



## Renowned Academic Presents Lecture on Animal Intelligence

Text by Daryl Yang | Images by Aleithia Low and Yasunari Watanabe

On 6 March 2017, renowned primatologist Professor Frans de Waal gave a public lecture as part of the President's Speaker Series. Professor de Waal is a Dutch-American ethologist and biologist known for his work on the behaviour and social intelligence of primates.

Atlanta, Georgia. He is also Distinguished Professor at Utrecht University. In 2007, he was selected by *Time* as one of The Worlds' 100 Most Influential People Today, and in 2011 by *Discover* as among 47 (All-Time) Great Minds of Science.

previously thought to be possible only by humans. From elephants displaying mirror self-recognition to capuchin monkeys protesting against unfairness, Professor de Waal recounted at least 25 claims of cognitions unique to humans that have since been refuted by mounting

Ultimately, Professor de Waal believes that a more accurate understanding of animal cognition lies in our ability to recognise its diversity and range. Instead of measuring animal intelligence using a linear scale, he suggests that a more useful approach is to understand animal cognitions as "a bush that branches out in a multitude of ways". For example, humans have long neglected the study of the bat's ability to use echolocation to locate its insect prey as we do not share the same cognition.



Titled '*Are We Smart Enough to Know How Smart Animals Are?*', Professor de Waal discussed how research findings increasingly support the idea that animals are capable of types of intelligence previously deemed unique to humans. His book with the same title was a New York Times bestseller in 2016.

Professor de Waal is the C. H. Candler Professor in the Psychology Department of Emory University and Director of the Living Links Center at the Yerkes National Primate Research Center, in

In his introduction, President Pericles Lewis noted the prolific writing that Professor de Waal had done, having published 13 books thus far. Many have been international bestsellers and these include *Peacemaking Among Primates*, which was awarded the Los Angeles Times Book Award in 1989, *The Bonobo and the Atheist* (2013), *The Age of Empathy* (2009) and *Primates & Philosophers* (2006).

During his lecture, Professor de Waal showed many video recordings of animals completing tasks that were

scientific findings.

For Adlin Zainal (Class of 2017), who attended the lecture because it combined the two things – animals and psychology – she was most passionate about, seeing the animals in action left her with an "incredibly profound appreciation for animals and how complex and intelligent they actually are".

She shared: "You hear about it in theory, but to see how they are able to recognise themselves in mirrors or display cooperative behaviour is just incredible."

Professor de Waal is also the inaugural speaker for the Big Think, a new annual event aimed at bringing the liberal arts experience to the community. This comprises a series of public talks and small-group discussions for the Yale-NUS community and members of the public to engage with and be inspired by thought-provoking insights from a prominent and influential scholar.

As part of the Big Think, Dr. de Waal also spoke at a panel discussion titled 'Being Human: Ethics, Religion, and our Ancestry' with Yap Kim Hao Professor of Comparative Religious Studies Gavin Flood and Senior Lecturer John van Wyhe, a National University of Singapore historian of science.



## Inaugural Cohort Head Abroad for Post Graduate Studies

Text by Daryl Yang | Image by Weave for Yale-NUS College

While Joan Danielle Ongchoco (Class of 2017, above) will be graduating from Yale-NUS College later this year with the rest of the inaugural class, her connection with Yale-NUS will continue as she heads to Yale University to pursue a PhD in Cognitive Psychology.

“I was choosing between Yale and two other amazing universities, and it was a really tricky decision. In the end, it was actually a speech delivered by President Lewis during his final town hall that made me so proud to be part of this Yale, NUS and Yale-NUS College community that made me decide to go to Yale. I look forward to being back in New Haven as a proud Yale-NUS College graduate,” she shared on her decision to return to one of Yale-NUS College’s parent institutions.

Like Joan, many other Yale-NUS seniors have been offered post-graduate studies programmes in top universities across the globe. For instance, Rohan Naidu (Class of 2017) has received offers from Yale University and at least five others, including Caltech, Harvard, Yale, UC Berkeley, UC Santa Cruz, and the University of Arizona to pursue a PhD in Astronomy or Astrophysics.

