

**Welcome Remarks by  
Professor Arnoud De Meyer, SMU President,  
at the Tahir Foundation Connexion ground-breaking ceremony  
held on Monday, 27 August 2018**

Guest of Honour, Minister Desmond Lee;

Dato Sri Prof Dr Tahir;

Mr Ho Kwon Ping;

SMU faculty, staff and students;

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen;

A very good morning to all of you.

- 1 Today is a momentous occasion for us all.
  - First, our award-winning SMU-X initiative will have a building to call its own;
  - Second, we received the University's second-largest gift to date, which has been instrumental in making this new development a reality;
  - And third, with this new building, SMU is making yet another huge step towards building a green, sustainable Campus in the City.

## Growth of SMU-X and the need for a home

- 2 In 2014, I mooted the idea of SMU-X with a simple wish to give students real-world, hands-on experience through an approach that involves working collaboratively in groups and solving actual problems faced by companies and organisations. These problems would be multi-disciplinary, and tackling them would involve the mentorship of both our faculty and practitioners. Through SMU-X, undergraduates will 'learn how to learn', and pick up skills-set which will put them in good stead to excel in the working world.
- 3 Beyond being an innovative, experiential pedagogy, SMU-X also creates a mindset for the University to collaborate internally across disciplines, as well as with external stakeholders from diverse fields.
- 4 Fast-forward to today, I am proud that what began as a pilot test of two courses involving only about 60 students, has evolved and grown into something that is much sought after by students and partners. The longest serving global accrediting body for business schools – the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of

Business (AACSB) – has also lauded it as an ‘innovation that inspires’.

5 To-date, SMU has conducted 48 unique SMU-X modules (equivalent to 180 course-runs) together with over 300 partners. More than 6,000 students have benefitted from the SMU-X pedagogy and delivered about 900 projects with partners from the public, private and NGO sectors. About 12% of our 300 partners are government or government-related agencies, another 15% are NGOs, and 73% are from the private sector, of which small-and-medium enterprises form the majority. The types of projects that students tackle are extensive and diverse.

6 Now, these are not mere statistics. They illustrate our University’s commitment to provide opportunities for *all* SMU students to take at least one SMU-X course as part of their undergraduate programme. In this new Academic Year that started last week, we will offer at least 30 SMU-X modules, and another 2,500 students will partner with organisations across sectors. We have also started to introduce SMU-X Overseas modules to give students a realistic

experience working with partners abroad and managing regional and global projects in their future workplace.

7 The success of all SMU-X modules and projects require a tri-partite effort – from our partners, faculty and students. Therefore, I wish to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has been involved in the SMU-X initiative for your support and enthusiasm, and for walking this journey with us over the past three years. SMU-X is becoming an integral part of SMU’s pedagogical DNA and will distinguish us from other leading institutions.

8 An innovative pedagogy requires bespoke spaces that can enable it to thrive. We began introducing 24/7 prototype spaces, in the form of the Learning Commons at the Li Ka Shing Library and the SMU Labs at the Vanguard Building in 2015. The SMU Labs was further enhanced last year into lyf@SMU through a unique partnership with The Ascott Group.

9 However, we knew from the onset that if we are to ‘mainstream’ this pedagogy, we will need a permanent and customised space in

which to anchor the Initiative – a space where students, faculty and industry can come together to interact in meaningful discussions and seek impactful solutions that will benefit the larger community.

10 Bearing in mind that the SMU Labs' location is transient, planning for an 'SMU-X building' as we used to call it, started from as early as 2015. However, given the limited space that we have in our campus, this would not have been possible without the perseverance of many teams in SMU, as well as the strong support on many external fronts.

11 I would like to congratulate everyone for all their hard work, as we break new ground today for a building which, when completed in 2019, will be an architecturally stunning addition to SMU's city campus.

