

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

**At the Opening Ceremony of
SMU Convocation 2016**

**Suntec City Convention Centre
Friday 12 August 2016**

Guest of Honour, Dr Victor Fung;

Mr JY Pillay, Chancellor, SMU;

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 2016;

Good evening and welcome to SMU.

I see some familiar faces out there of those I
met at freshmen orientation camps. I know
these are quite a full-on experience, which I

hope confirmed that you really have chosen “a different U”.

Parents, you need not feel left out. For you there will be a Parents’ Day in each of the Schools in September, which will allow you to learn more about the University and what you and your daughter or son can expect in the coming years. So please join us.

Today is still a day of celebration and fun for everyone – and the last day of freshman induction before term begins on Monday. Do enjoy the experience.

First I want to briefly mention a few things that are new at SMU – things that you will be the first cohort to experience and benefit from. Then I will offer five broad pieces of advice on making the most of your time here.

What’s new?

Many of you will be aware that SMU is launching two new majors this academic year, adding to the already rich choice of 41 majors across the University. First, there is PLE – politics, law and economics – for social science undergraduates. This programme is the first-of-its-kind in Singapore, and will provide a group of you with the necessary tools to

analyse major public issues from a multidisciplinary perspective. Secondly, there is a new major in Entrepreneurship. If you are interested in starting a business or social enterprise, or want to learn how to seize opportunities, innovate and create value in existing organisations – this is the major for you.

Your cohort will also be the first to be fully exposed to our innovative and award-winning SMU-X curriculum, which was piloted last year and is being “mainstreamed” this year. Some 25 courses are characterised by four key principles; experiential learning from tackling a real issue currently facing an organisation; active student mentoring by faculty and industry clients; interdisciplinary content and activities; and three-way learning by students, faculty and clients in a final tripartite forum.

What else?

[start showing sequence of slides]

You will be the first to use a brand new School of Law Building, with its own moot court, library, pro bono centre and more. This will not only benefit Law students, it will also

significantly increase the total amount of space on campus for everyone.

What's more, you can look forward to being among the first to enjoy flexible study spaces campus-wide, the facilities of a remodelled Campus Green with an amphitheatre and jogging route, and a brand-new three-storey fitness centre.

[finish showing sequence of slides]

Believe me, there is much more still to come, besides all this.

Now I come to those five pieces of advice. In the spirit of sport – they are all about stretching through your limits.

1. Stretch yourself academically

The first is to stretch yourself academically.

One of the most important aspects of SMU's undergraduate curriculum is its flexibility.

Our six degree programmes also provide the opportunity for 15 double degree combinations. Alternatively you can choose one of 41 second majors, which offer over 300 possible combinations. We spread a vast buffet before you. Clearly, you can't sample it all, so you will have to make your own choices.

But start early with planning your selection, if you want to try as much as possible.

But don't be afraid to take risks in your studies. Study areas outside of your known areas of strength. Challenge yourself, and why not, be prepared to fail – and prepare your parents and friends for that failure, maybe the first time in your life.

Study something for the sheer joy of learning. You will be more complete, more resilient, more self-aware – you may discover new strengths.

Above all, learn how to learn. Today, education and training are continuous processes – you will never stop learning new skills throughout your career. So honing your ability to learn is the most valuable skill you can develop.

Remember too that an SMU education is more than academic excellence – it is about holistic development which you can track through your SMU LifeLessons Pathfinder.

2. Stretch yourself in CCAs

My second piece of advice is to stretch yourselves by participating in co-curricular activities, or CCAs, and other aspects of campus life.

Do follow your interests, enrich the SMU campus life with your gifts, whether they lie in the arts, sports and adventure, or other areas.

But also take up something new, that you have never tried before. Try out a new sport. Again, don't be afraid to fail – because you may learn more about yourself from a failure than from a string of successes. You may also never have such open access to so many different activities again – and so much support.

Also take on positions of responsibility in your CCA clubs; even start a CCA club. It will give you invaluable experience of leadership. Frankly speaking, I know I learned more that is of value in my current job from being a student leader than I did from my engineering degree.

3. Stretch yourself through community service

My third piece of advice is to stretch yourself through community service. Community service offers you another excellent opportunity to develop your soft skills and heart skills, by focussing on others rather than yourself. You may feel unsure about facing those less fortunate than you and being able to help them – but the more nervous you feel, the greater the discovery that you have so

much to give and to gain. It is often the students who are initially the most unenthusiastic about community service that end up voluntarily doing many, many more than the 80 hours required to graduate.

4. Stretch yourself through internships

Similarly, and fourthly, stretch yourself through internships. Enter into the experience with 100% commitment because the more you put into it, the more you will get out of it. So stretch yourself beyond the compulsory minimum. Over 10,000 companies across 21 countries employ SMU interns. You will be given ample opportunities to gain valuable insights into specific job functions of your interest. You also have the opportunity to build your professional network and make connections that will serve you well in your future career. Remember, one in four SMU students who receive job offers before graduation land full-time employment through internships.

5. Stretch yourself to explore

Lastly, stretch yourself beyond cultural and geographical boundaries. Both community

service and internships can take you overseas. So can student exchange programmes, summer schools and study missions. In today's globalised world, employers value graduates with international exposure – because being confident and capable in another culture is so often a part of doing business today.

In 2015, 88% of our undergraduates experienced the world through SMU's global exposure programme. Let's make this 100% for your cohort.

I hope you find all that to be invigorating rather than daunting. Come ready to transform yourselves and ready to make a difference to your community and the world. I'll see you at the start line on Monday.