“All these universities have produced leaders in the field, and boast some of the best facilities to study astronomy on the planet,” he shared.

“I visited some schools over spring break to figure out where I fit best, but returned even more confused and wanting to enrol at all of them,” Rohan remarked. He eventually made the decision to enrol at Harvard.

Similarly, Clarissa Leong (Class of 2017) has received offers to pursue a Masters in Public Policy (MPP) from several universities but has yet to make a decision. A recipient of the Singapore Government Scholarship (Open) from the Public Service Commission, Clarissa will return to serve in the Singapore Civil Service after she completes her Masters programme.

“My decision to pursue an MPP cannot be separated from my interest in policy making in Singapore as one way to make positive change in the country. This interest was reaffirmed through a class I took in Yale-NUS called ‘Key Debates in Urban Planning and Policy’. I really enjoyed the process of identifying the root of the issues, understanding the values underlying each solution and implications of different policy approaches,” she reflected.

“Yale-NUS has trained me to conduct research, synthesise evidence and construct arguments. I hope to develop a more specialised set of skills through an MPP that includes quantitative policy analysis, impact assessment and writing policy memos to be

better equipped to enter the civil service of Singapore.”

For Rohan, his decision to pursue a PhD in the field of Astronomy can also be traced to a class he had taken at Yale-NUS College.

“I am certain I would have ended up a Literature major if not for Professor Charles Bailyn,” he reflected. Professor Bailyn was the inaugural Dean of Faculty at Yale-NUS College and served as a Professor of Science (Astronomy and Physics) during his term with the College. He is also the A. Bartlett Giamatti Professor of Astronomy and Physics at Yale University.

“I took a seminar on black holes in my second semester with Professor Bailyn, and that was my first real introduction to astronomy. The following summer, I accompanied him to an observatory up in the Chilean mountains, an experience which was very formative.”

Joan noted that the education she received at Yale-NUS College has prepared her well in pursuing her PhD. “My four years at Yale-NUS College have been building towards this decision. I had the opportunity to start conducting research as early as my first year. Here, I also realised just how much I love teaching — it is at Yale-NUS and teaching dance to my classmates that I found this passion,” she shared.

When asked what advice she would give to other Yale-NUS students, Joan shared a quote that has guided her through high school: “Snowmen fall from heaven unassembled”.

“On one hand, things fall into their proper place in due time. We can only ever do what we can with what we have and what we’ve been given. On the other hand, it it’s really up to us to put the snowmen all together. And this making of snowmen from snow—this is the best part.”

For Rohan, pursuing a PhD was also related to being immersed in an engaging community of learning. “I think wanting to go to graduate school comes naturally from being surrounded by such passionate faculty, who are daily reminders of how satisfying a life dedicated to creating new knowledge might be,” he said.

Clarissa shared that of her undergraduate experience at Yale-NUS College, the opportunity to live and grow with an engaging and driven community is what she will miss most.

“I will really miss the people I’ve grown and learnt with through these four years. It’s been such a special opportunity to live and grow with a talented, inspirational bunch of people who are always game to talk about anything and everything at any time of the day,” she shared.





## Seniors Head to Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies

Text by Daryl Yang | Image by Aleithia Low

As the pioneer batch of Yale-NUS students is set to graduate in May 2017, some of them will head to one of the College's parent institutions to continue their studies.

Chua Wan Ping and Xie Yihao (both Class of 2017) have been selected as the first two students to attend the Concurrent Degree Programme (CDP) with Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies (Yale F&ES).

A five-year programme designed for students who wish to pursue careers in an environmental field, the programme provides Yale-NUS students with accelerated graduate training in environmental science, management and policy.

Both Wan Ping and Yihao are Environmental Studies majors at Yale-NUS College and are no strangers to Yale F&ES, having both taken graduate classes there during their semester abroad at Yale.

