), one of the students who attended Mr Seshadri's poetry workshop.

"He had such an immense wealth of knowledge regarding the craft, and so much to share about every poem we went through, to the point the session overran. I was really intrigued by his attention to detail and his intuition, and I certainly learnt a lot at the workshop."

Mr Vijay Seshadri is the winner of the 2014 Pulitzer Prize for Poetry for his poetry collection, *3 Sections*.

He teaches poetry and non-fiction writing at Sarah Lawrence College, where he is the Michele Tolela Myers Chair, and has also won the James Laughlin Award for his

poetry collection, *The Long Meadow*.

One of the takeaways that Paul took from the workshop was an affirmation about poetry he had realised previously.

"Contrary to popular belief, poetry isn't just about feeling and intuition. A lot of logic and thinking goes into play as you're making sure your tools (i.e. grammar) are sharp, and that your metaphors are sound."

As a young poet, Paul's poetry has been published by the *Quarterly Literary Review Singapore* and *SingPoWriMo* so far.

He will also be published later this year in *Likhaan: The Journal of Contemporary Philippine Literature*.

Another student who attended the Mr Seshadri's workshop is Ritika Biswa (Class of 2018).

A major in Literature, she creatively heads *Storybook Me*, a non-profit publishing house and will also be interning with Penguin/Random House India in early 2017.

"His workshop yielded a sharper criticism of the sort I think we need more of at Yale-NUS. He was highly critical, but kindly so. We could do more with such incisive and direct comments," Ritika shared on what she enjoyed from the workshop.

Dr Nicole Walker is the author of the nonfiction book, *Quench Your Thirst with Salt*, which won the Zone 3 creative non-fiction prize.

She has also published a collection of poems, *This Noisy Egg*, and co-edited a collection of essays, *Bending Genre: Essays on Nonfiction*. A graduate of the University of Utah's doctoral programme, Dr Walker is currently Assistant Professor of Poetry and Creative Nonfiction at Northern Arizona University.

Apart from organising such events, the Writers' Centre provides regular individual writing consultations and group workshops on rhetorical skills, revision strategies, and the conventions of format and structure appropriate to different genres.

Previous guests of the Reading Series include Edmund Wee, CEO of Epigram Books and Divya Victor, winner of the Bob Kaufman Award.

The Yale-NUS Writers' Centre, helmed by Professor of Humanities Robin Hemley, Director of the Writing Programme, was very pleased with the strong interest in the workshops and reading as students and faculty filled the sessions.

He was especially delighted to see staff members such as Dean of Faculty Steven Bernasek attending the reading as well, attesting to the interdisciplinary spirit of

Yale-NUS College.

In addition to such readings with literary luminaries, the Writers' Centre also organises a reading for all the writing classes at the end of the semester.

"There were five different courses represented at the reading [this past semester]. Our creative writing courses are quite popular; we often have waiting lists," Professor Hemley noted on the student interest in such classes.

"Someday, I'd love to host a writing conference here as well, and I wish we could hire someone who could teach playwriting on a regular basis," Professor Hemley said, expanding on future plans for the Writers' Centre.

While he has "a long wish list", he says that he has been "really grateful to the administration for being so supportive of the Writers' Centre".

"I think we're different from any writing centre anywhere in the world in that we're a hybrid of a traditional academic writing centre and a literary centre. This combination really seems to fit the ethos of Yale-NUS," he added, referring to the creativity and innovation that is encouraged and flourishes at the College.



## First Agrarian and Food Studies mini-conference

Text by Melissa Wang

On 10 November, Yale-NUS College hosted the first Agrarian and Food Studies Mini-Conference in Singapore, a day-long interdisciplinary event that brought together academics from all over Singapore who do research and teaching on agrarian and food studies in Asia.

Assistant Professor of Social Sciences (Environmental Studies) Marvin Montefrio (*photo below*) organised and convened the event as he found that there was a gap in platforms for scholars interested in this topic to discuss and share about their work, and open up avenues for future collaborations, particularly with an interdisciplinary approach.

“Previously, there was no established network for agrarian scholars to meet and collaborate in research. This surprised me because Southeast Asia is still largely an agricultural society, and should therefore have more agrarian scholars who are able to come together to discuss the topic,” Dr Montefrio shared.

