

## Remarks by Mr Ho Kwon Ping, SMU Chairman

At SMU Convocation 2016

Suntec City Convention Centre

Friday 12 August 2016

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Guest of Honour, Dr Victor Fung;

Mr JY Pillay, Chancellor, SMU;

Members of the Board of Trustees;

Members of the faculty and staff of SMU;

Freshmen of 2016;

Good evening.

Welcome to you all.

I hope you are enjoying the “Sports” theme adopted for your Convocation.

There were many reasons for choosing this theme; some of which have already been mentioned. The ASEAN University Games, for example, were an inspiration to us all. The theme also highlights some of your options for CCAs.

Perhaps to most of you, sports and CCAs represent the lighter, more frivolous and enjoyable facets of university life, as a necessary contrast to the rigours of academic learning. No doubt that is true.

But – and this is perhaps an old-fashioned but ultimately timeless truth – sport imparts upon us both leadership and humility, self-awareness and empathy. It is simply engaging in the pursuit of sport, rather than the attainment of excellence in it, that imparts what used to be quaintly called “character” in a young person. The corollary in the academic life is the fact that more often than not, it is in the asking WHY that one learns more, than in simply knowing the answer.

Team sports have always been both a teacher and test of leadership abilities. The famous saying that the Battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton, was the Duke of Wellington’s tribute to the role of sports – he was referring specifically to rugby – in his victory over Napoleon Bonaparte. Teamwork, discipline, competitiveness, determination, to just name a few qualities, are learnt more in sports than in any classroom.

The same is true today in the battle of the boardroom. In 2015, a survey by Fortune magazine found that a remarkable 95% of Fortune 500 CEOs played college sports.

In 2000, the University of Illinois conducted a survey of war veterans which found that former student athletes:

- had higher scores for leadership, self-confidence and self-respect;
- were more willing to do volunteer work and make donations (more than 55 years after graduating high school) and
- were more likely to have had careers in upper management.

As a parent, I witnessed first-hand how sports can play an important role in character-building. When my eldest son was captain of the Track & Field team at Hwa Chong JC, he sprained his ankle and dropped out just before the last major competition before his graduation. As a parent I could hardly bear to see his heart-rending sobs, but I also knew that this early lesson in disappointment would be invaluable. My daughter was also captain of her Basketball team at RJC and was inconsolable when she lost a championship match. But as all parents here tonight know, our children's spirits are tougher than we often think, and early pain translates into later resilience.

Sports teach us how to be good winners and good losers. In learning the game of life there is really not a better substitute than school sports.

Writing in Bloomberg BusinessWeek in 2014, James Bailey identified five qualities that are developed through sports. The first three – determination, teamwork, and the ability to handle pressure – speak for themselves.

The fourth, “appreciating followership”, means that one can learn how to lead by following another leader.

The fifth quality is “cognitive complexity”. Competitive sports demands attention to the dynamic flow of multiple inter-related variables. One's mind is challenged with hundreds of unpredictable factors that require seamless adaptation and improvisation. This is the perfect education for today's fast-moving business environment.

The winds of change are also blowing across the educational landscape.

SMU was a pioneer in Singapore of a holistic education combining hard skills with soft skills and heart skills. Once, this education would have differentiated you in the job market – but no longer.

The other universities have adopted many aspects of the SMU model and the Ministry of Education is promoting holistic learning and aptitude-based admissions at every level.

A good degree and being well-rounded are now expected by employers. So you will need to practise astute gamesmanship if you want to be a winner.

There is a Chinese proverb which says, “When the winds of change blow, some people build walls, others build windmills.” At SMU you will learn to build windmills.

A defining characteristic of an SMU education is still its interactive pedagogy – interacting with faculty members and peers, rather than sitting and listening to lectures.

Speak out but also listen – make sure you understand both or all sides of every argument. Play devil’s advocate – while at SMU do not feel you have to be consistent in your views, values or politics.

If you lose an argument – think about how others were able to influence the consensus or decision makers.

SMU imparts a lot more than just teaching. Instead, you will learn how to learn – by always asking “why?”

To use a soccer analogy – SMU emphasises strategy rather than fancy footwork. It teaches cognitive complexity – so you can adapt to the ebb and flow of the game.

You can learn a lot about strategy from our Guest of Honour, Victor Fung. He left a brilliant academic career at Harvard University to take over Li & Fung, the small trading company his grandfather set up in 1906. He looked at their existing business model and identified supply chain management as their core competency. His business strategy in transforming a 19<sup>th</sup> century trading house into a 21<sup>st</sup> century leader in global supply chain management, is now studied by business schools worldwide.

Victor is a long-standing friend and coach to SMU, having been a member of the founding Board of Trustees, between the years 2000 and 2005. This is not the first time he has addressed SMU freshmen – he spoke at Convocation in 2003, inspiring the 4th cohort.

Just last year, he spoke at the 8th Fung Scholars Leadership Conference. Fung Scholarships were established in 2006 by the Victor and William Fung Foundation. Twenty scholarships are available annually for outstanding full-time local undergraduates at SMU proceeding for exchange in overseas universities, as well as outstanding students from universities in China on exchange to SMU.

As well as being Group Chairman of the Fung Group, Victor is also a member of the Economic Development Commission of the Hong Kong Government, a member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference in China, and Economic Advisor to the People's Government of Nanjing.

He has previously served as Chairman of the Paris-based International Chamber of Commerce, and as a member of the World Trade Organisation's Panel on Defining the Future of Trade.

The government of Hong Kong, where he lives, awarded him the Gold Bauhinia Star in 2003 and the Grand Bauhinia Medal in 2010 for his distinguished service to the community.

And now to welcome our Guest-of-Honour, Dr Victor Fung, I invite back on stage our emcees to lead us in our very own “SMU Roar”.

Emcees, are you ready?

*[Emcee 4 will signal to Chairman when 8 of them are in place]*

**SMU... on my count...3,2,1, ROAR!”**