According to Wan Ping, it was her experience at Yale F&ES that solidified her interest in continuing her environmental education there.

"After I experienced the quality of the classes, the access to world environmental leaders who were there as speakers and visitors, and the great energy from Kroon Hall, I was pretty sure I would be sending in an application the following year," she shared.

Wan Ping has been actively involved in the sustainability community, having co-founded I'dECO, the Yale-NUS sustainability movement, and organised the inaugural the Sustainable Solutions Network (SSN). Taking up this graduate programme seemed like an appropriate next step.

"As my career goals started becoming more solidified, it seemed like the CDP would fit in well in giving me the skills that are relevant to my career plans and to build SSN. It would also give me an international perspective on sustainability issues through my connections with professors and classmates there," she shared.

Interestingly, it was the very first introductory course to Environmental Studies that both Wan Ping and Yihao took that incubated their interests in this field.

"Introduction to Environmental Studies was one of the best courses I have taken and was what really drew me into the major. The subsequent courses that I took from different professors were all inspiring and exposed to me how multifaceted environmental issues are," Yihao reflected.

Similarly, it was the interdisciplinary side that appealed to Wan Ping: "Environmental Studies is at once psychology, ecology, sociology, chemistry. After taking these classes, I cannot see it any way else now."

As part of their graduation requirements, Yale-NUS students are required to complete a year-long capstone project. As Yihao's interests lie in the intersection between health and the environment, he decided to explore the issue of mosquito abundance in Singapore's public housing estates, built by the Housing Development Board (HDB).

"Apart from my interests, I also wanted the capstone to involve both qualitative and quantitative analysis methodologies. This capstone project enabled me to achieve both expectations and fits into my academic endeavour nicely."

As Wan Ping's interests were in food and agriculture, her capstone focused on a multi-stakeholder sustainable palm oil certification body called the Roundtable of Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO).

For instance, she previously attended a Learning Across Boundaries (LAB) trip to Sarawak, Malaysia where she learnt and lived with indigenous tribes protesting against palm oil and hydro-dam development on their native land. The trip was co-organised by the Yale-NUS Centre for International & Professional Experience (CIPE) and the Claremont Colleges.

"After we returned to Singapore, we met with several NGOs and sustainability representatives from Wilmar, the biggest

plantation owners in Indonesia and Malaysia. That trip left a deep impression on me, both academically and emotionally," she shared.

In addition, she also did an internship with Grow Asia, an NGO founded by the World Economic Forum and ASEAN, where she was assigned a project on the palm oil industry in facilitating multi-stakeholder agriculture partnerships.

When asked what they were most looking forward to, both Yihao and Wan Ping expectedly were concerned about the environment. While Yihao noted that "New Haven is a beautiful city in Spring and Fall", there was one thing Wan Ping was not looking forward to – winter on the US east coast.

What she is looking forward to, however, is being a student again. "I look forward to taking what I've learnt in the workplace to the classroom, and examining the ways academia can enable business and non-profit practices," she shared.

Yihao and Wan Ping have received the Bataua Scholarship and H L Kwee Scholarship respectively, which will go towards covering their final year of study at Yale University.



## First Graduating Class Embark on Capstone Projects

Text by Daryl Yang | Image by Aleithia Low

Before members of the Class of 2017 could count down to their graduation from Yale-NUS College, they counted down to the deadline for their capstone projects.

A unique aspect of the Yale-NUS curriculum is the original capstone project which all students undertake with the guidance of Yale-NUS faculty and other subject matter experts. In completing their capstones, students hone the disciplinary and general intellectual skills necessary to conceive, design and execute a year-long, self-directed project within their major. Each student is mentored by a faculty supervisor.

Associate Dean of Faculty Khoo Hoon Eng shared that through the capstone projects, students can bring together the varied strands of their learning from different modes of inquiry in the Common Curriculum and focused ones in their major.