#### Gift from the Tahir Foundation

12 Today, I also represent the University in thanking the Tahir Foundation, co-chaired by Dr Tahir and his son, Mr Jonathan Tahir. We are fortunate to receive our second largest gift in SMU's history

from the Foundation, which has been instrumental to this new development. In appreciation of this monumental contribution, the building will be named the Tahir Foundation Connexion.

13 We call it 'Connexion' because this building is envisaged to be the vibrant *connecting point* for SMU students to build friendships and learn from one another. It will be a key co-study, co-work, co-learning hub that houses new-generation learning spaces and collaborative zones where students and faculty will *connect* and engage with the industry. There will also be incubation spaces, which will provide an environment conducive to nurture innovation and entrepreneurship among SMU students and alumni. By providing a *physical connection* between our School of Law and School of Accountancy, the new building will also enable seamless and sheltered *connectivity* through the entire city campus – from Bras Basah Road leading to Fort Canning and Armenian Street.

14 Dr Tahir and Mr Jonathan Tahir have been firm and steadfast friends of SMU, for which we are deeply grateful. In 2014, they gifted SMU with the Tahir Indonesian Scholarship to provide financial

assistance to Indonesian students studying at SMU, and also as a means to further enhance the good relations and understanding between the people of Indonesia and Singapore. In 2015, the Tahir Foundation doubled its support with another Scholarship, this time for the financially needy Singaporean and Singaporean Permanent Resident students studying at SMU.

15 The Foundation further extended its support to a collaboration between SMU and Universitas Gadjah Mada in Indonesia in 2016 by contributing towards the establishment of the Tahir SMU-UGM Management and Faculty Development Programme. This programme focuses on collaborative academic initiatives, student and faculty exchanges, and study missions. I am pleased to report that to-date, Dr Tahir's generosity has benefitted 104 SMU students who, as a result, have been able to fully immerse themselves in the rigors of our holistic curriculum.

16 In April 2018, we also launched SMU's International Advisory Council for Indonesia, which is chaired by Dr Tahir and comprises eminent members from the Singapore and Indonesian business

community, as well as SMU alumni. With his advice and support, I am confident that the Council will play a meaningful role in raising SMU's international reputation and fostering closer ties between our two countries.

- 17 This latest gift is yet another testament of their commitment to education, and fully exemplifies the Tahir Foundation's motto of 'Built by the Society for the Society'.

#### A sustainable, green building

- 18 In this respect, I am also proud to note the Tahir Foundation Connexion has been designed to give back to the community in yet another dimension – it will be a green building that respects the environment and its surroundings.
  - The architect and project teams have made due efforts to ensure that this small and precious plot of land is fully optimised to maximise its potential;

- Its architecture is experimental, yet it tastefully and seamlessly blends in with the existing SMU campus, the lush Fort Canning Park and the historical buildings around it;
  - The building will also enable a seamless ‘connexion’ open to the public – from the Bras Basah and Bencoolen MRT stations to Fort Canning through our (basement) concourse, the School of Accountancy, the Tahir Foundation Connexion, and the School of Law.
  - Many sustainable features and advanced green technology have also been integrated into the building’s design, in support of the Building and Construction Authority’s (BCA) sustainability drive.
- 19 These efforts stand true to the essence of SMU being both a global city university and an integral part of the local community.

### Conclusion and final thanks

- 20 On this note, I wish to thank the Tahir Foundation once again for your generosity as our University continues to enhance the value of our undergraduate education through SMU-X.

- 21 We are also grateful to BCA, which has supported our pursuit towards a 'green' development through a grant under the Public Sector Construction Productivity Fund, which has greatly helped SMU to accelerate the adoption of productive technologies, such as a hybrid combination of Mass Engineered Timber with structural steel.
- 22 Furthermore, we wish to thank the Ministry of Education, Ministry of National Development, National Parks Board, Land Transport Authority, Public Utilities Board, Singapore Land Authority and Urban Redevelopment Authority – for your support towards realising this milestone. Today's ceremony marks the beginning of the next phase of our partnership.
- 23 Thank you all for coming to celebrate this joyous occasion with us.

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