

**Speech by
Professor Goh Yihan, SC, Dean of SMU School of Law
At the SMU School of Law Official Renaming Ceremony
Held at SMU on 8 April 2021**

Mrs Yong Wei-Woo and Ms Yong Ying-Ee

Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon

Ministers Mr Lawrence Wong and Mr Edwin Tong

SMU Chairman Mr Ho Kwon Ping and Trustees

School of Law Advisory Board Chairman Mr VK Rajah and Members

Distinguished Guests

Colleagues from SMU

1. Let me begin by thanking everyone for attending this truly momentous occasion. I want to specially thank the Yong family for the tremendous honour you have bestowed upon our School.

Looking Back

2. The renaming of this School to bear the name and legacy of the late Dr Yong Pung How says as much about what it represents, as where it can go.
3. It speaks to the School's tradition of excellence, as an innovative law school that provides an academically rigorous yet practically relevant legal education. Indeed, with your support and commitment, we have, in 14 years, produced graduates who are well regarded by the legal sector. What is more, quite a few of our graduates have set up their own private practice or innovative legal tech start-ups. Our students have also consistently done well in international competitions. Just last week, our team finished 2nd out of about 385 law schools from 80 jurisdictions in the Willem C Vis moot, the world's largest moot on international commercial arbitration.

Looking Forward

4. But the renaming of the School in Dr Yong's name also reinforces the School's relevance as an agent for change to shape the future, as Dr Yong had been in every organisation he was part of. These organisations were all greatly improved by his uncompromising quest for excellence and passion for innovation.
5. As a relatively young law school, constant evolution is part of our DNA. We pioneered prevalent small class teaching, reducing the distance between instructor and student. We went beyond theory to practical experience in the classroom, putting an emphasis on presentation skills and producing students who are articulate and confident. But we can do more and be that beacon of light that paves the change to come.
6. First, we want to change the way that law is taught.
7. We want to fashion the Yong Pung How School of Law as an institution that prepares our graduates not only for the practice of law but also the future. Our role as a law school is to be continuously relevant in legal education for all legal professionals.
8. In the past few years, we have taken a three-level approach to achieve these goals.
9. First, we want to ensure that all students have baseline exposure to key contextual issues in technology and globalization. We have thus started primer series for our students to learn about important contextual issues against which the law operates. In the coming years, we will enhance this by introducing a Week 0 orientation course modelled after Harvard Law School's Zero-L programme. This course will be enhanced by the input of members of our Practice Advisory Panels, both to advise on the practical relevance of our curriculum, as well as to share their practical experience with students.
10. Second, we want to provide students with the opportunity to further their specialist interest areas. We have done this by introducing a carefully curated suite of electives. For example, in the area of technology, we are offering close to 10 electives such as

Computational Thinking and Legal Design. Going forward, we will offer students the opportunity to choose specialist tracks.

11. Third, we want to allow a small group of students the chance to study law and another discipline in a truly integrated fashion. Distinct from a double degree, we launched an interdisciplinary joint degree in computing and law with our School of Computing and Information Systems. This is a pilot programme that we hope will lead to even more such joint integrated degrees.
12. Above all, we will challenge the silo-based method of teaching basic law subjects. Going forward, we will require every law student to take a capstone course that will involve students solving a real-life problem that incorporates facets of the different subjects they have learned.
13. The second area of change is in legal research. In the spirit of Dr Yong's passion for innovation, we want to produce cutting-edge legal research that is of practical relevance.
14. For example, in response to the current pandemic, our faculty produced an electronic book, 'Law and COVID-19', where technology, financial and private law approaches to mitigating the situation were analysed in relation to the pandemic.
15. Further, in the last few years, we gratefully received some \$20m to fund our two law and technology centres, namely the Centre for AI and Data Governance, and the Centre for Computational Law. This latter Centre is researching the representation of law as code, which will lead to the creation of legal tools for the future, reflecting our commitment to solving real world problems in a very practical way. The Centre's work is truly multidisciplinary: its research staff includes not only lawyers, but computer scientists and software engineers.

16. We also received generous funding for our Singapore International Dispute Resolution Academy and the Singapore Global Restructuring Initiative at our Centre for Commercial Law in Asia. The Restructuring Initiative, in particular, will promote cutting-edge research on restructuring and corporate insolvency, which, as the Chief Justice has noted, is an important growth area following the current pandemic. It will do this through the cooperation of academics, practitioners, judges and policymakers from around the world.

17. The third and final area of change is our interaction with the legal profession.

18. Just as Dr Yong fostered the interaction between all sectors of the legal profession, we would like to be a key partner of the profession. To that extent, we started the SMU Law Academy in early 2018 to provide a suite of executive legal training programmes for the profession. The Academy is partnering with law firms and industry bodies such as the Singapore International Arbitration Centre and the Singapore Corporate Counsel Association to offer these programmes. Our students have also produced a Singapore Law Journal to foster the exchange of ideas between academia and practice. Through the Academy and other programmes, we hope that the Yong Pung How School of Law will be partners with the profession in every sense of the word.

Conclusion

19. Ultimately, what really matters the most through these initiatives are the things that we cannot measure. Lives in the law we have cultivated. The legal innovations we have fostered. The impact we have made on the legal community and society at large.

20. It is therefore so fitting to honour one of the giants who personified this commitment to change for the future. Indeed, the best way we can honour Dr Yong's name and legacy is focusing on the future and continuing his legacy of effecting change in the hope of a better tomorrow. We will do this through preparing our students well, through innovative research, and through service that advances the rule of law.

21. May the memory of Dr Yong Pung How continue to inspire us to be that agent of change for the future of legal education and the profession. May we do it, as we all heard Dr Yong said earlier, ever so bravely, regardless of the difficulties that lie ahead. After all, if it is not hard to do, it is probably not a worthwhile cause to begin with. And may we do it as a cohesive and collegiate team, which I am so very blessed and proud to be a tiny part of – faculty, staff, students, alumni and our partners in the profession.

22. Excellence in everything we do must be our hallmark at the Yong Pung How School of Law.

23. Thank you very much.

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