For Aleithia Low (Class of 2017), an Arts & Humanities major, her experiences throughout college led her to embark on writing a creative non-fiction work on Vietnam.

Aleithia decided to make use of the capstone to reflect on her experiences that began in summer of her freshman year. She was awarded a Social Impact Fellowship by the Centre of International & Professional Experience (CIPE) to teach photography at a children's home.

"There were many questions I had left unresolved upon my last time leaving Hanoi, after completing two months teaching photography there. How does memory work? How do I remember a place? Do I have a right to claim some sort of belonging, as a foreigner, to a city I feel an affinity with? I also constantly wondered what had become of the children I worked with, if they would learn enough to move beyond the village and lead a self-sufficient life," she shared.

Aleithia subsequently returned to the same village every year and she also visited other parts of Vietnam, such as Ho Chi Minh and Dong Nai, so that she could see first-hand how the Vietnam War affected the country in different ways.

Mathematical, Computational and Statistical Sciences major Dylan Ho (Class of 2017) decided to embark on a unique project, quite different from that of his peers.

"My capstone is a little ambitious, and it is quite different from others. While many seniors wrote papers or did research and investigations, I created a new augmented reality game for Yale-NUS students to play within the Yale-NUS campus."

Called 'Yale-NUS GO', Dylan's project drew inspiration from an augmented reality game that was released recently: Pokemon GO. According to Dylan, while the game was

hugely popular when it was first released, there was a significant decrease in users within weeks due to game design flaws.

"Pokemon GO had millions of downloads the day it came out and immediately topped the charts in Google Play Store and Apple App Store worldwide. While its influence was massive, 80% of its users stopped playing the game within weeks. Why is this? I think Pokemon Go made many game design mistakes that made it un-fun."

Hence for his capstone, he decided to explore the question: "Can I make a game to address these mistakes and make a better game?"

One key aspect is the multiplayer feature of the game. "Pokemon GO markets itself as a multiplayer game but you cannot actually do anything with your friends in the game. One thing I wanted Yale-NUS GO to be able to do was to go on adventures with your friends to foster a greater sense of community on campus."

An avid gamer, Dylan explained how his game will work: "Let's say there's an invasion at Elm College. I can invite you to create a party and we get a mission to go to Elm College to fight that invasion. When we complete the mission together, we get rewards. Hence, there's a better sense of community and a better multiplayer aspect to the game." More

than just a capstone, Dylan hoped that his game will also become a part of the Yale-NUS community-building experience.

As an Anthropology major, Maggie Schumann (Class of 2017) studied the implementation of Singapore's 2012 regulation of rest days for migrant domestic workers.

According to Maggie's research, the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) regulated domestic workers' rest days for the first time in 2012, when it entitled domestic workers to a weekly day off but included an option to negotiate away rest days for extra financial compensation. However, according to previous quantitative research that examined over 20,000 bio-data, it was found that many domestic workers, particularly first-timers from Indonesia and Myanmar, do not utilise the weekly rest days.

"Through a total of 40 qualitative interviews with domestic workers, employers, and agents, my capstone explains why many domestic workers do not request or obtain a weekly day off and concludes by suggesting changes to the regulation so that all domestic workers have meaningful access to a weekly day off," Maggie explained.



## Dr Stuart Strange on Spirit Mediumship and Anthropology

Text by Poon Yee Suan | Image by Aleithia Low

Magic, mediums and mystics – themes found in the hit film *Doctor Strange* (2016) and in Yale-NUS College's very own Dr Strange's research and teaching. Like the film produced by Marvel Studios, Assistant Professor of Social Sciences (Anthropology) Stuart E Strange's work explores issues around the material and the spiritual world. Unlike his namesake however, a fictional sorcerer who uses magic to transcend the material plane, Dr Strange studies the rituals of spirit mediumship as a way to understand cultures and social relations.

Dr Strange is a self-described political anthropologist who focuses on religion. He graduated from the University of Michigan in 2016 with a PhD in Anthropology and joined Yale-NUS College in the same year.

