

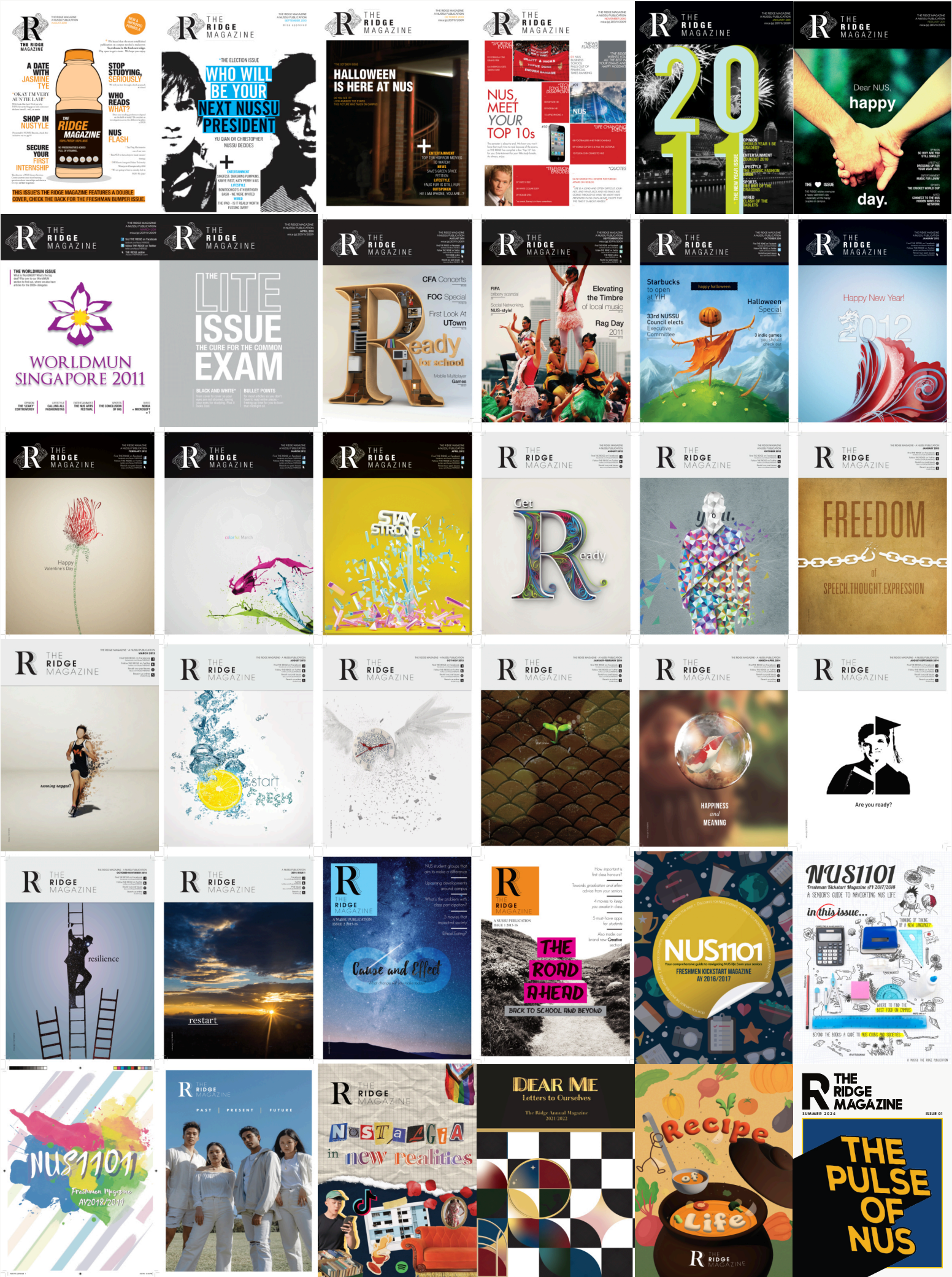
R THE RIDGE MAGAZINE

SUMMER 2024

ISSUE 01



**THE
PULSE
OF
NUS**



R THE RIDGE MAGAZINE

EDITOR'S NOTE

Dear Readers,

Welcome to our newly reimagined and freshly re-branded magazine! After almost a year in the works, we are now proud to introduce to you this exciting new chapter of our Magazine.

Throughout our long history, The Ridge Magazine has seen its fair share of changes: from its early days as a political magazine, to its later days as a conventional magazine, and finally to its most recent and experimental days as a freshman and then creative magazine. During that time, we've explored many uncharted territories. But this year, it's time to return home to our student life.

It is in this spirit that we're rebranding ourselves as a student life magazine, overhauling and condensing our focus into three distinct content categories: Campus, Lifestyle and Commentary. "Campus" is home to everything related to our student life here at NUS. "Lifestyle" is home to a dizzying array of light-hearted content including culture, entertainment, food, music, sports, technology, travel, etc. And "Commentary" is home to heavy topics worthy of deep contemplation, including those that discuss political,

economic, social and cultural issues.

The overall creative direction of our magazine redesign is guided by minimalism. This is reflected in our choice of plain sans-serif fonts over other complex font types, our choice of a crisp, clean design over an excessive one, in the selection of a basic colour palette consisting of black and white, and in the reduction of design elements to only the essentials. But the design of individual articles are unconstrained by minimalism: our designers have unbridled creative freedom and control over their own canvases.

This magazine wouldn't have been published if not for some very important people. Special thanks goes first to my team: to my Deputy Editor-in-Chief Rebecca Chan for her steadfast assistance with numerous administrative hurdles; to my Creative Director Ines Pang for her tireless dedication to designing the magazine alongside me; to my Editors Austin Ong and Lee Rui Kai for their relentless devotion to editing and revising the very many articles; and to my Marketing Director Tan Ai Mei for her persistent

work in sourcing and securing publication partners. Next, thanks goes to all the writers and designers for their invaluable contributions. Finally, thanks goes to the good folks at NUSSU, who provided support and assistance to us at every turn.

We hope that you will have as much fun reading this inaugural rebranded issue of The Ridge Magazine as we had writing and designing it.

Jolly Cheong
Editor-in-Chief

NUSSU The Ridge Magazine

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Love to write?

Looking for an avenue to let your ideas be known? We welcome all enthusiastic writers who want to make a positive contribution on board. Send your portfolio to theridge.recruitment@nussu.org.sg



Are you a creative individual with an eye for detail?
We are on the lookout for designers to join our team.
Send your portfolio to theridge.recruitment@nussu.org.sg

FRESHIE DIRECTORY:

ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW IN THIS ARTICLE

BY YUHA KIM

As you start on your first semester at NUS, navigating through the initial confusion can be daunting. To ease your transition, here's a compiled resource list for guidance.

NAVIGATING COURSEREG

Declare your academic plan every semester at EduRec (<https://myedurec.nus.edu.sg/>). Academic Plan Declaration allows you to declare your Majors, Specialisations, Tracks, Minors and 2nd Majors every semester. However, something worth keeping in mind is that a student has only until their 5th semester of study to make changes or opt for a new Second Major or Minor. The school website strongly advises you to complete this Declaration at least 24 hours before you register for your courses.

Course registration takes place in CourseReg@EduRec as well. You can select, drop, and appeal for classes, tutorials, and labs, all within the website. For information on how to use CourseReg, visit https://nus.edu.sg/coursereg/using_coursereg_undergraduate.html.

There are 3 rounds in total to select courses (for non-freshman, this might be unfamiliar to you as this is a recent update that will be in effect from AY2024/2025 onwards.) To view the CourseReg Schedule and Appeal Timeline, visit <https://nus.edu.sg/coursereg/schedule-and-timeline.html>.

Selecting tutorials is separate from registering for courses. There are two rounds for tutorial selection, and they take place in Week 1. In terms of having a tutorial bidding strategy, I've personally found this reddit post helpful: https://www.reddit.com/r/nus/comments/otspw1/tutorial_balloting_strategy/.

NUSSU RAG AND FLAG

On Flag Day, freshmen carry donation tins and seek contributions throughout Singapore. Rag is a festival where different faculties and halls present performances to express gratitude to the public for their donations on Flag Day. Catch a glimpse of Rag and Flag 2023 here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5PFiv9wQ5TE&t=14s>

If you're interested in joining, look out for sign-ups from your respective faculties/halls!

FRESHMEN ORIENTATION PROGRAMME

Orientation camps are a great way to make friends and familiarize yourself with university life. Head to NUSSU FOP website to find orientation camps in your major/faculty/hall! I also suggest visiting each FOP's Instagram page for details.

STUDENT LIFE FAIR

Want to know more about CCAs in NUS? Student Life Fair is a perfect opportunity for you to discover over 140 student committees, clubs, and societies spanning arts, culture, sports, and various interest groups. It usually takes place in Week 1 at UTown, so mark your calendar!

ACCOMODATIONS

University Hostel Management System (UHMS) website is where you apply for accommodations. For a comprehensive application guide, visit <https://osa.nus.edu.sg/accommodation/hostel-application/application-guide-undergraduate/>

There are four types of hostel options: Halls, House, Residential Colleges, and Student Residences. To learn more about each of them and see what's best for you, feel free to look at <https://osa.nus.edu.sg/accommodation/hostel-application/application-guide-undergraduate/living-on-campus/>

Keep in mind the application deadlines at <https://osa.nus.edu.sg/accommodation/hostel-application/application-guide-undergraduate/application-dates/>

NUS OVERSEAS COLLEGE: A GUIDE

NOC is an internship programme where you have a chance to pursue entrepreneurship education overseas. It's different from Student Exchange Programmes (SEP)—NOC is specifically geared for students interested in entrepreneurship and startups. Application opens twice a year in April and October. For more details, visit the NOC website at <https://enterprise.nus.edu.sg/education-programmes/nus-overseas-colleges/>

Entering university life may seem overwhelming at first. Armed with the right resources, you'll soon be a pro. Beyond this article, reach out to your seniors for valuable insights—they're eager to assist. Stay informed, engage in activities, and all the best for your time at NUS!

EXPLORATION OF MAJORS IN NUS

BY STEVEN DIAO

As students in NUS, most of us face the perennial question of how 'worth it' our field of study is. With the ability to change majors during our time at NUS up till a specified amount of time, the weight of choice constantly follows us. To help new freshmen figure out their academic path, I have gathered perspectives from multiple students from different departments so that hopefully, this guide can help newly admitted students in their academic journey. Do keep in mind that the interviews conducted are a mixture of (mostly) uncommon and common majors and are not an exhaustive list of all the majors in NUS.

THE SCIENCE OF LIFE

When I asked Scormon Ho, a Year 1 Life Sciences student about his academic discipline, I was amazed at the breadth of it. With the Life Sciences curriculum, a NUS student can specialise in a field they are interested in, whether it is Biomedical Science, Ecology, or Evolution and Biodiversity. Scormon says that no matter what your interest or niche is in Life Sciences, you will be able to carve your path in the major. From a practical perspective, Scormon highlights the diverse skills that the major can offer, such as being able to do lab work and conducting research.

Additionally, the major teaches many transferable skills such as analytical thinking, communication and project management that would be useful in any scenario. A Life Sciences major can then work in conservation, biotechnology and biomedical engineering, medical diagnostics, drugs and pharmaceuticals, among many others. Whether you are interested in animals, humans, or nature, or just interested in how science has shaped and moulded our daily lives, Life Sciences would be a major suitable for you.

