

SMU Commencement for Class of 2021, Opening Ceremony
SMU Hall, 7 January 2022, 10.30am
Speech by SMU President Prof Lily Kong

Guest of Honour, Finance Minister Mr Lawrence Wong;
Chancellor, SMU, Mr Lim Chee Onn;
Pro-Chancellor, SMU, Mr Eddie Teo;
Chairman, Mr Ho Kwon Ping, and Members of the Board of Trustees;
Faculty, staff, and the Class of 2021;
And guests joining us at SMU Hall and online

Good morning – and congratulations once again to the Class of 2021 on graduating from Singapore Management University!

Commencement marks the end of an important period in your lives and the beginning of a new phase as you embark on your career. That is why we call this a “commencement”. It is a significant moment in your lives and so, although you graduated many months ago, your hard work and achievements deserve to be celebrated.

SMU holistic education

Four years ago, most of you were sitting in a gathering just like this – excited and full of enthusiasm – at Convocation 2017 after your freshman team-building camp. You had been selected during our rigorous admissions process and you showed the potential to benefit from SMU’s transformative education. When you first joined SMU, you might have been reserved and unsure of yourselves but over the years with us, you have learnt and acquired knowledge and a whole range of different skills. Today I see confident and articulate young men and women who have a strong sense of social responsibility and a necessary understanding and appreciation of different cultures.

At SMU you approached learning through a variety of disciplines; you applied your knowledge to real-world problems in your public, private and non-profit sector internships; and you had opportunities to learn about cultures and practices around the globe. SMU’s holistic education shaped you into a well-rounded individual with broad-based learning and deep knowledge in your area of specialisation, a global outlook and a desire to make a meaningful impact in the world.

You were challenged and you committed yourself in a wide range of co-curricular and community service activities. In true SMU spirit, you pursued your dreams, took risks, dared to fail and learned to succeed with grace. Whether you studied here as an undergraduate or postgraduate, you grew and matured as an individual who will seize the initiative, assume the obligations of leadership and take responsibility for your actions.

Don't forget that education is a lifelong process – you have learnt how to learn. This has prepared you for a successful career in which you are already having to adapt to the demands of an ever-changing world. You will continue to have to adapt, through lifelong learning as well as seizing and creating opportunities. You will need to constantly hone your skills and upgrade your knowledge. We hope that you will continue your lifelong education journey with us, through our rapidly increasing range of postgraduate, executive and professional programmes at SMU Executive Development and the SMU Academy.

Appreciation of family support

Today, I want to also acknowledge the parents, siblings, relatives and friends present. You played such a crucial role in these graduates' journeys and in their achievement. Today is a long-awaited celebration for you too. I invite everyone to please join me in giving them a big round of applause.

SMU legacy and values

My thanks to all of you who kept up the SMU tradition of contributing collectively to a graduating class scholarship. Your contributions will enable students with financial need to enjoy the SMU education you had. We truly appreciate your generosity.

Remember you are among the ranks of some 24,000 alumni and I encourage you to stay connected with one another, with your Schools and the University. I am sure you will cherish the enduring friendships that you have formed and nurtured here.

As you step into the working world, I urge all of you to carry our CIRCLE values of Commitment, Integrity, Responsibility, Collegiality, Leadership and Excellence with you wherever you go. These values are a vital part of SMU's holistic approach to education.

In recognition of the students who have especially embraced these values, the University confers on them SMU's CIRCLE Awards at the Commencement Ceremony each year. CIRCLE Award winners have been actively involved in serving and giving back to SMU and the community at large. They have demonstrated leadership abilities, are upright in character, and well respected by peers, staff, and faculty. They are role models.

In closing, I just want to say that I am glad to see so many of you again and to know that you are safe, well and adapting to this new normal. I hope to be able to see you again soon, perhaps when you attend our alumni events, take up a postgraduate course or volunteer to mentor your juniors. We look forward to you staying in touch with your alma mater.

My heartiest congratulations and best wishes to all of you. I am confident that you will make a meaningful impact and help to shape a better world for everyone.

Thank you.