He has conducted fieldwork in Suriname, Sri Lanka, Ghana and Haiti, and is conversant in six languages. In Suriname, his comparative research on spirit mediumship focused on the observation and analysis of the rituals and the techniques used by spirit mediums to produce knowledge. This fieldwork has spawned journal articles, book chapters in edited volumes, and a book project. "My research on spirit mediumship has increasingly come to focus around questions of self-control and self-knowledge," he shared.

His book project will explore these themes in detail. "My book is largely about self-knowledge, and I will be examining spirit mediumship and how it is successful to the degree that it challenges people's sense of conviction that they know who they are."

Dr Strange's fieldwork and research provide a rich background for his teaching at Yale-NUS, where he conducts a module on Ethnography, drawing on his extensive fieldwork experiences to teach ethnographic methods. He has also taught a module on Religion, Ritual and Magic, and will be teaching a module on the Anthropology of Dreams and Sleep in the next academic year. The latter two modules overlap with his research interests in religion and its rituals. Thus, his research experiences have proved indispensable in providing his students with an in-depth education in Anthropology.

To encourage an understanding of Anthropology with as much breadth as depth, Dr Strange invites guest lecturers to speak to his classes in person or through Skype, by tapping on networks of friends who are fellow anthropologists. Some of these guest lecturers include a linguistic anthropologist who conducts fieldwork in the Andes and a Singaporean anthropologist conducting fieldwork in East Timor.

He shared many reasons for inviting guest lecturers to speak to his students. "These anthropologists work in very different ways, and such sessions introduce students to the different traditions and techniques of anthropology. Each of the guest lecturers provides a different sense about what is possible in ethnography. Ethnography is profoundly open, and it's about learning how to be responsive specifically to the demands of others."

In addition, bringing in guest lecturers helps to encourage students in their studies and research, and makes ethnographic research accessible.

As he explains, "When you're trying to figure out what ethnography is, you often start by reading a completed ethnographic monograph, which is very daunting. Thus, particularly with teaching the Ethnography class, it's often useful for the students hear from people who are further along in the task but are not totally finished with their projects – people who are still actively in the process of figuring it out themselves."

His expertise on the anthropology of religion is also invaluable for seniors when they conduct their capstone projects. He is currently supervising two students working on capstone projects that explore religious phenomena in Singapore.

Dr Strange describes Singapore as a fascinating place, and a great fit for his research interests. "For the kinds of things I'm interested in, it's kind of miraculous that I'm here", he said warmly. He enthused about the rich diversity of religions and rituals in Singapore, including the temple and shrines on Kusu Island, the Thai amulet shops in Golden Mile Complex, Hindu festivals and Chinese spirit medium processions, all of which he has visited or observed here. His interest in Chinese religions and spirit mediums has led him to embark on research on Chinese spirit mediums in Singapore, conducting fieldwork by observing medium processions.

In this, he sees parallels across cultures in his comparative research on spirit mediumship.

"I'm really struck by how similar the practices are between spirit mediums from different cultures, particularly the Afro-Surinamese spirit mediums I worked with, and the Chinese spirit mediums here in Singapore, even though there is no historical connection between the two."

This similarity, he explains, may stem from how spirit mediumship revolves around issues of self-control and self-knowledge.



## Yale-NUS Students Plan Activities for Migrant Workers

Text by Julian Low | Images provided by MWAW Committee

Despite the rainy weather on 12 March 2017, there was no dampening the spirits of the students, staff and migrant workers who had gathered at Fort Canning Green. Games, a photo-booth and a light yoga session were just some of the activities that kept everyone entertained, creating a carnival atmosphere. It was a marvellous way to kick-start the 2017 edition of Migrant Workers Awareness Week (MWAW).

MWAW is an annual week-long event, organised by National University of Singapore (NUS) Law and Yale-NUS students, that aims to raise awareness about the various issues faced by different groups of migrant workers in Singapore through a myriad of planned activities.