FINDING YOUR VOICE

Y (name kept anonymous), a Master's student at NUS, graduated from the Yong Siew Toh (YST) Conservatory of Music, majoring in Music and Society and Voice. For Y, the value of a Bachelor of Music is self-determined. Y reminds us that for each individual, the "value" of a programme would vary over time and the most important aspect is to find something you are passionate about. As a Music and Society major, the program encourages students to experiment with different disciplines such as Political Science, Sociology, and Geography among others. The interdisciplinary nature of the program allows for the student to experiment and define their path in the programme. The depth and breadth of majors in YST allows students to find their niche whether it's in music production, instrumentals or vocals. Y highlights that by discovering your discipline, you would uncover options and paths you would never have heard of.



UNDER THE BRIGHT LIGHTS

"Got money meh?" This question faced by Jade Ow, a Year 3 Theatre and Performance Studies major is a perennial one that is brought up by family members and students alike. As Jade progressed through her academic journey at NUS as a Theatre Studies major, she was able to take on such questions with more confidence. With a programme that has produced distinguished alumni such as Koh Wan Ching (Crazy Rich Asians), Anjana Vasani (A Streetcar Named Desire) and ex-Nominated Member of Parliament Janice Koh among many others. Graduates in the department have gone on to work in tech and drama education!

To Jade, the selling point of the programme is its emphasis on Performance-as-Research as its core focus. In other words, the programme researches and documents the creative process to achieve higher-quality theatre.



THE LAND BELOW THE WINDS

"What do you even study?". This is the question Shawn Wong, a Year 4 student majoring in Southeast Asian Studies is constantly faced with when he reveals his major to others. To that, Shawn answers that in Southeast Asian Studies, the department adopts a transdisciplinary approach to academics. The department has faculty specialising in Art History, Political Science, Anthropology, and Economics among many others. Shawn excitedly points out that as a Southeast Asian Studies major, one would have ample opportunity to travel overseas as many modules offered by the department have mandatory overseas trips.

When asked about the job prospects of a Southeast Asian Studies major, Shawn highlights graduates' diverse roles, such as working at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), Channel News Asia (CNA), banking and even in tech! A highlight of the programme is that there is a compulsory third language component where one can learn Vietnamese, Thai, Bahasa Indonesia or Bahasa Melayu, making it easier for one to graduate with a minor in Language Studies. If you look forward to small classes (one cohort has less than 10 majors), intimate learning environments and experiential learning, Southeast Asian Studies might be the major for you!



The Misconceptions of Different Majors

By Grace Leong

Have you ever wondered what your friends studied? Or perhaps you are thinking of switching majors and you are so riddled by different stereotypes of majors, crippling your ability to make a choice. Misconceptions are rife and it is very easy to assume things before you have studied them. Below is a brief summary of five different majors and common misconceptions about them, in order to help you gain clarity on what to study.

Business Analytics

Business Analytics is the study of programming and statistics to solve problems in businesses. It is, however, often confused with business majors. The difference is in that Business Analytics teaches you more focused skills in coding and analysing statistics. Their introduction course, Introduction to Business Analytics (BT1101), explores how to categorise data using R, which is a programming language that helps you derive solutions to improve business models. This course also teaches you linear optimisation where you can translate the businesses' goals and constraints into mathematical equations and use R to solve for the optimal mix of variables to achieve the best outcome, despite the constraints. Thus, bridging statistical concepts with business-related problems. Business Analytics focuses more on enabling you to develop the skill of analytics, hence, you can choose from a wide-range of jobs, like business analysts to software engineers.

History

History is often labelled as 'useless' due to the perceived lack of applicability to the present or the future. Although it is the study of the past,

history is much more than that. As a famous saying goes, we use the past to learn about the future, and that is why the study of History is still as relevant today. For example, in an Ancient Greece Module (HY2263), we learn about how the Greeks selected their leaders in the Classical era. Through this, you would observe how the characteristics of what makes a good leader can be compared to how we view leaders today, thus linking the past to the present and foreseeable future. In the introductory module, Asia and the Modern World, (HY1101E), you would learn not just about a wide range of Asian History, but also the fundamentals of writing a History essay.

Another misconception of the study of History is the rigorous memorisation needed for dates, places and names, etc, and this often scares people away. Although you are required to know and familiarise yourself with the different eras of History, you would not need to memorise that much, as it largely depends on the assessment mode. Oftentimes, assessment modes consist of final essays, group work or presentations instead of a sit-down examination, hence, memorisation is not as intense as it seems. History is also taught thematically, through different concepts instead of it being strictly chronological, which invites for a broader range of skills such as analysis of different sources to be tested on, instead of just purely memorisation.

People often associate jobs in education with History majors, usually as History teachers. However, even though a sizable amount of students do end up in the education sector, this is not always the case. There are various positions in the corporate world, such as consulting, that allow you to use the skills of analysis learnt in History, like researching on the political and historical climate of a region in order for a company to assess the risk of investing in said region. Other careers could also include working in museums doing curation or archival works. Many students also complement history with another major, hence applicability and job prospects may not be as narrow as you might expect.

Engineering Science

Engineering Science is often misconstrued as a faculty instead of a major, but it is different as it focuses on varying skills every engineer should have—for example, systems thinking or thermodynamics. As such, it enables you to develop more specific skills in engineering, for example, circuitry in electrical engineering. Most people from Engineering Science go to either academia or engineering-related industries and generally, the most relevant knowledge would be acquired on the job as you progress in the industry.

Law

For students majoring in Law, one common misconception people often hold is that law students would have to do tons of memorising and studying. Law is certainly not for the fainthearted. However, students majoring in Law are taught a framework in evaluating cases, which helps to ease the intensity of studying in law school. NUS Law follows the British Common Law system and establishes its syllabus via case studies, instead of making you memorise the whole Penal code. The curriculum in Law school follows a more unified structure, where Year 1 and Year 2 students have to take the same compulsory modules. Only in Year 3, do Law students get to take their unrestricted electives. Usually, Law students would have to get a training contract by the end of Year 2 for a company to train and sponsor them for the bar exam to become a practising lawyer.

Psychology

Students who take psychology are engulfed with lots of stereotypes, one of which is that since Psychology is more inclined towards the humanities, you do not need mathematics to do well in it. That cannot be further from the truth; mathematics is required in analysing and interpreting statistics from various experiments being conducted. It is an empirical science after all, as you need to analyse experimental data in order to come to a conclusion. Hence, statistics is necessary. There is even a statistics gateway module that you would need to pass in order to qualify for the major.

Another misconception is that you would learn how to 'read minds'. The truth is, psychology majors may learn how to analyse body language to some degree, but there is no way to truly 'read' somebody's mind. Their introductory module, PL1101E, Introduction to Psychology teaches you different facets of psychology, such as biological, developmental, cognitive, social and evolutionary psychology.

So, what can you do with a psychology degree? Many people go into Human Resources-related work or work in government boards. However, in order to be a practising psychologist in Singapore, they would at least have to hold a Masters' degree, hence, most people would probably work in other fields for one to two years before getting a Masters' degree.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there are so many different misconceptions each major has, as well as a wide variety of different career pathways. Each major has their own special niche or skill that they cater to. If you ever think of switching your major, or meeting friends of different majors, do remember to keep an open mind and not let misconceptions get in the way of understanding certain majors.

DECODING SPATIAL OF

THE LOGIC NUS

IN DEFENCE
OF
RUNNING
LATE
AND
GETTING
LOST

BY
GRACE

Everyone knows the feeling. It comes to you when you're left with a fifteen-minute wedge between classes and expected to teleport to the other side of Kent Ridge. Or, when you're still humiliatingly lost in the labyrinthine bowels of the FASS building weeks into the semester. It's a frustrating awareness of the distance between Points A and B, and the winding route in-between that swallows up time and stamina. For all its lush foliage and shiny buildings, some design choices in NUS just feel more confounding than others. Experiencing the ins and outs of other campuses while on exchange might further shore up these feelings. In moments where all sense of direction has gone to the wolves and the weather is too hot to justify the Odyssey it takes to reach a lecture, one wonders what logic went into planning where places go in

NUS. (Who condemned you to climb all these stairs and why the sadism?) Although most of these criticisms are

volleyed in emotionally charged (and fatigued) moments, they are still questions worth asking inquisitively. Not because the answers reveal the shortcomings of architectural design but because they have more to say about you—the student navigating the space.

It comes as no surprise to most that campus life is largely depoliticised. What might be more surprising is how depoliticisation is built into the brick-and-mortar of the Kent Ridge campus, and is the reason behind much of our daily grievances navigating it. The notion that space influences users is by no means unheard of (a concept widely explored in many classes across a myriad of disciplines) but applying it to the very vicinity we live and study in might border on existential. Yet, this is the undertaking of *Kent Ridge: An Untold Story*, a book published in 2019 that follows the natural and urban history of the titular region (a source that came to me by way of a Reddit thread, to which I owe the inspiration of this article).

Within it, there are juicy nuggets of information detailing the design choices made by the University of Singapore Development Unit (USDU) tasked with constructing the Kent Ridge campus in the 1970s. Have you ever gotten into arguments with another RC/hall-dwelling friend about who should be the one that travels to the other? The USDU might chime in to add that hostels were deliberately built at the peripheries of campus rather than in a cluster, "so that the campus could be construed, at times, as rather quiet, devoid of students and lacking buzz." Hence, the distance between each RCs/hall and the silos that each of them seems to exist atomically in is by no means an accident. Regarding the serpentine pathways that crest and fall on the undulating landscape they were built on (anyone who has gotten lost in the FASS building can attest to it feeling like a real-life game of Snakes and Ladders), the USDU was assiduous in adhering to a linear structure across its buildings to prevent congregation. Quadrangles were a big no-no.



Just to satisfy the question of who you can blame when stuck in those moments of thwarted commute around campus, one possible scapegoat for your frustrations is the then Minister of Science and Technology, Mr. Toh Chin Chye. Mr. Toh often advised the USDU in long, dreary meetings that they “dreaded”. In a comedically confessional anecdote from the book, Mr. Toh once called the USDU a “bunch of nincompoops” for designing an open space in the Yusof Ishak House. Insults and workspace spat

aside, the design of the Kent Ridge campus was founded upon real anxieties of the time. These calculated decisions were made against a sociopolitical climate of student power in Southeast Asia, where students were more than just literati with their noses stuck in books, but activists who took to the streets. At their very core, these design choices are a reflection of those that inhabit them—some food for thought to munch on to help pass the time on your next cramped shuttle bus ride. Whether we relate to it or not, our present circumstances are echoes of a bygone generation of students.

However, there is one blatant exception to the early designs of the USDU—UTown. With the sprawling UTown Green hugged by a crescent of F&B outlets perfect for congregating, this layout seems like exactly the type of plan that would send Mr. Toh into a tirade. Never before was there a central nexus on campus. In a Straits Times article dated April 2012 titled “NUS UTown revolutionises campus life”, UTown is lauded for “marrying academia with social life,” seemingly a complete reversal from decades of design strategy. Today, it is impossible to imagine UTown not being the heart of Kent Ridge, the pulsating chamber that the lifeblood of student life passes through before rejuvenating the wider compound. On one hand, this can be read as an attempt to keep up with the times as a world-class university and a commitment to improving student life. On the other hand, this concession might also clue us into the changing perceptions and dynamics of students today.

