A bona-fide bond with students

They are highly acclaimed in their respective industries and active in their fields, but these educators are putting students first.

▶ **Professor Venky Shannkararaman**, the first academic outside the USA to be presented the Award for Outstanding Contribution to IS Education by the elite Association for Information Systems (AIS).

Singapore Management University (SMU)'s faculty list reads like a who's-who of the professions they represent. Not only are these subject experts acclaimed for their work off campus, their academic careers have been equally luminous.

Take Professor Venky Shankararaman, Associate Dean of the School of Information Systems (SIS), whose 25 years in the IT industry have seen him gather accolade after accolade. His career roles range from consultant for government and industry to award-winning researcher and teacher. Or Associate Professor Goh Yihan, youngest recipient of the Singapore Academy of Law's Singapore Law Merit Award and renowned legal expert, who will be taking on a new role as Dean of SMU's School of Law from July 2017. Both have committed to sharing their experiences and knowledge with the next generation of leaders, by bringing their expertise to the classroom.

Enabling a new generation

"Students are at the heart of what we do here at the Singapore Management University," says Associate Professor Goh. It's a mind-set that has clinched him six teaching awards in his eight-year career, including 2016's SMU School of Law Most Outstanding Teacher Award. As co-editor of Singapore Law: 50 Years in the Making— the first study of its kind on the development of Singapore Law—Prof Goh has a wealth of legal wisdom to share. As he reaches out to understand his students' concerns and aspirations, the incoming dean also inspires them to become responsible architects in the development of Singapore law. He tells his students, "The law is supposed to make the world a better place."

The board member of the Singapore Institute of Legal Education and the Singapore Judicial College makes it a point to incorporate true-life examples into his lessons—"for law is intensely practical, and has real-life consequences for very real people," he emphasises.

Like Prof Goh, Prof Venky wants his students to create value for society through the work they do. He is a keen proponent of SMU's multi-disciplinary initiative, SMU-X, which he sees as giving SMU students a headstart when it comes to making an impact on industry. Through this new pedagogy, students benefit from projects that have faculty members mentoring them in their collaborations with corporate, non-profit and government-sector organisations.

Developing the X-factor in students

SMU President, Professor Arnoud De Meyer, elaborates on the course: "X stands for many things: eXperimentation, eXperiential, eXcitement, cross-interaction, collaboration and the unknown." In that vein, Prof Venky has been busy leading the revamp of the current Information Systems (IS) major, while also priming a new Smart-City Management and Technology (SMT) major for launch. It is designed to equip SMU students with not just technological solution skills but also social science and management skills. The aim, to enable them as innovative future policy-makers who will be needed as the government pushes for Singapore to become a smart city.

> **Students are at the heart of what we do here in SMU... The true reward in teaching is making a difference in our students' learning journeys.**
>
> Associate Professor
> Goh Yihan

"By designing new content, I get the chance to help the wider professional and academic community," he says. Another course is in the works—the Digital Business: Technologies and Transformation course, which explores the principles and practices that lead to successful digital transformation.

Prof Venky lays claim to being the first academic outside the USA to be presented the Award for Outstanding Contribution to IS Education by the elite Association for Information Systems (AIS). He has also received the SAP Outstanding Academic Award for Southeast Asia.

Beyond the honours, his enthusiasm for what he does is contagious. His students consistently impress their industry partners, and have picked up the soft skills they need to succeed at work, whether it is developing the right work attitude, learning to interact with co-workers and management, or adapting to different ways of thinking.

▶ **Associate Professor Goh Yihan**, the youngest recipient of the Singapore Academy of Law's Singapore Law Merit Award and youngest Dean to head SMU's School of Law.

Creating pathways to success

On the other end of the campus, Prof Goh is planning to undertake "a bold and progressive curriculum review". "Over and beyond legal perspectives, students should also be able to approach topics from other perspectives outside of law, such as in a societal or commercial context. The future of the legal profession promises multiple new opportunities to students, and we need to anticipate and provide these opportunities to our students," he says.

Both professors insist that students be the masters of their own learning. It is, as Prof Venky says, how they will "thrive in the work environment of the foreseeable future." In the meantime, they are standing by their students. "The true reward in teaching," Prof Goh declares, "is making a difference in the students' learning journeys."

▶ **Prof Venky** engaging his students during one of SMU's distinctive small classes.