Some of this year's activities included field trips to some

Goodman Art Centre for the public to colour as well as the intricate set-up of a simulated migrant worker dormitory at the NUS Central Library.

Walter Yeo (Class of 2018) who heads the MWAW committee said, "These art initiatives allowed us to have a powerful and emotionally engaging medium to reach out to more members of the public. We also organised a students' tea session at Tembusu College as a pre-MWAW event to increase publicity and call for volunteers. Thanks to the encouraging feedback that we received last year from our peers and the public, we were able to conceptualise MWAW this year better."

Undoubtedly, the main attraction was the Dialogue in the Dark sessions held at the Yale-NUS Black Box

last year, this year's edition proved to be no exception with almost all sessions 'sold-out'.

Tan Yan Ru (Class of 2019) was one of many who wanted to hear differing perspectives from people that she seldom met. "This session helped me strip away many of the inhibitions that people have when talking about migrant worker issues. I also learnt a lot from hearing about experiences similar to my own being told from another perspective," she said.

Heng Jia Min (Class of 2020) echoed her sentiments and shared, "My key takeaway from the session was that advocating for migrant workers is not merely a matter of righting wrong. It is allowing people with complex choices and reasons a platform to air their concerns

room' theme game could be considered as it might be an interesting yet educative way of learning about migrant workers in Singapore," she quipped.

With such positive reviews, it is little surprise that the MWAW committee has already started preparations for next year's edition. "We might plan for more pre-MWAW events to strengthen our publicity efforts." Walter said.

---

"Advocating for migrant workers is not merely a matter of righting wrong. It is allowing people with complex choices and reasons a platform to air their concerns and also to lend them support whenever they need it"

---

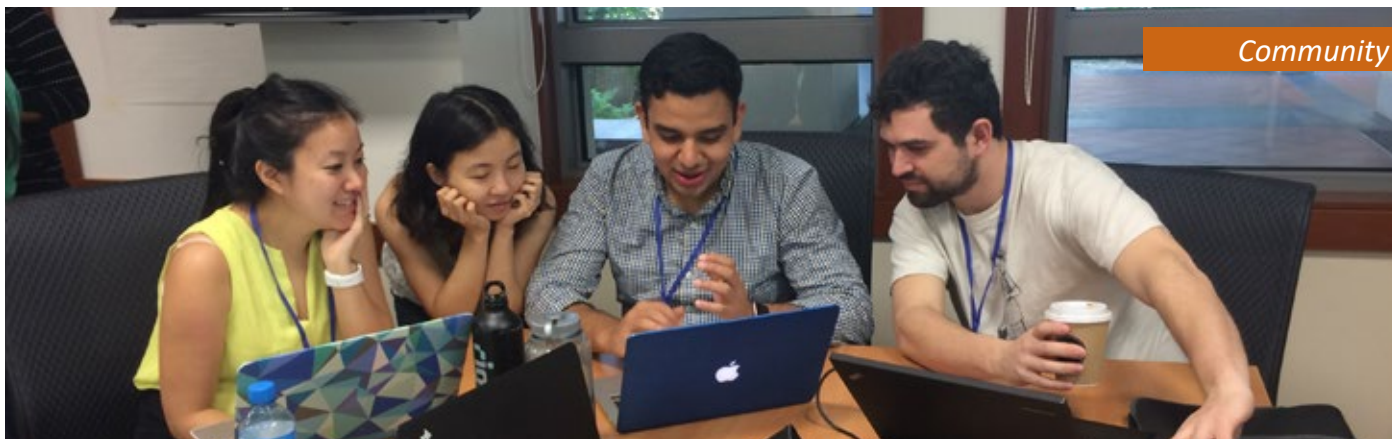


migrant workers dormitories at Mandai and Tuas as well as a lunch tag cum English and Legal lesson for migrant workers. Amongst the art initiatives were a community art mural placed at the

