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Remarks

By Prof Arnoud De Meyer, SMU President

At Convocation 2014

Suntec City Convention Centre

Wednesday 13 August 2014, 7pm

Guest of Honour, Ms Yong Ying-I,
Permanent Secretary (Public Service Division),
Permanent Secretary (National Research
Foundation) and Chairman of the
Infocomm Development Authority;

Mr J Y Pillay, SMU Pro-Chancellor;

Mr Ho Kwon Ping, SMU Chairman;

SMU Trustees;

Distinguished Guests, Colleagues;

SMU Freshmen of 2014 together with your
family and friends;

Good evening.

[Paraphrasing the opening ‘crawler’ of the original Star Wars
movie]

“A long time ago,” in a university “far, far
away,” I sat in the equivalent of a convocation
ceremony similar to this. So I still remember
how it feels for the nearly 2,000 freshman here
– to be excited and nervous, eager and
apprehensive, all at the same time. As the
previous speakers have suggested, this is
indeed the start of your own exciting
adventure.

It is an adventure you will shape yourself,
because you will have to make hundreds, if not
thousands of decisions along the way – and
each one could affect the path you take
through life.

We provide you with the opportunity to make such choices. One of the advantages of studying at SMU is the flexibility of the curriculum. There are six degree programmes, but roughly three-quarters of our students take double degrees or second majors, and there are currently 41 second majors available.

Your cohort is the first to benefit from a revised undergraduate curriculum. Previously students could choose more modules in a field they were strong in, and avoid others they were unsure of. You will be required to select your 16 modules from a wider range of clusters of broad bodies of knowledge that SMU graduates should have. You will have a more holistic education than ever before.

I've met some of you over the last few weeks on campus, during the freshmen camp at Sarimbun, and earlier today – so I know that among you are many talented athletes; musicians, actors, dancers and artists;

dedicated voluntary workers; successful entrepreneurs and technopreneurs. Our many student clubs will benefit from your talents. Choose your co-curricular activities boldly; try something new and challenging, step out of your comfort zone and stretch yourself. Later on, take on responsibilities within these CCAs to test and develop your leadership and organisational skills. Whether you succeed or fail, you will learn more about yourself. Our University is an environment where you can still experiment. Even if you should get out of your depth, there is strong support network to get you back on your feet. If you fail, do as Luke Skywalker would do: pick yourself up and try again. That is what life is all about; making you stronger, more confident and resilient.

Likewise with your community service, internships, exchange programmes and study trips: be adventurous and daring. Last year, 86% of the graduating cohort had experienced some form of global exposure during their

time here. They travelled to countries ranging from Chile to Russia, and including China, Nepal, Kazakhstan, the US and Middle East. We aim to ensure that 100% of students experience global exposure within the next three years. We encourage this because studying or working overseas will open your eyes to a world of possibilities, develop your cultural awareness, make you more adaptable – and therefore also more employable.

With all this, you will have busy lives at SMU. However, you must also find time to contemplate on all your experiences or they will count for nothing. To help you, we have developed a tool to allow you to track and shape your own learning. You will find a copy of this, called *SMU LifeLessons Pathfinder*, in your Convocation Ceremony folders. It takes the form of a journal to encourage you to take a deliberate pause to reflect and articulate your thoughts, deepen your understanding of your personal values and motivations,

relationships with your peers, and roles in the communities you belong to. It is part of the SMU LifeLessons programme which is integrated into the undergraduate curriculum to *define, prepare, and inspire* you to be your very best for others.

SMU is very strong in promoting thought leadership and I hope you, our freshmen will find time to attend as many of the various lectures, seminars and conferences at SMU as possible. Among the many thought leaders who have shared their views here are former US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Nobel Peace Laureates Aung San Suu Kyi and F W de Klerk, and other Nobel Laureates. We have also hosted talks by Ambassadors from countries ranging from Australia to Venezuela; local CEOs; global entrepreneurs such as our own Chairman Mr Ho Kwon Ping and OSIM founder Ron Sim; musicians like Jeremy Monteiro; even entertainers such as Kumar; and writers too numerous to mention in the

Singapore Writers' Festival, for which we are a partner.

Undergraduates may think that the four years or so that you will spend here gives you plenty of time to fit all this in. But that is not what the graduates last month told me. Many of them said how quickly the time had passed, and how good you have to be as an SMU student in planning your time. In addition to hard skills, they realised they had developed soft, people skills, and heart skills. They were more articulate, more confident, and more capable. I was very proud of their transformation and I look forward to seeing all of you benefit from the distinctive SMU experience.

I know you are ready for it. You showed your promise in the admissions process and have proved that you have what it takes to flourish here. Your professors look forward to engaging you in SMU's interactive, seminar style pedagogy. Prepare well for these sessions to

give your best and ensure a richer classroom experience for all.

In short: work hard and play hard. Seize every opportunity to stretch yourself. That is how you will make the most of your time here at SMU and in the future

Good night and good luck!

(May the force be with you.)