If one thing is for certain, the physical environment of our campus is not set in stone. Just as waves of student activism in the 1970s shaped its construction, contemporary currents continue to propose new opportunities and challenges. Perhaps a victim of the success of its aesthetic appeal, UTown has recently been swamped by buses of tourists, a human wave powerful enough that it has urged NUS to set up a new visitor centre. While the tourist surge presents itself in our quotidian as mostly an inconvenience, there is a historical silver lining to be seen amidst the sun visors and phone tripods: the spatial history and placemaking of our campus continue to be shaped by human agency, be it the desire to fight for change, the everyday want of unwinding with friends or the wish for bettering the future of one’s children by enrolling them in a prestigious institution. At the very least, know that it’s not (entirely) your fault for running late and getting lost around campus.

THE ABC (ESJ) OF CS1010

Coder or not, as a freshman at the National University of Singapore (NUS), one of the first modules you're likely to encounter is a variant of the CS1010 series. You might have seen passionate discussions on CS1010 across various forum posts, but knowing more about the CS1010 "flavors" will make your introduction to programming less daunting.

So what does that elusive letter suffix even mean? In some cases, such as with CS1010E and CS1010S, we can intuitively guess which faculty's students the modules are allocated towards (E for Engineering, and S for Science!). In other cases, we can only guess why that letter was chosen for the module.

In this guide, we'll walk through the different variants of CS1010, including which one you're likely to be allocated to according to your major.

Further research and self-checking of information with official sources are always encouraged to ensure accuracy between different academic semesters.

1. CS1010: Computer Engineering, Information Security, Cross-Faculty

CS1010 is a foundational module designed for students across various faculties and majors. Its variants are suffixed with different letters for different majors, but CS1010 itself is one of the Introduction to Programming modules NUS students are able to take.

This module itself is one of the more versatile, usually allocated to Computer Engineering (CEG), Information Security (InfoSec) and cross-faculty students who are taking computing-related second majors. It introduces students to the fundamentals of programming using the C language, a powerful and widely-used language in system programming and software development.

2. CS1010A: Business Analytics

CS1010A is one of the newer variants tailored for Business Analytics (BZA) students, and is occasionally said to be a successor of the old CS1010S module.

This generally means that the content is more difficult. It adopts Python as its programming language, offering a user-friendly and versatile environment for beginners.



3. CS1010E: Engineering



CS1010E is specifically designed for engineering students, utilizing Python for its ease of learning and application. According to personal recounts, this module tends to tackle problems that are more related to real-life scenarios and algorithms.

A common sentiment is that a good portion of engineering work does not involve programming, but it's a good skill to have nonetheless. Python's readability and extensive libraries makes it a sensible choice for various engineering applications.

4. CS1010J: Information Systems



CS1010J caters to Information Systems students, being one of the few Introduction to Programming courses that uses Java. Java is an object-oriented language that's widely used in company/enterprise applications and information systems.

5. CS1010S: Science

CS1010S is tailored for students under the Faculty of Science, hence it is one of the most talked-about variants of CS1010. Although its general syllabus and scope have been said to be smaller as compared to its previous renditions, its learning curve is still steep.

It is one of the modules that uses the concept of gamification and Python on Coursemology to make things a little bit easier on the students, with XP-granting "Quests" that students have to complete in lieu of the traditional assignments.

6. CS1010X: NSmen



It is one of the modules that uses the concept of gamification and Python on Coursemology to make things a little bit easier on the students, with XP-granting "Quests" that students have to complete in lieu of the traditional assignments.

Conclusion

Navigating the landscape of programming can seem overwhelming at first, but understanding the differences between your CS1010 variant and the others can help you prepare in advance. Further research and cross-referencing with official sources are always encouraged to ensure accuracy between academic semesters.

You may consider preparing early by familiarizing yourself with basic programming concepts and the specific language being used in your course. There are numerous online resources, tutorials, and courses online available to get you started, and most of them should work just fine to give you a head start. With the proper information, determination and willingness to learn, you'll be well-equipped for your introduction to the strong technical skill that is programming.



Student-run Small Businesses You Need to Know

— by Tricia Teong —

In the midday heat, as you get off the bus at UTown to head to class or meet up with a friend for lunch, you might be lucky enough to spot a trove of stylish second-hand clothing and unique handmade accessories glinting in the sunlight, as if they were treasures waiting for you. From racks of the coolest cargo pants and vintage tees to eclectically designed jewellery and accessories, it is nothing short of a shopper's paradise (or nightmare, if you are on a spending ban). You would be forgiven, however, if you have yet to stumble upon these pop-up events or know little of the small businesses run by none other than students just like you.



While NUS is renowned for a myriad of reasons, one facet of student life that deserves a brighter spotlight is our very own small business scene. These pop-up fairs (usually organised as part of fundraising efforts by the NUS Rotaract Club) are just one piece of a vibrant mosaic fashioned by student sellers who are creating a lively small business scene here in NUS. Each of these young entrepreneurs have their own niche and cult following, forming a network that extends across campus and even beyond.

These tight-knit communities were not formed overnight, but nurtured through great care. Intentionality is key, as seen in the painstaking hours these business owners spend crafting jewellery, doing quality checks on hundreds of clothing pieces and engaging with customers both online and offline. This human touch is the cornerstone of these businesses' popularity and is as important to the individual sellers as much as the customers. Shermaine (Biz, Year 3), the face behind AhMa Thrifts and co-owner of Hikari Space (a curated store located in Queensway Shopping Center), shares about a surprising turn of events that led to a customer

becoming her best friend. "One of my closest friends was actually someone who had bought from me online, and we later met each other in a school camp as OGLs (Orientation Group Leaders)," she recounts.

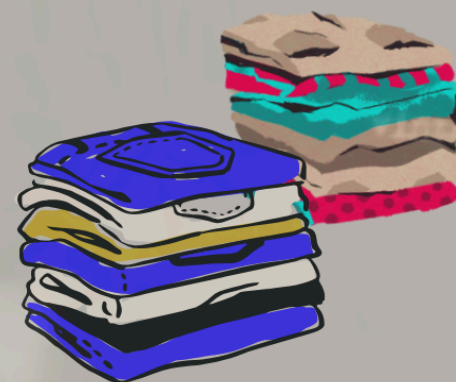
"We immediately had a common love of vintage clothes and because of that prior interaction, we were able to have a bond that later blossomed into a friendship."



SECOND HAND CLOTHING

It was the generous outpourings of support that Shermaine received that transformed AhMa Thrifts from what began as a closet purge into a passion project of curating clothing that speaks to her own personal style. Born from a love for what she calls "animal lover" and "granny core" tees (fitting given her shop's name), AhMa Thrifts offers more than just classic vintage t-shirts, boasting a range of apparel from fitted baby tees to baggy Harley Davidson shirts, jorts and reworked accessories like Nike sling bags. Aside from tuning into her drops on Telegram (ahma.thrifts store), you can find her pieces in person at Hikari Space, a space she co-founded which stocks secondhand clothing alongside a rotation of new accessory vendors every month.

Shermaine also continues to take part in pop-ups, having had a booth at The Hammock Market—a "thrift party" pooling together secondhand sellers and curated personalities every other Saturday—a total of 19 times.



"The sweetest part [of running this business] is when my regular customers showed up at pop-ups with snacks and drinks as gifts for me, which further motivated me as I can see the community that has formed because of our collective love for vintage clothing!"



@ahma.thrifts on Instagram

Another iconic player in the secondhand scene that has amassed a loyal base of customers is Woofie Co, a brand beloved by those with a penchant for eye-catching pants. Whether you are a maximalist who loves ultra-utilitarian cargos with too many pockets to count, or a lover of bootcut denim jeans, Woofie’s got you. Her Instagram drops garner a ton of hype (fastest fingers first!), but you can still snag some of her curations for lower prices through her Telegram channel (Woofie’s Sales).

For those on a budget, you need to check out Woofie’s Warehouse nestled in Golden Landmark Mall, at the heart of Bugis. The self-service thrift store blew up on TikTok for its student-friendly pricing. Tees, jerseys, varsity jackets, branded zip-ups, camisoles, knits, denim skirts, and of course cargo shorts and jeans—all for just \$10!



Given the store’s immense popularity, Desiree (CHS, Year 3) and her partner Matthew (CHS, Year 1), the owners of the booming business, often burn the midnight oil to wash and rack up new items every week. “Owning a brick and mortar store means an additional responsibility to ensure that we have enough supply to meet the demand on a daily basis, as compared to a more flexible (OTOT) schedule with an online-only store.” The couple’s tireless commitment to the business is a testament to their love for what they do. Desiree commented,

“I also feel really blessed to be able to pursue something I am truly passionate about, while also learning more about entrepreneurship and my strengths and weaknesses!”



@woofie.co &
@woofie.warehouse on Instagram

Starting a business may seem daunting, but if I have learnt anything from my peers in this community, it is that passion is fundamental for any aspiring entrepreneur. Shermaine and Desiree’s love for vintage propelled them to success. Likewise, my love for fashion opened my eyes to the small business scene, when I first visited vintage pop-ups and dipped my toes into the secondhand world. Meeting such inspiring small business owners pushed me to transform my lifelong interest in fashion and the environment into a passion project and philanthropic initiative. All that is to say, if you are passionate about something, you already have one of the most valuable tools needed to start your own business. The rest is just a learning curve.



@orbit__apparel on Instagram

Second hand stores have dedicated themselves to providing youths an avenue to experiment with their style by creating looks of their own. Gen Z’s thoughtfully assembled outfits, dripping with distinctive details from playful silhouettes to the eye-catching accessories they adorn themselves with, serve as windows into their unique personalities.



Featuring NUS students: Yanni (top left), Tianyu, owner of @odysseyvtg on Instagram (top right), Hakim (bottom left), and Kit Yee (bottom right)

HANDMADE JEWELLERY & ACCESSORIES

In the small business scene, this sense of unbridled creativity starts at the source. Look no further than our local crafters and jewellery makers.

One business looking to play with the boundaries of self-expression is Crocadooodee, which specialises in affordable handmade rope jewellery for all. Rykiel (Biz, Year 2), the creative behind the brand, shares,

“When creating accessories, I disregard the idea of gender (more feminine/masculine styles, for example) and simply create what I want based on my inspirations.”

Rykiel’s creations have been featured in the trendiest curated stores, including Anteiku Studios, Bhabie’s Market, Hikari Space, SSALTY THRIFTS and more. A simple scroll on her Instagram shop (@crocadooodee) will reveal a wonder of gems for sale.

Beaded accessories have been a mainstay in the local market, but small businesses are beginning to expand beyond. PEACHPAO is a small business that is passionate about style, design, and innovation in the

world of accessories. Mabel (CDE, Y4) hopes to take the success of PEACHPAO one step further, venturing out to incorporate 3D printed parts in her keychain designs.



@peachpao on Instagram

Her works are usually sold offline at various pop-ups. Keep up with her Instagram to know when and where you can find her items!

Some creators have also chosen less conventional mediums to make their accessories, like polymer clay. Teho Clock was made for those looking to add a touch of whimsy to their outfits with necklaces, earrings and rings featuring adorable ducks and frogs, as well as beloved characters from franchises like Studio Ghibli. Trinity’s eclectic mix of designs are inspired by her interests in popular movies, games and characters. There are even trinket trays for sale, if your room needs a bit of sprucing up as well.

“From a young age, I have always had an interest in miniatures and its intricacies from the toy sets my parents bought me. I discovered clay as a medium around the age of 14, starting from cheaper air-dry clay to making a more



@teho.clock on Instagram

hefty investment in pricier polymer clay (which needs to be baked in an oven to solidify),” Trinity (Biz, Year 2) reminisced. “Drawn to its versatility and the endless possibilities of what I could mould and shape it into, I continued to experiment with polymer clay and I am self-taught with the help of videos on Youtube!”