Theatre. The event allowed students and migrant workers to engage in deep, meaningful and intimate conversations in either single or group sessions in the dark. A popular concept that was very well received

and also to lend them support whenever they need it." She added that she was very impressed by the amount of effort put in for the activities held this year. "For next year, perhaps an 'escape





## Yale-NUS Students Hold First 'Data 1.0' Hackathon on Campus

Text by Julian Low | Images provided by Chandler Catherine Beyer

On 18 March 2017, more than 50 participants from Yale-NUS took part in the first student led hackathon held at Yale-NUS College. Swarnima Sircar and Ross Rauber (both from the Class of 2019) were the key drivers of this event, which was aimed to improve data literacy and create a platform where students could develop visualisations and tools in a collaborative and empowering environment. They were assisted by Chandler Beyer, Isabel Fang, and Michael Smith (all from the class of 2020).

Most hackathons are tailored towards experts in their relevant fields and organised on a large scale. To enable beginners or those who have a keen interest in coding or programming to have a taste of hackathons, the students decided to organise a student hackathon at the College.

"Many students, including myself, are interested in data science but do not know where to start. We wanted to provide an outlet for people to learn about one of the fastest growing and most exciting technical fields. To do that, Data 1.0 was designed for beginners and emphasised growth and learning above other outcomes. We also wanted to keep it small to make sure that our participants could get as much attention from our facilitators as they needed," shared Swarnima. Ross added, "We thought that it was worth a shot as it is



very rare to have a hackathon for novices in Singapore."

In the days before the event, introductory workshops were held for participants to practise their skills on datasets using a statistical computing and graphics software called 'R'. These were taught by student researchers and research associates from the Yale Data-Driven Environmental Solutions Group (Data-Driven Yale), an interdisciplinary and international group of researchers, scientists, programmers and visual designers based at Yale University's School of Forestry and Environmental Studies and Yale-NUS College.

"The team from Data-Driven Yale had been invited by Assistant Professor Angel Hsu to come to the College and assist in her research. Their time and expertise was extremely valuable in providing our participants with some of the skills necessary to work with the datasets during the hackathon," Swarnima said.

On the day itself, participants

formed teams and worked on different datasets. Thereafter, they were tasked to use these datasets to carry out various assignments under a stipulated timeframe. They investigated various topics that ranged from the implications of college major choices to the kinds of damage caused by different forms of natural disasters. Apart from the Data Driven Yale team headed by Dr Angel Hsu from the Division of Social Sciences, two engineers from Google Asia Pacific, Ms Florbela Lei and Mr Mohit Kanwal lent their assistance. Mr Clayton Miller, an engineer who runs a data analysis tutorial website called Data Driven Buildings, helped in providing datasets to the participants.

After assessing and packaging the data, they then presented their findings to an interesting panel of judges that consisted of student organisers Swarnima and Ross; Datascience.sg co-founder Mr Koo Ping Shung; Associate Professor Alex Cook from the Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health and

his 9-year old son Uri. "We deliberately asked Dr Cook's son to be a judge to ensure that each team would have presentations that even a child could understand! It also drove home the point that data visualisation should be accessible to all of ages," Swarnima said.

The presentations proved to be both entertaining and creative, which caused the judges to have a hard time deliberating on the winning entries. In the end, one of the teams, who called themselves "*Jiak Peng Liao*", a colloquial phrase meaning 'Time to eat!', won the best presentation award for devising the fastest route to all of Singapore's 137 hawker centres. Using the skills learnt in the introductory workshops, they discussed various methods in which hawker centre density and cuisine varied across neighbourhoods with different incomes and demographics.

Ross and Swarnima hope that they can continue to foster a local community with a passion for data analysis and coding so that richer discussions can continue to take place.