The first of its kind, the mini-conference saw 11 speakers from various disciplines, including Environmental Studies, Sociology, Anthropology, Human Geography, and History.

Speakers and participants came from various institutions across Singapore, including the National University of Singapore (NUS), Nanyang Technological University of

Singapore (NTU), Singapore Management University and Singapore University of Technology and Design.

Professor Jonathan Rigg from the Department of Geography at NUS, one of the speakers at the conference, concurred with Dr Montefrio’s thoughts about the importance of the topic, particularly in the Southeast Asian region.

“Generally, agrarian questions

about food such as food security, food diversity, and food safety all bear upon our understandings of how humans have made choices in the past to care for (or about) the fertility of the land and sea,” said Assistant Professor of History Lisa Onaga, from NTU School of Humanities and Social Sciences, one of the conference speakers.

Dr Onaga added: “It is exciting to have been part of a

step towards building bridges between subject areas and institutions”.

Dr Montefrio shared that moving forward, the format of the mini-conference could go both ways – either expand to become a more large-scale and formal conference, or take on a more intimate setting, where academics can have more in-depth conversations on more specific topics within agrarian and food studies.



receive quite a low profile here because Singapore has moved on from such matters,” he noted. “However, in the wider region they are of much more central importance.”

The conference focused on a multidisciplinary approach, and scholars from various disciplines weighed in to present their research on the topic through different lens.

“Our contemporary concerns

conference that recognises the value of studying the history of food and agriculture in a broad sense in order to promote both imaginative and deep thinking on a topic that impacts everyone in the world.”

Professor Rigg found that the conference was useful as a platform for agrarian and food scholars across different institutions across Singapore to come together and was “a first

Regardless of the format it might take, Dr Montefrio has definite plans for this conference to be held again next year.

The conference has thus far paved the way for several collaborations both in terms of research and teaching, and he is hopeful that more will continue to stem from the inaugural conference.



## Music as passion and research

Text by Clare Isabel Ee | Image by Alistair Ryan

By day, Steve Ferzacca holds two titles: Visiting Associate Professor of Social Sciences and Acting Head of Studies for Anthropology at Yale-NUS College.

By night (and on weekends) he holds two more – member of the legendary 1960s Singapore band, The Straydogs, and songwriter and member of rhythm and blues band, Blues 77.

It began in the unlikeliest of places. When Professor Ferzacca arrived in Singapore five years ago for a ten-month stint at the Asia Research Institute (ARI) of the National University of Singapore (NUS), he had a clear priority: to find out where the guitar shops were located in town.

His search led him down to the basement of Peninsula Shopping Centre, where he came across a shop called Guitar 77 and met the store's co-owner, Mr Lim Kiang, who is a founding member of The Straydogs. One impromptu blues jamming session later and Professor Ferzacca found himself one step closer to becoming the newest member of The Straydogs, and to the formation of Blues 77.

Five years on and with many jamming sessions under his belt, Professor Ferzacca is also on his way to finishing *Sonic City: Making Rock Music and Urban Life in Singapore*, a book based on his research of The Straydogs and their community of fellow musicians, family and friends.

"I am exploring the making of music as the making of urban life, following the past four years of ethnographic work that includes conventional methods of participant-observation with performance, with an attention to writing sound in order to understand the social life of urban space," he wrote of his research in an article for ARI News, Issue 37, in March 2016.

"I'm an ethnographer and a storyteller, and I'm trying to tell the story of a community rather than come up with research findings," Professor Ferzacca explained in an interview.

"I realised I was getting a different vantage point on life in Singapore, different from the stereotypical life and history," he said. "Their lifestyles are out of tune with what Singapore holds up as the mainstream and they may not be productive in a way that fits into a capitalist world – but they are productive in their own ways of making music."

Slated to be reviewed for publishing in 2017 by NUS Press, *Sonic City* is motivated by academic and personal interests. Professor Ferzacca performs regularly with both bands, which functions as both fun and fieldwork, even travelling overseas to perform with The Straydogs. They have shared their music with hundreds of fans from Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam, to

Malacca and Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia, and at the Esplanade in Singapore.

