

**Remarks by Professor Arnoud De Meyer,
SMU President**

At the 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;

Mr Ho Kwon Ping, Chairman, SMU Board of
Trustees;

Members of the Board of Trustees;

Members of the faculty and staff of SMU;

Freshmen of 2015;

Good evening.

Let me start by welcoming all our freshmen
and their families at this Convocation. This is

the official start of our academic year and a moment of reflection, fun and celebration. Monday the real work for you, the students, will start.

I not only welcome you but also congratulate you to have made it to SMU. Our admissions process is a two way process: we select you out of a large pool of applicants, and I am sure that many of you had several options and have made a positive choice for SMU. Thank you for that act of trust in SMU and your confidence that you are right for us.

We all know that SMU is still a young University. In the beginning of this year we celebrated our 15th anniversary. Our Chairman played down somewhat just how uncertain SMU's viability was in its early years. Before anyone even worried about whether any students would be willing to trust their university education to an unknown upstart, his team had to consider whether they could

attract world-class faculty and administrators from their safe havens in Singapore, the region and overseas institutions. However, brave and very capable local and international faculty members and students did come, at the very start, and in increasing numbers since. SMU was a bet that paid off – for the Singapore government, our many benefactors and SMU’s pioneers. After 15 years of innovative pedagogy and growth in research, we now have a most enviable status and reputation in Singapore and on the world stage.

As you join us today, we have a network of 222 partner universities across the world, our faculty members hold PhDs or similar qualifications from 68 academic institutions and represent 30 different nationalities. We embrace cosmopolitanism. As of last September, 11% of undergraduates were international students, from 25 different countries, and more than half of our postgraduates were international students

from 34 countries. More than 86% of the graduating class of 2014 experienced some form of global exposure, and I hope all of you will do the same. You will have plenty of opportunities – through overseas exchanges, summer schools, internships and community service missions. In fact I want to throw a challenge at you: I hope that when we see each other in four years from now for the Commencement that we can say that 100% of the graduating class has some form of international exposure. We will help you to achieve that.

As our Chairman outlined, another priority ever since we were founded, has been in developing a sense of ethics and responsibility in our students. Such studies are part of the core curriculum, and serving a minimum of 80 hours of voluntary service is a requirement of graduation. Most undergraduates choose to contribute many more hours than that. Since 2000, SMU students have rendered a total of

more than 2.2 million hours of community service. Our graduating cohort of 2014 contributed an average of close to 150 hours per person over their 4 years of study in SMU.

This is in addition to the considerable commitment of time and energy most students devote to their co-curricular activities.

I strongly encourage you to embrace the wide range of opportunities that your student clubs offer you, and of which you will see some on display here today. Develop your talents but also use these clubs 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 a strong support network to help you pick yourself up, get back on your feet and try again. That is what university life is all about; making you stronger, more confident and resilient. I hope that you will develop that “can do” attitude of

the pioneers of SMU that ensured the survival and success of this university.

Part of your education at SMU is that we ask you to mix practice with theory. One of the many ways we do this is through experience based courses, which we often bundle under the name of SMU-X, where X stands for experimentation, exchange, exploration, etc. All of you will have the opportunity to go through such experience based courses. The other practice opportunity comes through the internships. Enter into your internships fully committed to give your very best to your employer. Be humble and willing to learn, but confident and proactive. We have strong ties with some of the best companies around, who take on our students as interns every year, because they have earned a reputation for being not just knowledgeable and capable, but also articulate and proactive.

All these opportunities will challenge you in ways you cannot imagine, helping you to grow as person, and see life and the world in a totally new way. This experience will also make you more employable as employers seek candidates with international experience and a global mind-set, have soft skills as well as hard knowledge, a heart as well as a head, passions beyond work and experience. That is one of the reasons why SMU graduates command better salaries and a higher rate of employment than that of their peers, with nearly 92% finding employment within six months of graduation for the past three years. And last year, more than one in five graduates were offered full-time employment at the organisations at which they performed their internships.

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.

You have a lot to fit into your next four years or so at SMU and you will face many challenges. In fact time management will be one of the competencies that you will have to develop at SMU.

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

[Pause]

I want to use this occasion to acknowledge that this will be the last University gathering during which Professor Rajendra Srivastava will participate as SMU Provost. I would like to express our sincere gratitude to Professor Srivastava for his very effective leadership as Provost and Deputy President (Academic Affairs) in the last seven years. Under his

leadership, the total faculty of SMU grew by 30% and our research rankings improved significantly. He reorganised the Office of Research and launched the Areas of Excellence. He was instrumental in facilitating the birth of practice-oriented initiatives, and has been the driving force behind the development of SMU's India Initiatives. Under his leadership the Postgraduate programmes grew tremendously.

At the same time, I would like to welcome Professor Lily Kong as the University's new Provost, i.e. your Provost. She will join us from 1 September 2015 and will also hold the Lee Kong Chian Chair Professorship of Social Sciences. She brings to SMU 24 years of solid experience as a distinguished educator, prolific researcher and senior academic leader at NUS. She played a key role in the establishment of Yale-NUS College when she was Vice-President (University and Global Relations) between 2007 and 2014, and as Acting Executive Vice

President (Academic Affairs) of Yale-NUS
College during the first two years of the
College's inception.

I would now like to invite Provost, Professor
Rajendra Srivastava, and Provost-designate,
Professor Lily Kong, to the stage for a symbolic
handover of the University Mace, which
signifies the academic authority of the
university and is traditionally carried by the
Provost at SMU official ceremonies.

Thank you