A comprehensive coverage of the event can be found at: <http://datadriven.yale.edu/climate/data-1-0-an-introduction-to-hackathons/>



## Building a Legacy of Senior Class Giving

Text by Baoyun Chelsea Cheo | Image by Aleithia Low

As Yale-NUS College prepares for the graduation of its first class this May, the Class of 2017 united for their final parting gift to the College community in February during the College's inaugural Senior Class Gift (SCG) Campaign. Led by a committee of seven students from the Class of 2017, the SCG is an initiative that encourages the graduating class to give towards a worthy cause and in doing so, leave a legacy behind by building a tradition of giving in the Yale-NUS student community. This year, all gifts through this initiative were channelled towards financial aid—enabling future generations of needy Yale-NUS students to fully benefit from their time spent at the College, without having to worry about financial obligations. Through their efforts, the students from the Class of 2017 raised S\$4,557, with a 91% participation rate from the class.

“The SCG is about fostering and committing to a spirit of participation and support,” said Zachary Mahon (Class of 2017), a member of the inaugural SCG Committee. “As we become alumni and spread across the globe, the ways in which we can be involved in the Yale-NUS community will change. Having all of us coming together to give back is about acknowledging and accepting this transition. We chose Yale-NUS because we wanted to build a world-class institution

that thrives for decades and centuries to come. It is clear to all of us that this does not stop, even after we graduate. The SCG is about re-signalling our commitment to this life-long project.”

Spurred by the senior class' efforts to come together, various generous donors stepped forward to offer different challenges to the students to further maximise the impact of their gift.

“It's been very encouraging to see the Class of 2017 coming together to pioneer and establish new traditions, especially for a worthy cause like financial aid,” said Yale-NUS President Pericles Lewis. “With this in mind, the senior leadership team proposed to match their gifts dollar for dollar, so as to further the impact that their gifts will have on students who would benefit from receiving financial aid.”

Mrs Doris Sohmen-Pao, former Executive Vice President (Institutional Affairs) at Yale-NUS also stepped forward with a challenge gift, with the condition that the Class achieved a 90% participation rate. A ‘Class of 2017 Award’ would then be created and named after the inaugural senior class. Each year, the graduating class will nominate one of their peers to receive this award, which recognises him/her for making a difference in and contributing towards the Yale-NUS

community.

“I'm very heartened that our class banded together to reach our participation goal,” added Natalie Tan (Class of 2017). “Many students were very personally committed to promoting this cause.”

Saga College Rector Sarah Weiss celebrated her Residential College's achievement together with her students. “Such a high level of participation for the SCG means much more than the simple dollar amount contributed by the Class of 2017. Their participation represents one more foundational act in the building of Yale-NUS College. Our inaugural class' participation rate of 91% is nothing short of extraordinary. Because of their efforts, other classes will strive to match that level of giving so that we can grow our endowment, which will ensure the College's future and enable its iconic programmes to flourish.”

For Diamanta Vania Lavi (Class of 2017), the SCG was a way for her to give back to the College. Citing how being a recipient of the Alan Chan Study Award helped her fully immerse herself in the Yale-NUS experience, she shared, “Instead of worrying about spending my free time working, I was able to contribute to the Yale-NUS community by cooking in the butteries or serving in the Student Government.”

The campaign was also a way for the senior class to come together and remember their four years together as a class. The SCG committee members put together various initiatives for the campaign, including a well-received publicity video showcasing the senior class' various achievements, moments and memories, which ranged from the birth of an a cappella group, The Wallets, to celebrating fond moments in the science lab or the dance studio and learning at a Rector's Tea setting. In addition, a message board on the theme “Before I Graduate” was set up near Café Agora for seniors to pen down their messages and hopes for the future beyond graduation.

Sharing his experience serving in the SCG Committee, Chia Teck Yuke (Class of 2017) cited the process itself as his main takeaway.

“Beyond reaching our goal and setting a high initial bar of participation for subsequent classes, what stood out about the SCG was the process, where individuals came forward of their own volition to share what they have received from the College and why they were giving back to it,” he reflected.

More information about the Senior Class Gift can be found at: <http://scg2017.common.yale-nus.edu.sg/>