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**Headline: Shaping tomorrow's changemakers: How a leading university nurtures innovation to drive impact**

## **Shaping tomorrow's changemakers: How a leading university nurtures innovation to drive impact**

From fintech pioneers to social advocates, these changemakers exemplify how a Singapore Management University education fuels ambition and drives meaningful change



The world belongs to those who challenge the status quo – visionaries who push boundaries, ignite change and leave a lasting impact. Yet, behind every remarkable individual is a journey of transformation, shaped by experiences that inspire them to do better and dream bigger.

At Singapore Management University (SMU), education goes beyond traditional degrees. It serves as a launchpad for leaders, disruptors and pioneers who are reshaping industries and the future. By emphasising interdisciplinary learning, leadership development and global engagement, SMU nurtures individuals who not only navigate the world but transform it.

From fintech innovators and legal disruptors to tech entrepreneurs and social impact leaders, the stories of alumni featured in this article highlight how an SMU education fuels ambition and equips individuals to create meaningful change, both locally and on the global stage.

### **A university that sets you apart**

Choosing where to pursue higher education is one of the most important decisions a student will make. Here is what makes SMU unique:

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- **Global mindset:** Since 2018, global exposure has been made a graduation requirement for all SMU students, allowing them to expand their perspectives and networks beyond Singapore.
- **Guaranteed second major across specialisations:** All SMU students may opt for a second major after their second year, with no minimum requirements.
- **Interactive and collaborative learning:** A seminar-style approach encourages engagement, debate, and hands-on problem-solving.
- **Industry-relevant experience:** SMU students graduate with at least one internship, gaining real-world exposure that sets them apart in the job market.
- **Proven career outcomes:** SMU graduates are among the most sought-after, with median salary and employability rate that reflect the value of an SMU education.
- **Lifelong career support:** From May 1, 2025, all SMU degree holders will enjoy lifetime access to structured career support, designed to enhance their long-term adaptability in the workforce.

### **Where law and technology meet**

In a world where technology is rapidly transforming societies, what drives change at the intersection of law and technology? For Mr Josh Lee Kok Thong, an SMU Law alumnus, the answer lies in embodying the change you want to see, while being guided by a strong set of values.

At SMU, Mr Lee gained a unique university experience that shaped his passion for law, policy and technology. Representing SMU at international moot competitions gave him a taste of working on issues at the forefront of law and technology.

His experience as a co-founder of a student club, the SMU Funk Movement, defined his values and his spirit of entrepreneurship and creation. These invaluable experiences shaped Mr Lee into an industry leader at the intersection of law and technology, and a regional youth voice on topics like AI regulation and online safety.

Today, as the managing director (Asia-Pacific) at the Future of Privacy Forum, a member of Singapore's Media Literacy Council, and a recipient of Asia Society's Asia 21 Next Generation Leaders Fellowship and the National Youth Council's Asean Youth Fellowship, Mr Lee is empowering youths to shape the region's law and technology landscape.

His takeaways from his education can be described as tangible, transformative and timeless – providing a solid foundation to guide his desire for meaningful change in the world.

### **SMU's impact:**

- **SMU's innovative spirit and teaching methods** fuelled Mr Lee's desire to be a changemaker.
- **The Socratic method** used in SMU's classes gave him the ability and confidence to develop his thought leadership and voice in the fast-moving field of law and technology.
- **SMU provided opportunities** for collaboration with industry stalwarts and pioneers, equipping him with a savviness of the world at large and how to navigate its complexities.

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### **Innovating for sustainability**

Mr Ryan Ong's entrepreneurial journey began with a passion for sustainability. This led him to establish Fogo Fungi, a company focused on transforming agricultural waste into sustainable products.

His start-up is dedicated to reducing food waste by upcycling agricultural by-products such as timber waste, soy hulls and coffee grounds to cultivate gourmet mushrooms. This initiative seeks to minimise food waste, close the loop in the food system and drive a more sustainable, circular economy.

Through Fogo Fungi, Mr Ong supplies premium gourmet mushrooms to top chefs and hotels, exemplifying how innovation can drive growth while promoting sustainable practices.

### **SMU's impact:**

- Fogo Fungi was kick-started by the SMU Institute of Innovation and Entrepreneurship's (IIE) Business Innovations Generator (BIG) incubation programme, which provided mentorship and resources that helped Mr Ong to develop and grow his business.
- Through SMU-X, SMU's experiential learning framework, he worked on real-world sustainability projects, enhancing his understanding of sustainability challenges and business innovation.