More recently, in celebration of The Straydogs' 50th anniversary, Professor Ferzacca and the original 1960s line-up of the band played a gig to more than 350 people at Hood Bar and Café on 4 December 2016, alongside Blues 77 and other local bands such as Pests Infested. "It's a way of being in the world that I find really open; it's a way of knowing the world through sound," Professor Ferzacca said. "I'm calling this a sonic ethnography, where sound is at the very centre of how these people organise their lives and come to understand the world."

As a songwriter for Blues 77, Professor Ferzacca has written many songs inspired by daily living in Singapore. For instance, 'Shiok Lah!' was written about his first time experiencing kaya toast, a local breakfast staple, while 'On the Doghouse Floor' describes Professor Ferzacca's sudden fainting episode while the band was jamming.

"I passed out, and of course they all freaked out and called an ambulance, so we wrote the song to describe the whole event – and this has now become one of our favourite songs," recounted the 62-year-old with hearty laughter.

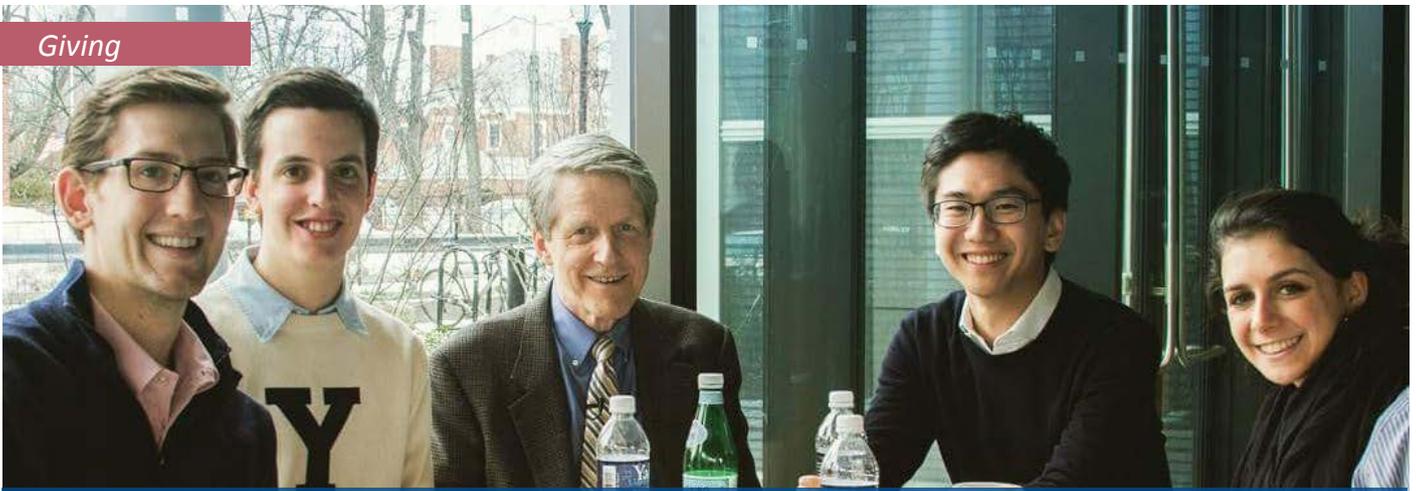
"I do much of the writing [for Blues 77], inspired by my

relationships with Kiang and James [Tan, another member of The Straydogs]. As I write, I'm always talking with them as I work out chord changes and et cetera."

Professor Ferzacca has had two stints at ARI as Visiting Senior Research Fellow of their Asian Urbanisms Cluster, and is an Associate Professor of Anthropology at the University of Lethbridge in Alberta, Canada.

More widely known as a medical anthropologist, his previous research has focused on urban medicine and chronic disease in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, where he conducted fieldwork over 17 years. It was in Yogyakarta where he first forayed into sonic ethnography, when he encountered kroncong music in a *kampung* (village) and explored the social aspect of making music. Similarly, *Sonic City* is a project that is both about music and social ties, of using songs to understand and bond within a community.

"Writing the songs and writing about the centrality of sound in a community as a way of knowing the world – that's what I hope the book will be... It's beyond a researcher-subject relationship, it has become friendships that are pretty solid," Professor Ferzacca said. "They have each other's back. That's not something that I've always experienced that I find very interesting in this community," he added.