Her masterpieces are better seen in person given her great attention to detail in refining each piece, so you will likely find her at art and lifestyle fairs organised by small businesses like Mercury Fest (a bi-annual pop-up event bringing together popular creators and clothing vendors) and Hammock Market.

Caylee (CDE, Year 1 Masters) is yet another creator who loves experimenting with different materials and concepts in her works through her shop Strawberry Champagne Sparkles. Her main craft is wire-wrapping, which involves framing beautiful gemstones and crystals in intricate designs. Always seeking new ways to perfect her craft, she recently began incorporating tiny crystal beads into her works and making flower rings. She has also recently started dabbling in making and selling bespoke flower crowns, as well as redesigning and modifying old shoes. Her store is best described in her words, “I’m your one stop shop to make your accessory dreams come true!”



@strawberry_champagne_sparkles on Instagram

The individuals featured in this article have transformed mere transactions into touching moments of conversation and connection, and their businesses have thus become what Caylee describes as “third spaces”. The small business scene is where culture and community collide, where self-expression is celebrated and creativity is nurtured. The current fundraiser events held on campus that provide a crucial platform for small businesses are a step in the right direction, opening up a world of possibilities for more authentic and organic engagements between students. It is my hope that this growing scene may grow and evolve such that it becomes a hallmark of NUS student life, and continues to inspire generations of students to follow their passions. Only time will tell.

Super Saving in Singapore: Student Deals for the Thrifty Soul

Akshita Jain

Disclaimer: All deals listed are as of February 2024, and all prices are listed in Singapore Dollars (SGD). Please note that the terms and conditions of each promo are not detailed extensively.

Are you struggling to get a handle on your student budget? Rising prices got your bank account withering away? Eaten so many cup noodles recently that the 7-Eleven cashier always sighs a little disappointedly when you go up to the counter for payment? Fret not! Whether you're a local, international, or exchange student, your NUS student ID can get you all kinds of funky discounts across Singapore. From food establishments to waterparks, there are a myriad of deals you can find that'll help you squeeze that little outing into your budget.

1. Food and Beverages

While there is certainly a multitude of affordable eating options at the campus canteens (\$3.60 mixed veg rice at the PGP canteen, you'll always have my heart), sometimes you want a little change of pace, be it simply eating something different or having a fancy dinner out. Here's a list of 10 eateries you can present your student card at to benefit from some tantalising deals:

1. The Tree Cafe: you can get \$2 off any main (from a range of specialty, pasta, baked and breakfast goods) at any of their 4 outlets except for the one at E!Hub.
2. Yoshinoya: get an \$8 meal from a range of options including ramen and Japanese curry, along with a free drink!
3. No. 17 Tea: buy a medium bubble milk tea for just \$2.50 at any of their three outlets.
4. Yakiniku Like: Mondays to Fridays, from 1 to 5 PM, you can get a free upgrade to 200g of meat for their karubi and pork belly sets at \$10.90. This is available at specific outlets only: those at Clementi Mall, Junction 8, Compass One, Westgate, and AMK Hub.
5. Pepper Lunch: Get 15% off any main after 5 PM at any of their restaurant outlets on any weekday. Your meal comes with a soft drink as well!
6. Greendot: Visit from 2 to 5 PM on weekdays to enjoy your fill of vegetarian bento sets and noodles at \$6.90. Note that this applies only to selected sets.
7. Geläre: You can get the classic waffle at a discounted \$5 at Geläre The Star Vista, with an additional \$1 for an iced lemon tea add-on.
8. COLLIN'S: Get \$5 off any dish within the selected categories (salad, pasta, meats, seafood, and more), along with a soft drink. This deal is available from 11 AM to 5 PM on weekdays.
9. Pastamania: Amongst their robust offerings for students, you can pick a set dish for \$5.90 or make your own pasta from \$4.90 (additional toppings go for \$1.50 each). To enjoy this discount, visit on weekdays before 6 PM.
10. Bober Tea: For any drink in the menu, get 20% off the total!

2. Activities and Entertainment

The new Hunger Games movie came out a few months ago, and I vividly recall the horror I felt when I saw that tickets were going for \$45. In the spirit of NOT spending that much on watching movies and having a fun weekend out, here are some student deals to take the bite off your bookings:

1. Play Nation: Play console and board games in a 3 hour long session with free flowing drinks and snacks at \$14.90 on weekdays and at \$18.90 on weekends, both from 12 to 6 PM.
2. Orchid Bowl: Go bowling for just \$3.50 per game when you go on weekdays before 6 PM. On weekends, you can still enjoy a game at a discount of \$5.50.
3. Katapult Trampoline Park: On weekdays from 10 AM to 6 PM, you can enjoy 1 hour sessions at \$11 and 2 hour sessions at \$21 per person.
4. Virtual Room: Try out a VR escape room at 20% off! Each session lasts from forty to fifty minutes, and is played in groups of two to four people.
5. Xcape Singapore: If you go after 6 PM, escape room bookings go for just \$6 per person.
6. Kayaking at Singapore Sports Hub: Paddle with friends at Kallang at \$8 for 2 hours on weekdays, 9 AM to 5 PM, and at \$10 on weekdays past 5 PM and weekends from 9 AM to 7 PM.
7. Cathay Cineplex: Grab movie tickets at \$6 on Tuesdays, and at \$7 on other weekdays before 6 PM.
8. Shaw Theatres: Like Cathay, get tickets at \$7 for any movie showing before 6 PM at any Shaw Theatres. Note that this is only valid for walk-in purchases, and not online bookings.
9. Have Fun Karaoke: Enjoy 2 hours of karaoke with free flowing drinks at \$10/pax on weekdays and at \$12/pax on weekends. Timings and drinks offers for this discount vary with outlets, so make sure to check their details before booking!
10. Kinetics Climbing: Get the student pass at \$15 to go climbing (not inclusive of the \$5 registration fee). This discount applies only to those who are 21 years old and below, and students using the gym must leave by 7:30 PM.

3. Places to Find More Deals

Of course, the list of student discounts doesn't end here. There are countless more to choose from, ones that run for a long time and ones that run for a limited time only. To keep up-to-date with these offers, there are a few places to look:

1. divedeals.sg: you can filter by the type of deal you're looking for (food, experience, apparel, etcetera) and the criteria for the discount (student).
2. Join the SG Student Promos Telegram channel: @sgstudentpromos
3. Join the ThisCounted Telegram channel: @ThisCounted

With these deals, hopefully you'll be able to make the most of your weekends and days off while not lamenting the state of your finances afterwards. Remember to carry your student pass with you before cashing in on your discounts!

A Winter's Tale:

My Student Exchange Programme IN CANADA

by Clairene

Wistfulness, a slightly sad feeling caused by something that you wish to have, especially something in the past that you can no longer have. It is the smallest of things that trigger this feeling—the setting of the sun with the clouds in just the right shade of purple, the sound of the train in the distance, the way the leaves on that specific tree rustle, the flipping of a book's pages that have turned yellow and crisp, the hearty aroma of baked potatoes. The minute things in life are the ones that etch themselves in our memories, reminding us of the past long gone, telling us of a future that has yet to start.

Sometimes, when I look back on photos of my Student Exchange Programme (SEP), I think about the snow that was as high as the top of our boots, of being enveloped by the warmth of the house after a long day out, of the fluffy pancakes drizzled with maple syrup, of the friends that I made and the world that I have seen. Going to Canada for SEP was truly an experience of a lifetime and this is my story.



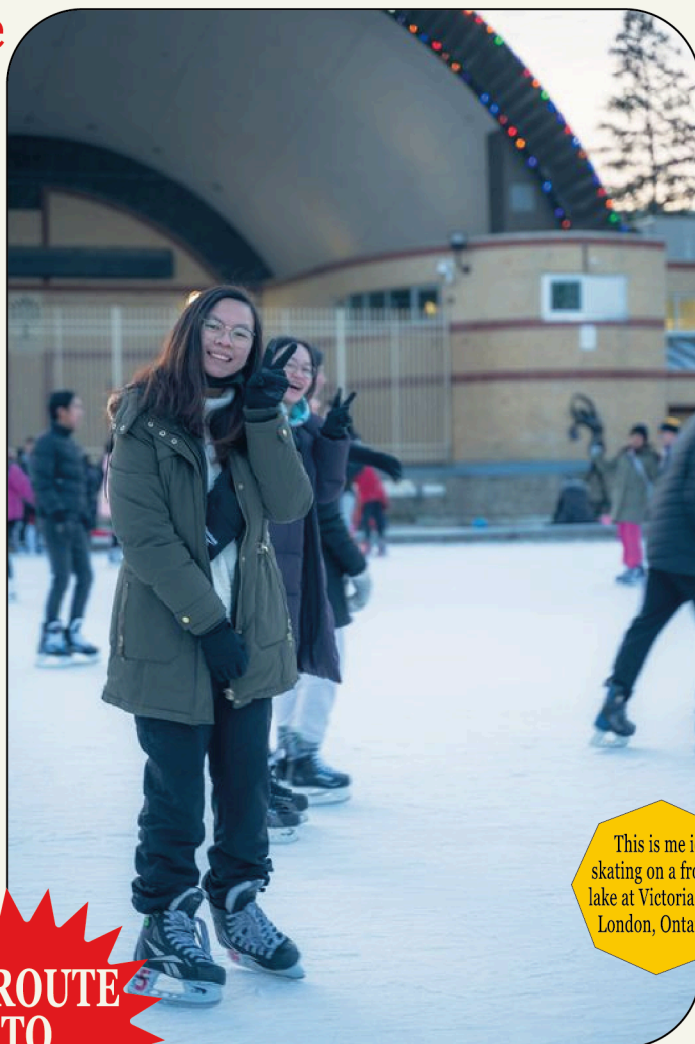
On the flight from Japan to Vancouver with the icy mountains beneath us

ENROUTE
TO
CANADA

PRE-EXCHANGE

Two years ago, I was on my couch, mindlessly scrolling TikTok, my eyes slowly becoming fatigued as I had been staring at the screen for way too long. A notification from Microsoft Outlook caught my eye, and I think I might have even gasped as I clicked on the email and read its contents. On it was a message from the SEP FASS coordinator, stating that I had an opportunity to do my exchange in Western University in London, Ontario, Canada. Even though I was unsure as to what interesting things there were in London—in fact, I was

kind of convinced I was probably going to London in the United Kingdom—I allowed myself to revel in the news. It was a privilege, and despite the immediate concerns that I had regarding the weather and the fact that I would be in a foreign land for almost half a year, I was most definitely going to seize the opportunity. That is lesson number one, which is that even if you have doubts about accepting the offer, trust me when I say that it is worth every second that you spend planning courses, and every (almost every) cent of your money.



This is me ice skating on a frozen lake at Victoria Park, London, Ontario.

THE EXCHANGE

We heard horror stories of luggage being lost in transit, and standing there, waiting for our luggage to appear in Pearson airport was stressful. The reason for this was because we took a flight where we transited in Japan and Vancouver, which meant that there was an increased chance of our luggage not making it to the next flight. Some of my friends placed an air tag on their luggage, which turned out to be a wise decision because when their luggage actually got stuck, they knew exactly where it was and could contact the relevant authorities. Flights generally do take care of your luggage, but sometimes when you are flying to a continent as big as North America, it is better to err on the side of caution.