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- IIE's and SMU's network helped to connect Mr Ong with industry experts, refine his business model and position him for success in the green innovation space.



### **Driving social change**

What does it take to create real, lasting change in less privileged communities? For Ms Nazhath Faheema, it is a commitment to social inclusion, empowerment and collective care.

As the director of development and community relations at Hope Initiative Alliance (HIA), she builds impactful partnerships and leads initiatives that uplift underserved communities in Singapore. This includes migrant workers, domestic helpers, children and youth from low-income families, and persons living in rental housing.

She also leads Sowing Care Together, a movement in HIA that mobilises youth leaders, community volunteers, religious groups and other stakeholders to strengthen social cohesion and inspire inclusive action across diverse segments of society.

At HIA, Ms Nazhath is developing sustainable working models that facilitate long-term change for communities that need greater care and support. Her leadership drives impactful programmes focused on advancing social equity and harmony.

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At the same time, she remains deeply committed to initiating, leading and facilitating interfaith dialogue to promote empathy and understanding. All while encouraging others to challenge societal barriers and contribute to a more inclusive world.

**SMU's impact:**

- At SMU, Ms Nazhath developed a strong academic foundation in technology, law, community service and youth leadership, which nurtured her skills in research, advocacy and community development.
- Engaging in various social impact projects and community outreach programmes at SMU, Ms Nazhath honed her leadership and communication skills, preparing her to make a meaningful impact in the nonprofit sector.
- Through SMU's global exposure programmes, she gained valuable insights into social issues from an international perspective, enhancing her ability to collaborate effectively with diverse stakeholders.



**Building a wellness revolution**

Mr Daniel Soh's entrepreneurial journey began with a simple yet powerful belief: Everyone deserves to feel their best and have access to premium personal wellness products at affordable prices.



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In September 2023, while still an SMU Accountancy student, Mr Soh co-founded Feel Fresh. His start-up focused on making premium-quality personal wellness products accessible to all, while providing exceptional after-sales customer care – a market gap he identified in the industry.

Feel Fresh has seen impressive growth, with revenue multiplying 10 times since the beginning of 2024. Mr Soh's disciplined approach, alongside strong support from his co-founder, friends, partner and family, has helped him balance academic demands, student life and his growing business.

Looking ahead, Feel Fresh plans to expand its product range, collaborate with influencers and enter new regional markets. But beyond business success, Mr Soh remains committed to giving back to the community, having sponsored key events at SMU and working on grassroots initiatives to promote oral hygiene among young children.

**SMU's impact:**

- Through the support of SMU's BIG Incubation Programme, Mr Soh was able to access crucial funding and mentorship, which played a pivotal role in Feel Fresh's rapid growth.
- Mentors from the programme helped him navigate key business challenges, ranging from marketing strategies to scaling operations regionally.
- SMU's entrepreneurial ecosystem, including exposure to real-world business experiences and networking opportunities, gave Mr Soh the tools and confidence to build his business while managing academic commitments.



**Innovating in financial services**

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In an ever-evolving financial landscape, Ms Pauline Sim, an SMU Executive MBA alumna, is at the forefront of driving innovation and digital transformation.

Her commitment to lifelong learning led her to pursue SMU's Executive MBA programme, where she deepened her expertise in business strategy and transformation. Her academic journey was marked by her role as class president and recognition on the Dean's List, reflecting her commitment to excellence and leadership.

With over 15 years in SME Banking, Ms Sim is a driving force in business strategy, digital transformation and innovation. From leading The FinLab, UOB's innovation accelerator, to expanding fintech partnerships at Sleek, she has helped start-ups and small- and medium-sized enterprises grow in a rapidly evolving landscape.

Now at UOI Ltd, she continues to drive change and innovation to enhance the experience of UOI's insurance clients. Ms Sim has also served on the Executive Committee of the Singapore FinTech Association. SMU was the launchpad that empowered her to lead, innovate and create lasting impact in the financial services industry.

**SMU's impact:**

- Through the SMU Executive MBA programme, Ms Sim learnt to apply the different lenses a business leader needs, from strategy planning and operations to finance, human resources and corporate ethics, all of which are crucial for her leadership development and growth.
- Ms Sim's engagement with SMU's industry-driven approach gave her practical insights from real-world case studies, equipping her with tools to solve challenging issues and drive change.
- The diversity of her class, comprising classmates from various industries, created an ideal environment for building relationships, expanding her network, and exchanging a wide range of perspectives.

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Are you ready to be part of the next generation of changemakers? Apply to SMU today to embark on a transformative journey.

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