

**SMU Academic Year Opening Ceremony
Friday, 17th of August 2018, School of Law**

Nomination of Professor John R. Niland for an SMU Honorary Degree

(Delivered by SMU Chairman Ho Kwon Ping at the Academic Year of Opening Ceremony)



Professor John Rodney Niland is an eminent Australian academic, a pioneer trustee of Singapore Management University, and a deeply respected mentor for many of us involved in the building of this university, including myself. I can legitimately call him my mentor because as a fellow Dragon-year baby, he is exactly 12 years or an entire zodiac cycle older than me.

John obtained a Bachelor and Master of Commerce from the University of New South Wales (UNSW) and his PhD is from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. He has held academic positions at Cornell University, The Australian National University, and UNSW. He was UNSW's fourth Vice-Chancellor from 1992 – 2002. He also served as President of the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee, and was a member of Australia's Prime Minister's Science, Engineering and Innovation Council.

UNSW's most recognised and architecturally renowned building, the Scientia, was officially renamed The John Niland Scientia Building in recognition of his long and distinguished service to UNSW. John Niland was also Chairman of the Australian Environmental Protection Authority for five years, and chaired or was a director of numerous civic institutions and corporate boards.

In Australia's honours system, John became an Officer of the Order of Australia (AO) for services to industrial relations policy, research and reform in 1992 and in 2001, became a Companion of the Order of Australia (AC), Australia's highest civilian honour, for services to education. He holds honorary doctorates from Southern Cross University and the University of New South Wales.

When SMU was officially incorporated in January 2000, I invited John to serve on SMU's Board of Trustees. Together with his fellow pioneer trustees, John played a critical role in guiding and shepherding SMU through its important formative years and brought his wide and deep experience to bear, which SMU has clearly benefitted from.

John Niland served as Chairman of the Finance and Remuneration Committee (FinRem) from 2003 to 2009 and during that time, he laid a robust foundation for SMU's finance and remuneration framework, and also introduced the practice of conducting an annual 360-degree review of the President, which to this day is followed. He also helped to document the key annual milestones in SMU's financial and remuneration calendar that resulted in the FinRem Roadmap, which continues to guide the FinRem committee and SMU's management.

Prof John Niland also served as Deputy Chair, Academic Affairs Committee (AAC), and worked closely with the AAC Chair in helping establish an academic governance framework for SMU, which is distinguished by the very rigorous and stringent standards set for SMU, including the adoption of a tenure review process that incorporates the best practices observed in top internationally recognised institutions.

In 2006, the Board formed a governance review taskforce and appointed John to chair the taskforce which had the mandate to conduct a thorough review of SMU's academic governance handbook. This was a major exercise, which finally resulted in a key document – the Governance and Academic Policies Handbook – which serves to this day as SMU's primary academic governance handbook.

John Niland served on SMU's Board of Trustees for 12 years from 2000 – 2012; and served as Deputy Chairman, from 2008 – 2012. During that time, he worked closely with all of SMU's Presidents and Provosts, past and present, and was also intimately involved in all previous President searches.

The above only provides a brief outline of Prof John Niland's enormous contributions to SMU, and his deep and varied associations and interactions with SMU at many levels during SMU's important formative years. The various frameworks and governance-related insights and contributions from John, and his fellow Trustees, have to a great extent embedded themselves into SMU's DNA.

The University is enormously indebted to John – and of course to his wife Carmel, whom we all know was the power behind the throne -- for his many contributions, and awarding him with an honorary degree, will serve as a simple, but important, recognition by the University of Professor Niland's contributions to SMU.

From all your many friends and admirers in SMU, John, our heartiest congratulations for an accolade well-deserved!