Armed (literally, because all of our luggage were super heavy and at least two each) with our entire life in our hands, we trudged our way to our hotel. Using an airport shuttle made the trip easier, the climate and roads, so being able to sit in the warmth (even for five minutes) while someone drove us to our hotel in the middle of the night was beneficial. I remember our first meal in Canada was Subway, and I was shocked at the price (SGD\$15 for a full meal) but I pushed those thoughts aside because there was nothing else open at 8pm in Pearson.

When dawn arrived, we continued our journey to London via a two-hour bus ride which took us directly into our school's premise. Even though I lived off-campus, it was still convenient for me to get an Uber to what would be my house for the next four months. We found the house on Airbnb, but if I were to redo the selection process, I think looking for actual leases online would be better and safer because of the mandatory contract that we would have had to sign. The contract would protect the tenants against any rule change that the landlord might make, and it would basically work as an insurance during the tenant's time there. It is also important to sign the contract before arriving at the house, so that everything is transparent right from the beginning. While living on campus might arguably be better contractually because everything administrative is handled by the school, this meant longer waiting times and the rent prices might even be higher.

Although we could invite people over to our house for things like reunion dinners and birthday parties, I would sometimes think about what my life would be like if I had stayed within the vicinity of multiple groups of people, instead of my five housemates.



Pancakes with my international friends at McLachlan Maple Farm

In the winter, going home is sometimes miserable as the interval for buses are irregular, which would cause a small, yet inevitable twinge of regret in my heart. Sometimes, I still remember the smell of the dining hall at my friend's dormitory, and the Tuesdays that we would have lunch together; it became almost like a routine. At night, I would return home to have dinner with my housemates; we decided that cooking would be much more economical than eating out. But beyond money (note, budgeting is very important, and you can do this on an excel sheet), there is nothing that will beat the smell of home cooked food, food that smelt so much like Singapore on a freezing winter night.

However, I would say that sometimes, it is okay to spend money on activities or food. Being too calculative about your money might be a turn off for the people around you, and I had to constantly remind myself that whilst I can return home to earn the bucks, memories last forever.

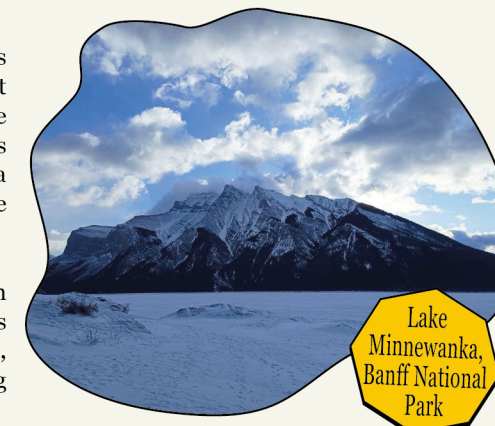
Most times, the journey home is after one of my many hangouts with my international friends that I made along the way. We all met during orientation, and we quickly became a group that just stuck to one another. We cooked, we sang, we celebrated, we travelled, we laughed, and we cried together. The people that you meet on exchange will be your ride-or-die, as it determines whether your exchange is one that is enriching and one like no other. Sure, you might be in a different country and the experience might be novel, but at the end of the day, a beautiful space will only become a beautiful place when memories are attached to it.

For my group, we did a lot of the planning during the trip itself, but it would be good to plan beforehand, figure out what small cities are around you and whether it is feasible to do day trips out. I did not regret a single day of my exchange as I went to multiple events hosted by the school, travelled as much as I could with the people that meant a lot to me, and built everlasting friendships.



A celebration for our friends' birthdays with all the NUS students in Western University present

we had through the airport to make because we were unfamiliar with



Lake Minnewanka, Banff National Park

PRE-EXCHANGE

MODULE MAPPING

But of course, the idea of mapping courses over was daunting—what even was a dummy code, what IS mapping?

I must have spent at least two weeks cumulatively on my laptop, my keyboards taking the brunt of my frustration as I tried to figure out all of these pertinent issues. I did not have seniors to ask, because prior to my year was COVID, which meant that my seniors did not have an opportunity to travel out of Singapore. I had Reddit, sure, but even the information was outdated. Was this going to be the tipping point where I give up and not head overseas?

I did not think so.

After hours of research, I realised that mapping is equivalent to me taking courses in the partner university and then matching it to a corresponding course in NUS. Essentially, I would have “taken” the course in NUS during my university tenure when in actuality I studied the course overseas.

This is useful because for NUS, the courses are graded on a Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory (S/U) basis. This means that my Grade Point Average (GPA) would remain the same as the previous semester as long as I passed the courses overseas, and this was a huge plus point for me. In instances where I was unable to find a one-to-one pairing for the courses, I would employ the dummy code tactic, which acts as a replacement course and can be counted into the academic units that you have taken. This, of course, also depends on the unit ratio; in NUS, if you take a level 2000 module, it accounts for 4 academic units, but if you take it in Europe, it might count for twenty units. These were some of the research points that I had to embark on before making my choice.

During the application process, people would have already completed this step of course mapping, but things might change along the way, courses could be discontinued etc. When I was stuck, I emailed the faculty coordinator of both schools, and even ***if the answer may not be satisfactory, it is still an answer.***

FRIENDSHIPS

Apart from academics, I had a crippling fear of not being able to make friends and that I would have to go solo for my entire exchange. Yet again, I went to the internet for solutions. Fortunately, I chanced upon an excel sheet that helped connect students going to the same partner university together. I scrolled to “Western University” under the Canada tab, and only saw one name in the cell. Despite all my anxieties of reaching out to a stranger, I took the first move and sent a tentative “Merry Christmas!” to Megan, who is now a friend of mine.

It was nerve-wracking—what if she did not reciprocate? What if she was unfriendly and wanted her own space? These thoughts filled my headspace for the next two hours, but thankfully, she replied and that was how we started talking to everyone else. We met up in July 2022, to get to know each other and to understand the expectations that we had for exchange. Although we would not meet a second time before our flight, the platform was able to help us build connections, albeit online.

PACKING

Then comes the packing. How much would one have to pack for a place that is known to have winters that are biting? Standing in my room, looking at my two large empty luggage, I was lost.

As I sat down, I remembered a conversation I had with a friend that came to NUS from Finland. She told me that crucially, I needed to bring an extension cable so that I did not have to bring multiple international adapters. She also mentioned that one or two small memorabilia from home would be good; personally, I brought my penguin stuffed toy because that reminded me of everyone that I cared about in Singapore.

From my study desk, I swiped my JBL speaker, my laptop stand, my mouse and my Google Home mini. These were some of my tech essentials that would later make my room in Canada feel just a ***tad more familiar.***

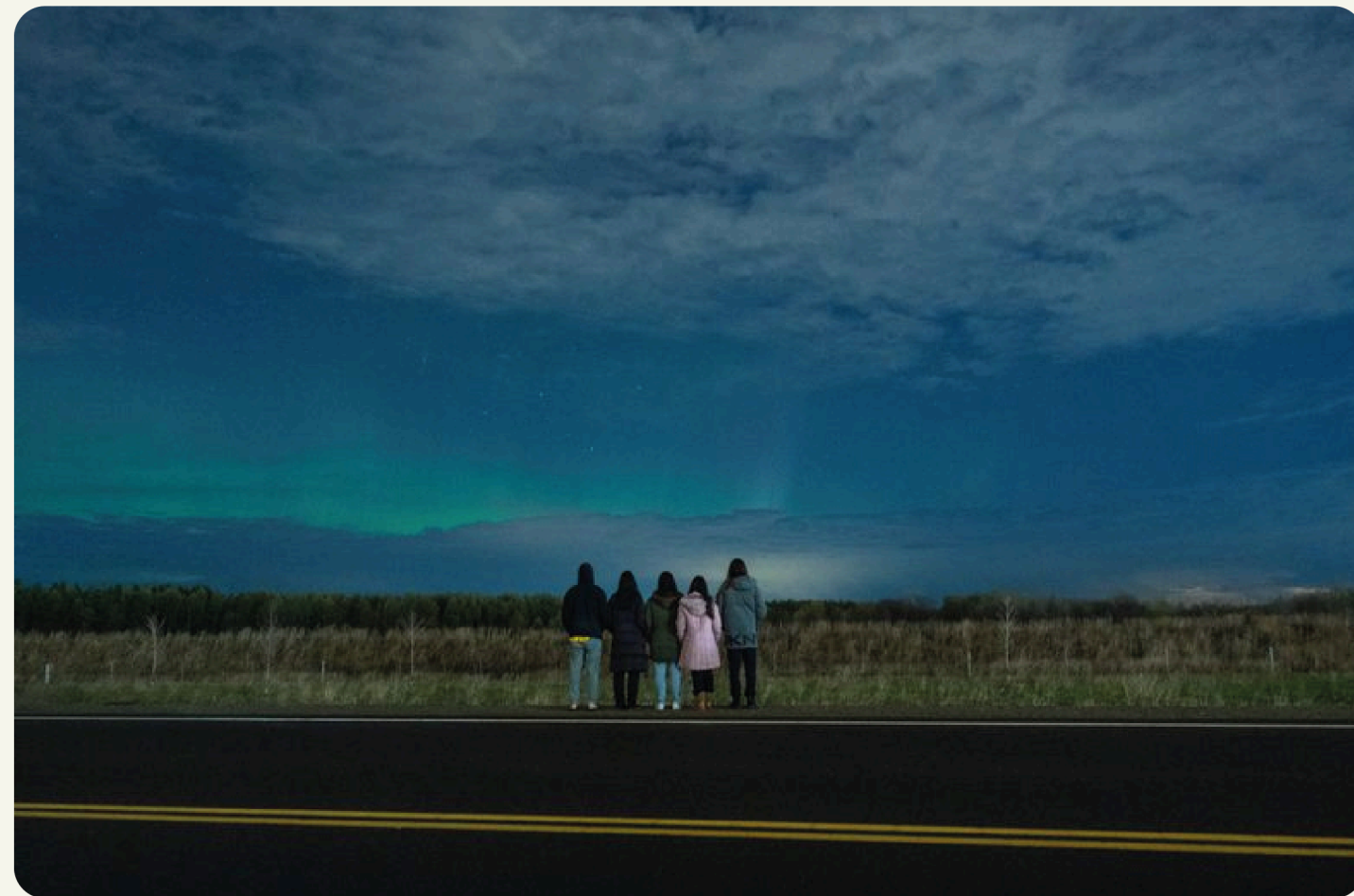
As I stuffed my luggage, my mom told me to bring a set of bed sheets that I could use, because there could be a case where the beds were not furnished with sheets. Even if they were, nothing could beat the smell and touch of home. As for clothes, it is entirely up to the individual, but in hindsight, I would have brought some Singapore-coded clothes because you never know when the weather might turn warm in one of your travels, and buying clothes might burn a hole in your wallet too.