## Dispatch from abroad

Text by Callysta Thony & Joella Lopes-Lam | Image provided by Alex Pont

Semester abroad programmes are enriching and highly rewarding experiences for students at Yale-NUS, who return with stories and lessons to share with their peers back in Singapore. These trips provide valuable opportunities for students to pursue their academic interests while being exposed to different cultures and college experiences. With the help of various philanthropic gifts to the College, a number of students were able to participate in a wide variety of semester abroad programmes this year.

Brian Huang (Class of 2017), who flew to England to study mathematics at New College, Oxford University, was one of those hoping for a different college experience abroad. "I wanted to experience learning at one of the strongest institutions for mathematics in the world and to learn how best to manage a highly independent education during my time at Oxford," he said, referring to the larger class size he experienced at Oxford, as compared to small seminar-styled classes that Yale-NUS offers.

Despite being challenged by the unfamiliar learning environment, Brian reflected that the experience, which included engaging category theory tutorials and opportunities to attend a number of talks at the Mathematical Institute, gave him greater exposure to mathematics and increased his confidence as a mathematics

major. However, Yale-NUS was not far from his mind as he missed the intimacy and vibrancy of the Yale-NUS community as well as its style of education. "While going through Oxford's system was a valuable experience, I still do enjoy working with friends on homework and having constant opportunities to chat with professors," he explained.

Meanwhile, inspired by a Learning Across Boundaries (LAB) trip organised by the Centre for International & Professional Experience (CIPE) in her sophomore year, history major Regina Hong (Class of 2017) spent her semester abroad in Japan participating in the Kyoto Consortium for Japanese Studies (KCJS) programme administered by Columbia University.

Eager to improve her mastery of the Japanese language during her time there, Regina took courses in Japanese, history, as well as migrations to and from Japan. She also volunteered at the Kyoto Institute of Technology Museum under KCJS' co-curricular programme, giving her a glimpse of corporate culture in Japan. These experiences enabled her to significantly improve her Japanese writing and speaking abilities.

Outside of the classroom, Regina enjoyed various memorable and meaningful cultural experiences, such as viewing the annual sakura light up at Kiyomizu-dera Temple

during the height of the cherry blossom season.

Over in the US, Yale University played host to many Yale-NUS students, who relished the experience of meeting industry leaders and enrolling in courses that proved to be both exciting and challenging. "I was learning about monetary policy from William Nordhaus, who chaired the Boston Federal Reserve during the financial crisis. Additionally, the opportunity to enrol in an MBA course in competitive strategy was an amazing and very challenging experience, which made me realise that I want to pursue an MBA in the future," said economics major Alex Pont (Class of 2018).

May Tay (Class of 2017), who studied at the Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies (F&ES), shared that her semester abroad enabled her to experience environmental studies beyond the classroom and better evaluate her post-graduation options. "A few serendipitous conversations with classmates at Yale F&ES led to opportunities to help organise two conferences – one on green careers in science targeted at high school girls, and another on sustainable development in Latin America and the Caribbean," she said. "As a rising senior, I was also starting to think about life after college, and taking classes at Yale F&ES really illuminated for me the myriad environmental professions one can embark on. After my semester abroad, I became clearer about wanting

to attend graduate school and pursue an environmental career."

However, like many other students on semester abroad programmes, Fatima Diaf (Class of 2018), who pursued Global Affairs during her semester abroad at Yale, also missed the close-knit Yale-NUS community back home. "Getting used to a large institution was challenging at first, especially when it came to large lecture classes since I was used to seminar style classes. However, learning to navigate this change has been an important take-away from my time at Yale. And while I appreciated being part of a large student body, I missed the feeling of community and familiarity that comes with our college," she said.

"As I follow our students' pathways from applying for semester abroad programmes to completing them and then sharing their experiences back in college, it is heartening to witness their personal development," said Goh Fang Wei, Programme Manager for International Programmes at CIPE.

"Our students have pursued their interests, which range from learning Chinese intensively in one semester to taking studio-intensive arts coursework. Gaining such valuable exposure overseas also gives them fresh insights into their passions and prepares them for their future careers."