

SMU Commencement for Class of 2020, Opening Ceremony
SMU Hall, 15 December 2021, 11.30am
Speech by SMU President Prof Lily Kong

Guest of Honour, Minister for Defence Dr Ng Eng Hen;
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 2020;
And guests joining us at SMU Hall and online.

Good morning – and congratulations once again to the Class of 2020 on graduating from Singapore Management University! This is a belated in-person ceremony, given COVID-19, but some of you will have participated last year in the virtual ceremony. I am happy to say that the virtual event had won silver for “Best Content Creation for a Virtual Event” and two bronzes at The Marketing Events Awards 2020, so I am happy to say that you were part of an award-winning event! Nevertheless, I understand that, for some, there is nothing that replaces the in-person event, so here we are, for the long-awaited physical ceremony. A warm welcome back to SMU!

As you were finishing off your final year with us in 2020, we were busy finalising the strategic plan for the university to take us to 2025. In our plans for propelling the University forward, we have identified three Strategic Priorities. These priorities, announced in September 2020, are Digital Transformation, Sustainable Living and Growth in Asia. They are framed to help SMU focus our strengths, draw on our existing assets, offer research and thought leadership, build workplace capabilities among our students, and guide our behaviour as an organisation.

If you allow me a little re-interpretation, I think that, you, as graduates, can apply similar strategies to help you reach for *your* dreams. Let me explain this by looking at each in turn.

Digital Transformation / Lifelong learning

First, digital transformation. SMU is making rapid progress in the digital transformation of its own administration – and can look forward to improved efficiency, more informed decision making, greater agility and continued relevance, among other benefits. Those of you in the Class of 2020 are digital natives. You were born into this world just a little before SMU was established. So just as SMU is transforming itself through enhanced digitalization, so too must you be willing to constantly transform yourself – whether it is digital or some other transformation. Just like institutions and businesses, you need to be proactive in updating yourselves – develop new skillsets, learn new knowledges, and acquire broad experience. At SMU you have learned how to learn. This is our best gift to you. It prepares you not just for your first career, but for future careers. You will be well placed for marketplace transformations and will be well able to adapt to the demands of an ever-changing world if you take that spirit of lifelong learning with you through your entire journey.

Growth in Asia

Second, through our Strategic Priority of Growth in Asia, SMU strives to offer a deep understanding of Asia's economy, polity and society, contribute to the region's growth and manage the ensuing impacts. Most of us here, including the Class of 2020 are Asians, and those who are not, have, by being here, generally gained an understanding and appreciation for the continent, its cultures and economies. The 21st Century has been forecast to be the "Asian Century", with the projected dominance of Asian politics, economic change, and cultures. Perhaps it is still to be, even with COVID. So, although, SMU has given you global exposure, you should consider how you can contribute to and benefit from being here in the heart of Asia. Sometimes the grass is greener on your side of the fence.

Sustainable Living

SMU's third Strategic Priority is Sustainable Living. Our university strives to practise what we preach, and have achieved remarkable success in our efforts at being a green campus. Much more, of course, can be done, and that will be part of our sustainability plan moving

forward. But sustainable living is more than being green, important as that is. It entails the creation of sustainable futures -- for yourselves, for Singapore, the region, and the world -- through ensuring economic, social, cultural and, yes, environmental sustainability. It begins with you.

You and your cohort are the future leaders of business, government, academia and private enterprise – and I believe SMU has given you the perspectives you need to ensure a sustainable future.

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 grew your heart through community service. SMU's holistic education shaped you into a well-rounded individual with broad-based learning and deep knowledge in your specialisation, a global outlook and a desire to make meaningful and lasting impact. This is the foundation of a sustainable future – for yourself, for Singapore, the region and the world.

Appreciation of family support

As you take your beginning steps in creating a sustainable future, I want to take the opportunity to acknowledge your parents, siblings, relatives and friends present. You played such a crucial role in the journeys of your loved ones and in supporting and enabling their achievement. Today is a long-awaited celebration for you too. So 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 have enabled 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 make your way in 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 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. We are very proud of you.

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 join our alumni events, take up a postgraduate course or even volunteer to be a mentor to 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 and very best wishes.