Before I knew it, it was January 2023, and it was time for my arduous, close to 30-hour flight journey to Toronto. I zipped my We Bare Bear cover over my luggage, gave my room one last look before I locked the doors and headed towards the airport.★

EPILOGUE

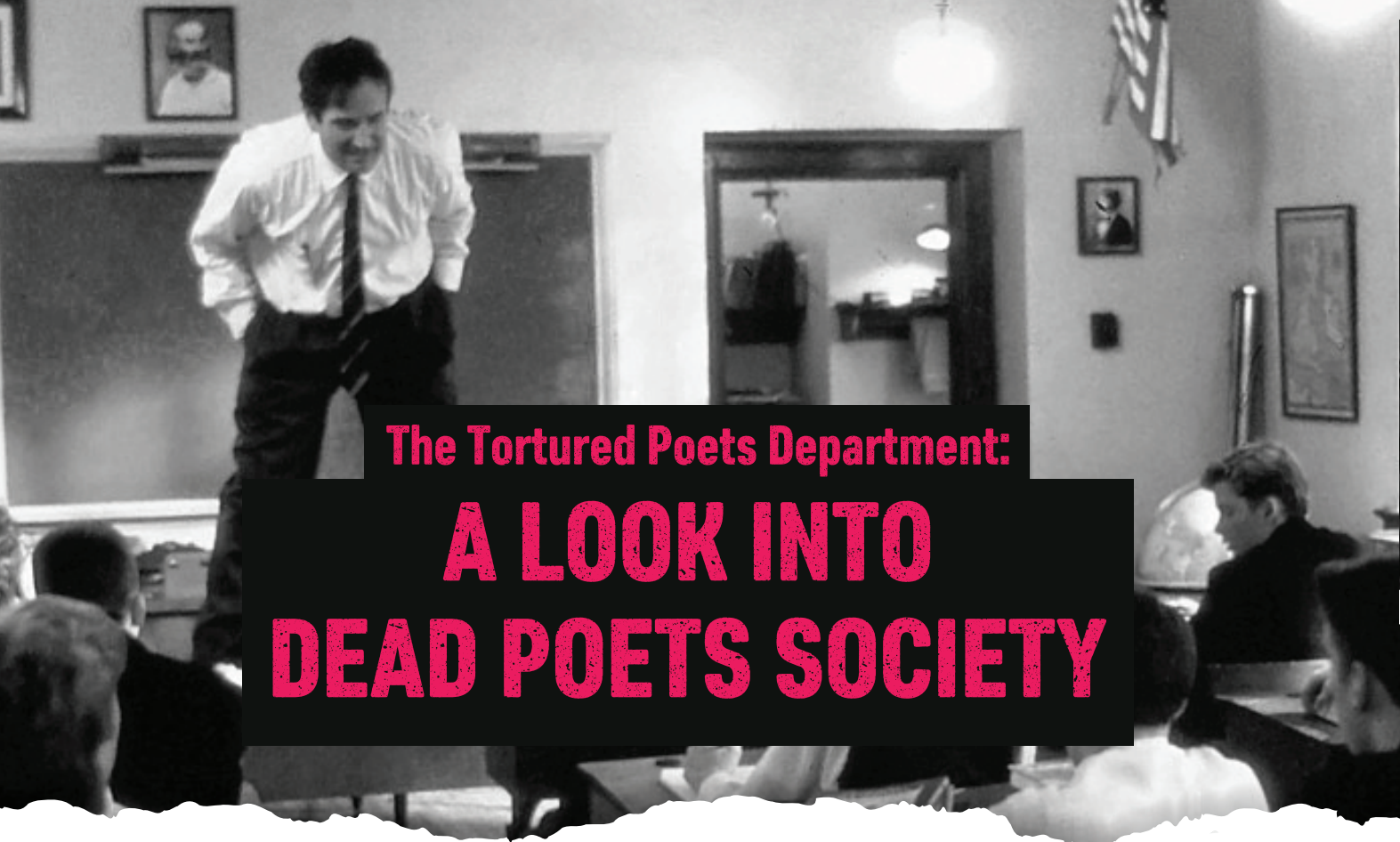
Just as quickly as the start of my exchange arrived, the end came way too early as well. It was April, and we were gathered at the lobby of my friends’ hall. I was bound for New York City the next day, and tearfully, I hugged my Danish and Korean friends goodbye. I knew I would see my Singaporean friends again, but it was my international friends that were geographically further away. We made promises in front of the lounge that we used to hang out at; we promised to call each other, we promised to think of each other, and most importantly, we promised that we will meet one another again, someday.

In essence, when you are on exchange, put yourself out there, be exactly as you are or be someone else. It is a new, and very big world out there—***so create your own story; how it starts and ends is completely up to you.***



Seeing the northern lights for the very first time on my penultimate night in London, Ontario

The End.



The Tortured Poets Department: A LOOK INTO DEAD POETS SOCIETY

By Carissa Fong

Dead Poets Society: An Oldie But Goodie

When Taylor Swift announced her new album, the Tortured Poets Department, at the Grammys, it sparked a wave of memes and posts online. One such meme featured the cast of the Dead Poets Society as said tortured poets in the new album, which got me thinking back to the old film. I watched it several years back and it quickly became one of my favourite films. While old, the coming of age film is still highly relatable, transcending generations. It is profound, unpretentious (despite being centred around poetry), and is overall a cinematic masterpiece. If given the opportunity, I encourage you to give it a chance as you'd definitely not regret it.

The film, directed by Peter Weir and written by Tom Schulman, follows a group of boys as they learn to break out of their shells and truly live. They learn this through the unorthodox teaching methods of their new English teacher, Mr Keating (Robin Williams), at the strict and traditional all-boys boarding school Welton. Through Keating, the boys find out about the unsanctioned Dead Poets Society and go on to revive the club. They sneak out of school at night and take turns reading poetry aloud in a cave. While it may seem a little lame or pretentious, the poetry reading itself is really more than just that. It represents their dreams, their individuality, their adolescence. It is an amalgamation of life itself. In Keating's words, "We didn't just read poetry; we let it drip from our tongues like honey. Spirits soared, women swooned, and gods were created."



O CAPTAIN! MY CAPTAIN!

The Significance

Your Barbaric Yawp

There were a great many things that the film wanted to convey to us. I will first start off with one of the most important messages that is also a personal favourite of mine: to be brave. I'm sure we know all about the mortifying ordeal of being perceived. The film tackles this growing pain in a profound yet subtle way, encouraging us to be brave in letting ourselves be seen, through my favourite scene in the film. In the scene, Keating calls on Todd, a socially anxious boy, to read out the poem that they have been tasked to write as homework, in front of the class. After Todd tells Keating that he didn't do the work, Keating writes this out on the chalkboard: "I sound my barbaric yawp over the rooftops of the world." While its sentiment is over-used and overdone in so many iterations of various pieces of media telling us to be ourselves, the way it is delivered and the scene's context in the film gives it so much more meaning. This is especially so when Todd is forced to come up with a poem on the spot and deliver it under everyone's watchful eyes. The whole scene feels so raw and genuine, you can practically feel yourself in Todd's shoes, the sheer anxiety he must feel at the moment. Coupled with his poem that is just his true feelings, you can't help but feel so seen yourself. After he's finished his poem, Todd opens his eyes and is met with loud applause from his peers. To let yourself be seen is to allow yourself to simply be. And to do that, one has to be brave. It always seems much scarier than it actually is. So, let us all be brave and sound our barbaric yawps over the rooftops of the world.

Carpe Diem

Of course one cannot talk about Dead Poets Society without talking about chasing one's dreams when half of the film's most famous quotes are about just that. It is arguably the main and most important message the film is trying to send out. "Carpe Diem, seize the day, make your lives extraordinary" is one of the first few things Mr Keating says to his class. Neil, one of Keating's students, loved acting and wanted to pursue his dream of becoming an actor despite his father's strong disapproval. He thus went behind his father's back to sign up for a play where he obtained the lead role. His joy at being able to do something that he genuinely loves is so palpable, it makes you want to follow in his footsteps and chase your own dreams too, despite whatever societal expectations there may be. While the film ends rather darkly, it asks an

important question: would you rather die with your dreams than continue to live meaninglessly as an empty shell? Nevertheless, at the heart of the matter, whatever your answer may be, the film just wants to encourage you to chase your dreams. This is your own life after all. Let yourself be young and free, let yourself dream.

To Those Who Go With You

Another theme the film hints at is the importance of friendships. The film highlights the close relationship between Neil and Todd, as well as the friendship between all of the members of the Dead Poets Society, who we shall refer to as The Poets here. The Poets have consistently been a pillar of support for Neil, encouraging him to chase his dreams of acting, agreeing to join the Society should he want to revive it once more. They watched his play, cheered him on and were happy for him. They were more of a family to Neil than his parents ever were. Thus, I'd like to dedicate a few lines to two of my closest friends. Firstly, to Claire, thank you for being a constant in my life, for giving me structure and security. Secondly, to Hazel, thank you for all the beach days, all the low days and all the high days. Both of you mean the world to me, thank you for letting me grow and live life with you. After all, we all need a friend in our life because we are not meant to go at this alone.

The Woods Where We Lived Deliberately

The final point I'd like to delve into is the message that I personally feel captures the whole essence of the film: to live life. The film tells us that there is more to life than just excrement, the expectations of others and the rigidity or mundanity of school. Life is beautiful and fluid, and we must strive to see beyond conformity. We must strive to find ourselves, to be stirred up by things. Because being stirred up by things—feeling things—is the precipice, the tipping point of discovering how to truly live, to appreciate life for all that it is. It is only when we allow ourselves to feel that we can see all these intangible beautiful things in life, like dreams and hopes and love. And perhaps, to feel stirred up by things, we must first do things. This is all admittedly terrifying, which is exactly why we have to be brave—brave to accept ourselves and let ourselves be seen. I'd like to end this section with the poem that is read aloud to officiate the start of every Dead Poets Society meeting. The poem reads,

"I went to the woods because I wanted to live deliberately.
I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life.
To put to rout all that was not life,
and not, when I had come to die, realise I had not lived."

Conclusion

There's still so many more things I want to say about this film but if I continue, this article will simply never end. I know most of us are put off by poetry, thinking it to be pretentious or akin to some incomprehensible mystery that we can never seem to figure out. We abhor it because we don't understand it. And we don't understand it because we are so desperate to find this fixed, elusive, obscure meaning to something. This is the crux of our problem. Poems are fluid, organic and their meaning differs from person to person, because as what your peace-loving english teacher would say and what we all loathe to hear, there is simply no hidden meaning to discover, rather just the ones we make up on the way. To understand poems, we must first feel. It is only when we feel, when we are stirred up by things, that we can make up our own interpretations and create the answers that we're looking for. Poems are really just an avenue for the expression of life. So, Carpe Diem; let us all live deliberately, let us all live deeply and extraordinarily. After all, the powerful play goes on and you may contribute a verse.

What's on r/NUS

by Viven Kwai



r/NUS Posted by u/originalposter 1 hour ago

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Personal thought

It was sometime in my first semester that a friend of mine mentioned that she used the NUS subreddit. It was a bit of a shock, because if you've been on the internet enough you may have a certain impression of the type of people that are on Reddit, and she did not fit that stereotype at all. Nevertheless, the information that she gave me, purportedly from Reddit, was useful.

Over the next few semesters, I would hear about it every now and then. People would talk about things they had seen on the subreddit and certain issues that had been raised there. People always spoke about it as sort of a joke, but it was clear to me that it had caught on in some way.

The question I had, then, was why?

3 2 Share



r/NUS Posted by u/longtimelurker 1 day ago

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What is r/nus?

If you've never spent time on Reddit, a subreddit is a type of web forum for a particular topic, where you can create posts and discussions. You can subscribe to the subreddit if you like that topic and you can unsubscribe if you don't. In this case, r/nus discusses things that happen within NUS or about NUS.

The type of posts on the r/nus range from memes and heated discussions about certain unacceptable behaviour in NUS, to genuine requests for help when it comes to internships or certain modules. As you'd expect from Singapore, a lot of these posts fall into the realm of complaining, but there's quite a wide variety of posts on the subreddit that do not fall into that realm as well. In fact, there are some interesting ways that r/nus has functioned by way of community building.

