

A SPECIAL FEATURE BY SINGAPORE MANAGEMENT UNIVERSITY

For whom her motor runs

While her head is always filled with numbers, it's her students who are at the heart of her teaching.



► Ms Rosie Ching (far left) with her students in a group shot, capping the last lesson of the semester.

"My students are for whom my motor runs," declares the indefatigable Ms Rosie Ching, Senior Lecturer of Statistics at the Singapore Management University (SMU) School of Economics. They know it, and in turn have put her on the SMU Teaching Excellence Honour Roll with two Excellent Teacher Awards and two Innovative Teacher Awards in a row—making her the first faculty to achieve the distinction. Last year, Rosie also received the CEMAN (Central and East European Management Development Association) Champion Award for Teaching.

One student wrote, "I hate math but she has inspired me." It is, in fact, these very students who inspire Rosie. She affirms, "Everything starts with my students, even before the Statistics—I always have them in mind."

Playing the numbers game

Rosie uses interactive games, hands-on experiments, current affairs and history to demystify statistics, and the students have nothing but praise for her and her teaching, off-the-charts' experiments.

Whoops and cheers often ring out from her classes as students spin roulette wheels or drop buffered toast to test Murphy's Law of Toast, meticulously collecting and analysing the data. The "Dress that Breaks the Internet" also made a "fun" appearance, all in the name of engaging students.

"Experience is a powerful teacher," Rosie explains, noting these experiments often have positive effects: "I have seen the most resistant and stubborn of students become engaged," she adds cheerfully. Over the years, thousands of her students have testified as to how her dedication has inspired them to improve.

In December 2015, Rosie's work was recognised with a Whitson-Quaquebarre Symonds Stars Reimagine Education Global (Bronze) Award for an original game she created based on the Customer Service Index. This proved so popular, it has now been downloaded in 54 countries. Rosie personally designs passports complete with Custom stamps for her "CSI agent" students. "The students love



► A souvenir Passport of the World War II project, which her students dedicated to the memory of World War II heroes.

it! They like how this brings them through the intricacies of their statistical work," she enthuses.

Some projects have had an enduring national impact, such as the world's first Toilet Cleanliness Index which was created last year with the World Toilet Organisation. Some are more pragmatic. These include a World War II 70th anniversary project, in which the students dedicated their project work to the memory of the World War II heroes. The way Rosie sees it, "Humankind's story is one of statistics."

Every student counts

Rosie makes an effort to get to know each and every one of her students, remembering up to 225 names every semester. She also



► Rosie (centre) and her students strike a pose for the 2017 "Olympics Statified" Project.

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Senior Lecturer of Statistics, Ms Rosie Ching

makes time for them outside the classroom, to be there for the friendless, the discouraged, the distressed and disheartened as they come." As one student says, "She is a mentor, teaching and guiding us in life."

Many of those who have long since joined the workforce keep in touch. Recently, a former student Nicholas Tan, now a trader, told her how her lessons have helped him "participate meaningfully in discussions on trends and assumptions," with a cheeky side note about being able to "stop researchers who try to pull a fast one on us with numbers".

"I just want to awaken in my students the belief in themselves," Rosie says. For those she has taught, this teacher certainly is one-in-a-thousand.



► Mr Soh and his daughters spending some quality time together at Pebble Beach, California.

A journey of discovery, right here at home

Three sisters had planned to study abroad, but they found a world-class education at SMU instead. Their father shares how he's seen the girls bloom at SMU.

Mr Soh Chye Guan's eldest daughter Genevieve used to be a quiet girl, he says, thinking back to her younger days. She was studious and focused, and rarely shared her opinions with the family.

That changed when she took up a double degree in Business Management and Accountancy at the Singapore Management University (SMU). Genevieve learnt to express herself and speak more confidently," recounts Mr Soh. Their dinner table conversations grew more spirited, as father and daughter debated economic policies in Singapore. "She was becoming an adult, and impressed me with the points she made," says Mr Soh, who works in the financial industry.

He wasn't the only one who took note. Genevieve's two younger sisters, Geraldine and Gillian, watched as their sister blossomed. "As when Genevieve led a team to Canada to compete in a case study competition and triumphed, her siblings were cheering on the home front."

When it came to Geraldine's and Gillian's turns for university, both girls originally had their hearts set on studying abroad like many of their peers. However, they were won over by their sister. "Genevieve had really grown and developed as an individual," says Mr Soh. "I think her sisters saw that in SMU, she was given a lot of freedom to experiment, and was happy." It also helped that Geraldine, like Genevieve, received a scholarship from the Lee Kong Chian School of Business.

