

Remarks by SMU Chairman, Mr Ho Kwon Ping
At SMU Convocation 2015
Suntec City Convention Centre
Friday 14 August 2015

Guest of Honour, Sir John Hood

CEO & President, Robertson Foundation;

Lady Emma Hood;

Mr JY Pillay,

Pro Chancellor, SMU;

Members of the Board of Trustees;

Members of the faculty and staff of SMU;

Freshmen of 2015;

Good evening.

As freshmen, you are joining SMU during a period of great celebration for Singapore, less than a week after we marked the 50th anniversary of Singapore's independence on National Day.

This year, in addition to marking SG50 in a great many activities, SMU has also been celebrating its own anniversary – the 15th anniversary of our establishment. In SG50, our nation has been looking back at its amazing past progress and looking forward to a better

future, in order to better understand and consolidate our sense of nationhood.

As a University community during SMU15, we have similarly taken a dual perspective in order to understand and re-examine our own purpose and identity.

The university you are joining today relishes its reputation as “A Different U” – which it has been since before we even opened our doors. It was Singapore’s President and SMU’s Patron Tony Tan Keng Yam – who was then Deputy Prime Minister and had twice served as Minister for Education – that in the mid-1990s first proposed the establishment of Singapore’s third university.

He believed that the new university should be different from the two established institutions –NUS and NTU. The government wanted the new university to be an experiment in diversity.

Both universities in Singapore at that time had been based on the British model, where large groups of students attended long lectures recited by their professors in vast lecture theatres.

Dr Tan and I discussed basing an alternative on the American model. As a result, you can expect a more

personalised, highly interactive pedagogy, based on seminar style teaching in small-sized classes, which in most other universities is reserved for postgraduate classes.

You and your peers will often be doing more talking than your professors – and your class time is a time to explore ideas, to practise articulating your views and arguing your opinions, in addition to gathering knowledge and opinions from your professors.

We also set out to provide a holistic education that produces well-rounded graduates. We taught business ethics to all our undergraduates; made community service a compulsory requirement; pushed for substantial internships; encouraged overseas exposure through overseas community service and internships, business study missions and student exchanges; and fostered a vibrant culture of co-curricular activities.

That was the model that SMU has been employing and developing over the past 15 years. However, during SMU15 we have also been seeing the future of SMU take shape.

Construction of the new School of Law building is now well underway. When it opens in 2017, this will mark a major extension of our city campus. Next to it, we have already opened the state-of-the art SMU Labs,

which together with a major redevelopment of the Li Ka Shing Library provide an extensive range and wide variety of spaces for collaborative learning and project work.

We also announced redevelopment of Campus Green to include an amphitheatre, jogging route and two-storey gym, which will also provide additional study spaces in the existing concourse.

All this supports a newly revised curriculum which will evolve to more closely integrate academic development, personal development, and community engagement.

SMU's next growth phase will also include a stimulating environment to promote world-class research and increase research-based teaching that will make an impact on education, business and society.

Our Guest of Honour this evening, Sir John Hood, is no stranger to making such an impact and managing world-class universities

Sir John earned a Bachelor of Engineering and a PhD in Civil Engineering from The University of Auckland. Upon completing his doctorate, he was awarded a Rhodes Scholarship to study at the University of Oxford.

There he read for an MPhil in Management Studies and was a member of Worcester College.

He served as Vice-Chancellor of the University of Auckland from 1999 to 2004 and as Vice-Chancellor of the University of Oxford from 2004 to 2009.

Sir John Hood is the President and Chief Executive Officer of the Robertson Foundation, and Chair of the Rhodes Trust and Teach For All. He also serves as a director on the Boards of BG Group, plc and of WPP plc; and as Chairman of Urenco Limited, Matakina Limited, and Study Group Limited.

In addition to these appointments, Sir John serves on the Boards of the Fletcher Trust, the Mandela Rhodes Foundation, the Kawharu Foundation, and the Said Business School Foundation; he also serves on Advisory Boards for Lund University, the African Leadership Academy, the University of Oxford's Medical Sciences Division, and SMU, where he was recently appointed as a member of the Board of Trustees.

Sir John has been appointed a Knight Companion to the New Zealand Order of Merit.

Sir John will speak after a short video. In the meantime, please put your hands together to give him a warm welcome.

I want to close, by saying that while the theme of this evening is SMU15 and SG50 – celebrating our past and future – it is actually all about you.

This is a day for you to look back on all you have achieved, to acknowledge those who have helped you come this far and who will support you during your time here. It is also a time for you to look forward to making the very most of your next four years or so here, which will prepare you not only for a promising career but also for a fulfilling life.

Remember all those who have gone before and left their mark in building SMU over the past 15 years and the nation over the past 50 years. Think to yourself that when others look back in 15 or 25 years' time, you want to be one of those remembered as having made a difference.