6 4 Share



r/NUS Posted by u/ilovenus 1 day ago

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Community building through r/nus

As with most places on the internet, the people of r/nus share a common language, customs, interests and passions. It's just that a great deal of it tends to be irreverent, and in the language of memes, complaints and stereotypes.

Just a glance at the most popular posts on the subreddit of all time will tell you that memes about student life proliferate the website. The subjects of these jokes are what you'd expect from NUS—it's typically about the (lack of) student life here, studying too much, or panicking close to exams.

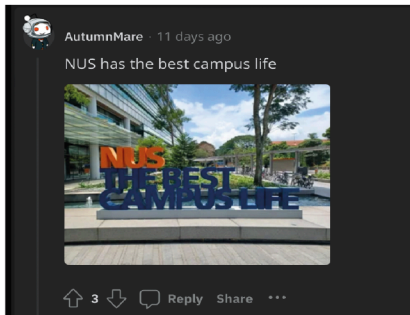
20 10 Share

 r/NUS Posted by u/ilovenus 1 day ago

Community building through r/nus

Nevertheless, there does seem to be a caring side to the subreddit. Back during the pandemic, a professor asked for their students’ opinions on how to make Zoom lessons more engaging, and the community responded with much enthusiasm, with a sincere appreciation for his efforts to make things better. There are also stories of students doing nice things for each other, like when a passerby helped this Redditor out and even bought them a drink. As much as Reddit as a whole has a bad reputation, there is still good that can be seen on the r/nus subreddit.

[20](#) [10](#) [Share](#)



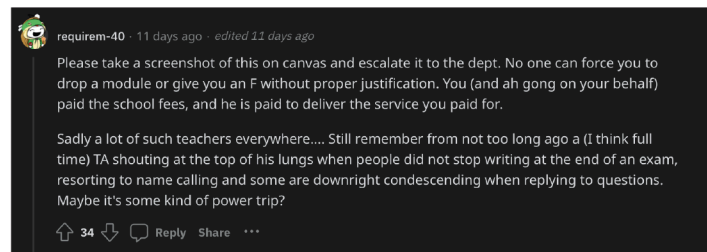
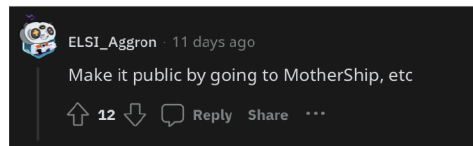
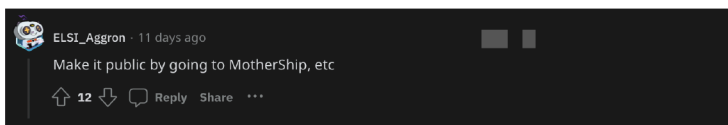
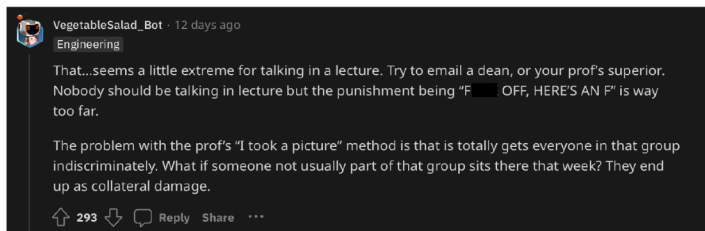
For whatever reason, this image comes up a lot, probably in an ironic way

 r/NUS Posted by u/wesupportu 1 day ago

Effecting change through r/nus

One of the most viral posts on the subreddit was a recent incident regarding a lecturer’s demands for noisy students to drop the class. A student in the class shared with the subreddit an announcement the professor made to the class about certain students, and there was a myriad of discussion around this issue.

Some of the most upvoted comments to this post were criticisms of the professor’s lack of professionalism. Others suggested ways the OP or affected students could take action. Those broadly fell into two categories: escalating the issue within NUS or taking it to sites like Mothership to solicit public pressure on the school to do something about it. Others also asked how noisy were the students for the professor to take such actions against them.



[90](#) [2k](#) [Share](#)

Nevertheless, a few days later, it was followed up by a post sharing the prof’s apology message to the class regarding previous demands. Most people found the apology sufficient, but some still felt that the apology was insufficient considering the professor’s first announcement.

 r/NUS Posted by u/originalposter now

r/nus and it’s place in NUS

Forums can be useful. We’ve all been a freshman, struggling to piece information about what the current ModReg round number even means. It’s almost always easier to ask someone who’s been there before, but not everyone has access to seniors or help. This space, which fosters peer-to-peer information sharing and gathering, can really help people who are still making sense of university life.

Besides, there’ve been many articles about how lonely people our age feel in our current environment. It can be quite hard to have a school culture when our campus is so big and fragmented. As imperfect as it is, a sense of community from a subreddit like this could be healthy. It can often feel like we are each on our own boats, adrift on the open seas of the university experience. But a shared space like this, I feel, can help remind us that there are others out there as well.

As we’ve seen, even a subreddit can be useful as a place to effect change. When CNA was reporting on the changes to the tourism policies on NTU’s campus, one of the places they cited to demonstrate student’s desire for change was the NTU subreddit. A lot of us may feel hesitant to speak up about issues if we think we are the only ones suffering. Forums like these are helpful in discovering that you are not alone in suffering and realising that perhaps more can be done to solve it.

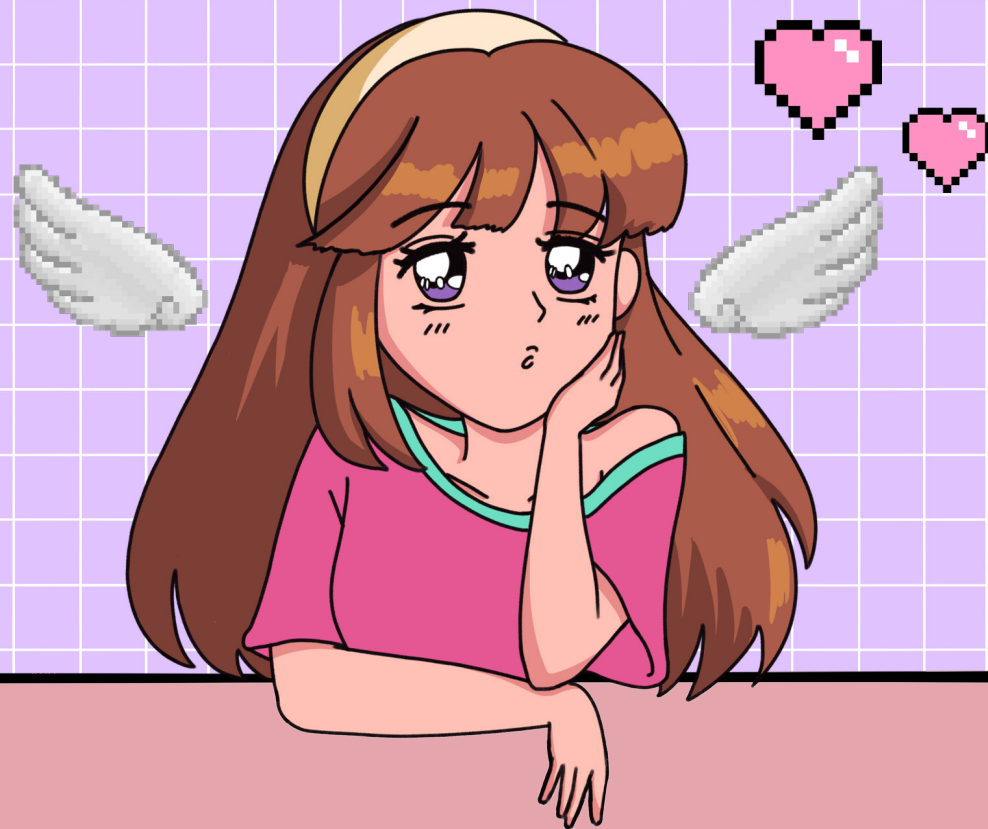
Nevertheless, considering how widespread complaining is in general, there might be some things to keep in mind. Criticising takes no effort at all. If you go into any situation looking for mistakes, you’ll inevitably find them. Yet, no matter how good a writer of a Reddit post is, a lot of situations are going to be a lot more nuanced than can be described. It’s important to keep those in mind before jumping on any issue or responding to posts.

Overall, I think if we use this space correctly, we might be able to build a better sense of community and enact some meaningful change.

[5](#) [3](#) [Share](#)

BEING “DELULU” IS MY “SOLULU”

By Rachel Leong



At some point during the gruelling semester last year, while we were drowning in a slew of classes and assignments, a friend of mine declared resolutely to me over lunch and coffee: “I’m gonna delude myself into pulling through the rest of the year.”

As a bit of a tech dinosaur (in other words, I don’t have a TikTok account), I had no clue what she was talking about. And as I listened to my friend explain her newfound philosophy to me in amusement and confusion, I’d somewhat wondered if the stress had finally fried her brain. Imagine my surprise when I (finally) discovered the newest, hottest Gen Z catchphrase floating around social media: “delulu”. And after consuming more “delulu” content on the Internet and letting my friends brainwash me into the “delulu” phenomenon, this year, I have made it my New Year’s Resolution to be just a bit more “delulu”.

What is Delulu?

The name speaks for itself: “delulu” is short for “delusional”. The top definition on a very reliable site (Urban Dictionary) states: “A delusional fan girl/boy who believes they can/will end up with their favourite idol or celebrity and invest an unhealthy amount of time and energy into said idol.” A slightly more reliable site (Dictionary.com) adds that these people are “superfans or dating partners who display odd or extreme behaviour”.

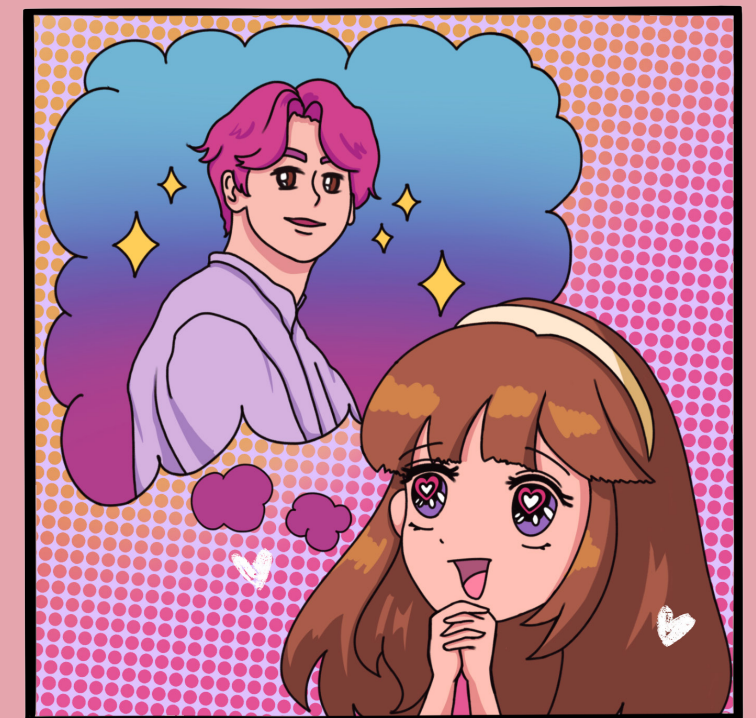
“was used as a derogatory term to describe toxic, obsessive and parasocial fans”

The term “delulu” has its origins in K-pop fandoms from all the way back in 2014 (Urban Dictionary also lists Directioners and Beliebers as other “delulu” demographics), and was used as a derogatory term to describe especially toxic, obsessive, and parasocial fans (e.g. sasaengs). For example, believing that you were Mrs Jeon Jungkook or Mrs Cha Eunwoo would get you labelled as “delulu”.