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Genevieve's father, Mr Soh Chye Guan

In any case, the sisters never missed being abroad, as overseas opportunities led at SMU proved to be plentiful. All three girls travelled extensively, undertaking exchange programmes in the United Kingdom, Sweden and Canada, and teaching in Cambodia and Thailand. Even their father overcame his initial reluctance to let them take so many trips, amazed at how independent they had become.

This year, when his youngest daughter Gillian graduates, Mr Soh is confident she will be well prepared for a successful career, just like her two other children. "SMU is a choice university," he says. It has certainly been the right choice for their family.

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A bona-fide bond with students

They are highly acclaimed in their respective industries and active in their fields, but these educators are putting students first.



► Professor Venky Shankararaman, the first academic outside the USA to be presented the Award for Outstanding Contribution to IS Education by the elite Association for Information Systems (AIS).

Singapore Management University (SMU)'s faculty list reads like a who's who of the professions they represent. Not only are these subject experts acclaimed for their work off campus, their academic careers have been equally eminent.

Take Professor Venky Shankararaman, Associate Dean of the School of Information Systems (SIS), whose 25 years in the IT industry have seen him gather accolades after accolade. His career roles range from consultant for government and industry to award-winning researcher and teacher. Or Associate Professor Goh Yihan, youngest recipient of the Singapore Academy of Law's Singapore Law Merit Award and renowned legal expert, who will be taking

on a new role as Dean of SMU's School of Law from July 2017. Both have committed to sharing their experiences and knowledge with the next generation of leaders, by bringing their expertise to the classroom.

Enabling a new generation

"Students are at the heart of what we do here at the Singapore Management University," says Associate Professor Goh. It's a mind-set that has clinched him six teaching awards in his eight-year career, including 2016's SMU School of Law Most Outstanding Teacher Award. As co-editor of Singapore Law 50 Years in the Making—the first study of its kind on the development of Singapore Law—Prof Goh has a wealth of legal wisdom to share. As he reaches out to understand his students' concerns and aspirations, the incoming dean also inspires them to become responsible architects in the development of Singapore law. He tells his students, "The law is supposed to make the world a better place."

The board member of the Singapore Institute of Legal Education and the Singapore Judicial College makes it a point to incorporate true-life examples into his lessons—"for law is intensely practical, and has real-life consequences for very real people," he emphasises.

Like Prof Goh, Prof Venky wants his students to create value for society through the work they do. He is a keen proponent of SMU's multi-disciplinary initiative, SMU-X, which he sees as giving SMU students a headstart when it comes to making an impact on industry. Through this new pedagogy, students benefit from projects that have faculty members mentoring them in their collaborations with

corporate, non-profit and government-sector organisations.

Developing the X-factor in students

SMU President, Professor Arnold De Meyer, elaborates on the course: "X stands for many things: experimentation, entrepreneurial, excitement, cross-interaction, collaboration and the unknown." In that vein, Prof Venky has been busy leading the revamp of the current Information Systems (IS) major, while also piloting a new Smart-City Management and Technology (SMT) major for launch. It is designed to equip SMU students with not just technological solution skills but also social science and management skills. The aim, to enable them as innovative future policy-makers who will be needed as the government pushes for Singapore to become a smart city.

Associate Professor Goh Yihan



► Prof Venky engaging his students during one of SMU's distinctive small classes.

"Students are at the heart of what we do here in SMU... The true reward in teaching is making a difference in our students' learning journeys."

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► Associate Professor Goh Yihan, the youngest recipient of the Singapore Academy of Law's Singapore Law Merit Award and youngest Dean to head SMU's School of Law.

"By designing new content, I get the chance to help the wider professional and academic community," he says. Another course is in the works—the Digital Business, Technologies and Transformation course, which explores the principles and practices that lead to successful digital transformation.

Prof Venky lays claim to being the first academic outside the USA to be presented the Award for Outstanding Contribution to IS Education by the elite Association for Information Systems (AIS). He has also received the SAP Outstanding Academic Award for Southeast Asia.

Beyond the honours, his enthusiasm for what he does is contagious. His students consistently impress their industry partners, and have picked up the soft skills they need to succeed at work, whether it is developing the right work attitude, learning to interact with co-workers and management, or adapting to different ways of thinking.

Creating pathways to success

On the other end of the campus, Prof Goh is planning to undertake "a bold and progressive curriculum review." Over and beyond legal perspectives, students should also be able to approach topics from other perspectives outside of law, such as in a social or commercial context. The future of the legal profession promises multiple new opportunities to students, and we need to anticipate and provide these opportunities to our students," he says.

Both professors insist that students be the masters of their own learning. It is, as Prof Venky says, how they will "thrive in the work environment of the foreseeable future." In the meantime, they are standing by their students. "The true reward in teaching," Prof Goh declares, "is making a difference in the students' learning journeys."