Now though, the usage of the term has expanded beyond K-pop. The “delulu” wave that dominated social media in 2023 refers broadly to setting ridiculously high expectations and goals for yourself, no matter how impossible or unattainable they seem. It’s telling yourself things like “I’m going to be the next Bill Gates,” “I’m going to get into Harvard”—or, even as I write this: “this article is totally going to hit peak viewership and my readers totally care about my opinions!”

*“delulu is gaslighting
yourself into
achieving success”*

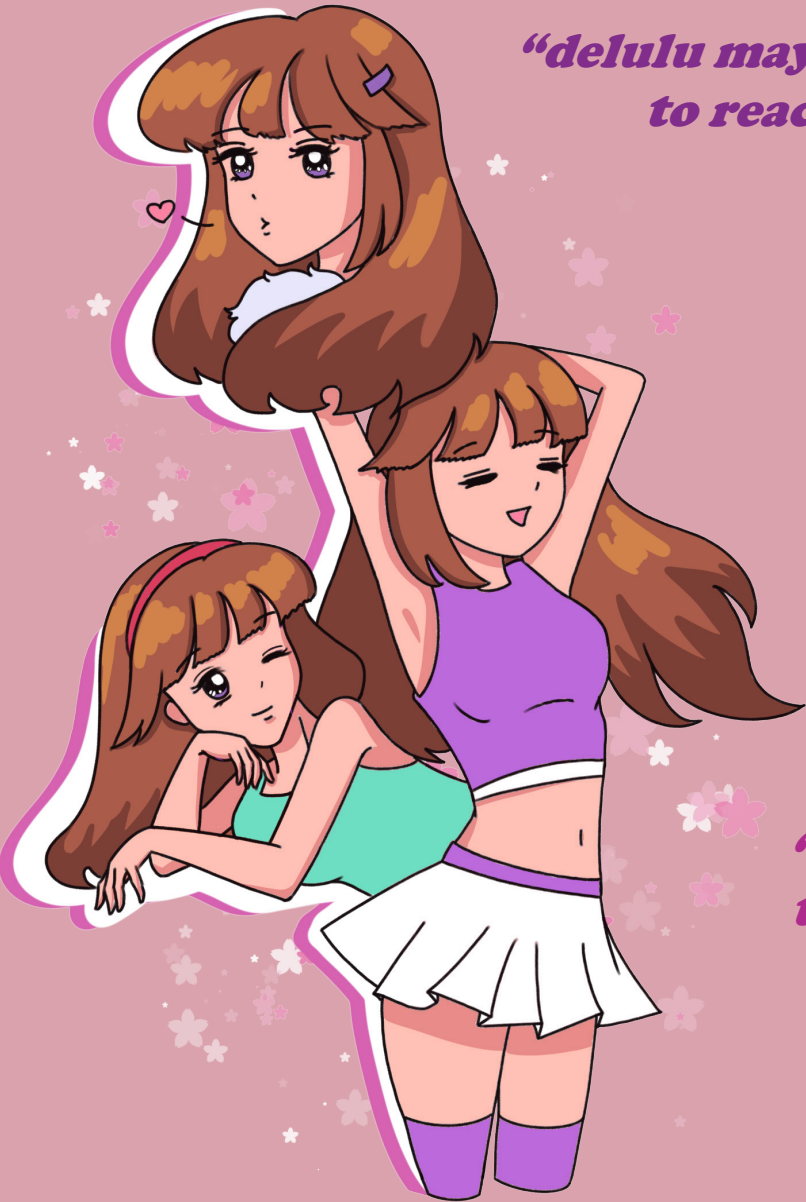
The core tenet of the “delulu” phenomenon is actually nothing new. It has appeared in other forms: manifestation, abundance mindset, lucky girl syndrome, “fake it till you make it”, and a myriad of other similar names. No matter the name, the key principle underlying all these is: anything is possible, if you want it badly enough and if you believe it hard enough. In other words, being “delulu” is gaslighting yourself into achieving success—when there’s a will, there’s a way.



Is it Trululu?

Sounds pretty crazy, right? When I'd first heard this, I found it unbelievable that one could simply delude themselves into reaching their goals. But as the stresses of school began to pile up, I found myself pondering if "delulu" really was the "solulu".

There may be no concrete scientific evidence to back up the effectiveness of being "delulu", but there does seem to be some logic behind it. Broadly, the point is to instil a sense of confidence and optimism in your abilities, allowing you to brush off failure and persevere in times of difficulty and hardship. You can also push yourself out of your comfort zone, and seize opportunities that you previously may have been too fearful to try. This is especially helpful for those who struggle with insecurities, negative self-talk, and other psychological barriers like imposter syndrome and low self-esteem. The act of fantasising, romanticising your life, and working to realise your childhood dreams or inner desires can also be invigorating. Overall, it does seem like being "delulu" may actually be the key to reaching your goals and finding happiness and contentment.



“delulu may actually be the key to reaching your goals and finding happiness and contentment”

However, the fantastical nature of the "delulu" phenomenon has, of course, given rise to scepticism. Some believe that reality is too bleak to escape; what's the point of deluding yourself into finding a high-paying job in the midst of soaring unemployment rates? Or what if you become too good at deluding yourself to the point where you lose your true sense of identity, or deluding others to the point where they no longer see you for your real self?

“what if you become too good at deluding yourself to the point where you lose your true sense of identity”

What's the Solulu?

To delulu, or not to delulu, that is the question. My personal opinion? Delulu is the solulu, and that is trululu.



As we enter the first few months of 2024, we see the same old problems following us from 2023. At the risk of sounding like a self-help book, we live in a VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous) world. Not only are we facing social problems like unemployment and inequality, we have to contend with climate change, wars, natural disasters, and the like. Things can feel depressing, especially for us Zoomers, whose shoulders have to soon carry the burden of a world going up in flames (literally). And in such a state of affairs, hope becomes an even more precious rarity: how can we push on in the face of such uncertainty and hopelessness?

If the world cannot give us hope, then it falls to us to give ourselves hope. Perhaps the only way for us to imbue meaning into our lives is to tell ourselves that there is still a chance to realise our aspirations, that we still have the agency and the willpower to make our dreams come true even if the world seems like it may collapse at any moment. In fact, I think that it is because the world is so bleak that being "delulu" becomes all the more important.

Of course, this does not mean deluding yourself to the point of actual lunacy (like becoming a sasaeng fan). But if it is what you need to push on for just another week, another month, another year? Then I say: by all means, embrace the delulu.

ATTACK ON TITAN

For the Glory of Humanity
DESTINED FOR WAR?



CHEN YU AN

Introduction



First things first: Spoilers alert for the entire Attack on Titan series! If you have not watched or read the series and plan to one day, return to this article after finishing it. Following this story is a journey of a lifetime, especially on the first watch, so don't miss out on the opportunity.

The anime Attack on Titan (AOT) ended in November 2023, 10 years after the first episode aired in 2013. Safe to say this was one of the most phenomenal series of the decade, and as part of The Ridge's thematic magazine to relive 2023 with our readers, this article is dedicated to the closure of this monumental journey. There are many angles to approach unravelling Attack on Titan, and for this writing I choose to discuss its cultural significance on conflicts and wars. One thing AOT left us with was a lens through which we can unravel these conflicts from a clear bird's eye view that is usually hard to attain in real life.

Beginnings

Like the first season of the anime, real conflicts seem simple on the surface. The first season had no moral debates; titans were mindless and soulless monsters who killed humans on instinct, and killing a titan did not have an impact on the characters' moral conscience. Hatred was also easily justifiable in the first season; the cruelty of a world where our protagonist watches his Mom get bitten into half, blood and flesh splattering, body going limp, and the inability to do anything about it except run away. It seems natural that Eren had wound up with so much hatred and desire for vengeance towards the titans, and it was easy for the audience to rally behind that hatred and look forward to his attack on the titans.

Most of us have been fortunate enough to be away from war, so I could be wrong about this, but I suspect in the heat of war and conflict, enemy combatants don't appear all that different from titans depending on which side one is on. There is no time nor reason to think for the enemies; they are threats that need to be neutralised.

But as the door to the basement unlocks, Isayama Hajime challenged the ease of this hatred. It is easy to hate pure monstrosity, but what if it wasn't monsters that committed these atrocities? Where do we channel that hatred if we realise there was a legitimate reason why the atrocity had to happen?



I'll wipe every
One of them...
off the Face
of this Earth!

~Eren after his mom's death, episode 1

Dissonance

Reiner, Bertholdt and Annie, culprits to the bloodbath and massacre that happened on Paradis Island after the walls came down, were from Liberio—an internment zone on the main continent that lived under violent, state-sanctioned racism and discrimination. Prosperity was an estranged concept, and the Eldians—race of the people living in this internment zone—quite literally lived to have stones thrown at them.

Becoming warriors was their golden ticket out of a lifetime of being shamed: a chance to no longer be limited on where they can or cannot enter, to live as equals to their oppressors, and to live with dignity and respect. This golden ticket is priced upon thousands of lives, but they were raised to believe that these thousands of people were responsible for their horrid treatment. Apathy and hatred, again, come easy. A drowning person will push down anyone approaching them from the front to keep themselves afloat, and the residents of Liberio have been drowning in spit and disdain for their whole lives.

This doesn't justify the lives these three took in the walls, just like how the lives lost in the walls don't justify Eren's subsequent decision to carry out the raid on the Liberio internment zone which destroyed lives in the same way his mother was taken away from him. A massacre is a massacre, and it seems presumptuous to say either side was right or wrong for carrying out such atrocities. To me, the complexity of the situation set in when the added perspective didn't justify tragedies but explained them. When Eren started learning that there were humans living beyond the walls, he also learnt that these people wanted to destroy Paradis Island and regain the founding titan for their own safety and peace of mind. He learnt that the rest of the world feared Paradis Island the same way he feared the titans outside the walls. Regardless of whether he wanted to or not, the parallels in the situation pushed him to empathise with the attackers of his hometown.

His hatred didn't cloud his ability to empathise with Reiner, but neither did that empathy wash out hatred. Acquiring an empathetic perspective while harbouring hatred and cynicism over the tragedies that wrecked his home created an extremely frustrating dissonance within him—likely the equivalent of punching soft cotton with all your might when you're trying to take out your anger on something.



I'm the same as you.

If Eren's frustration towards this dissonance between hatred and rational understanding was what led to the rumbling and his decision to raze everything to the ground, then both Marley and Eldia's refusal to face the same dissonance is why the cycle of vengeance was endless in the series. The history of what happened a thousand years ago was written in an ancient language that could not be deciphered; Eldians like Grisha simply decided that their ancestors helped to cultivate the world, and Marleyans simply decided that all the titans ever did was destroy and force-breed other races. None of them knew how history actually went down or had any intentions to learn the ancient tongue. Because dissonance is hard to grapple with and because humans are naturally averse to dissonance, both sides chose to point their finger at the other and place the entire blame on them. Both made themselves out to be victims seeking righteousness, over the same event in history, without ever stopping to consider if they could be wrong.

The one-sided understanding of war reflects how history is taught in real life, and this is very much observable around us: the stark contrast between mainland China's and Taiwan's history textbooks, the avoidance (or in the past, straight up denial) of Japanese officials towards war crimes of Nanjing Massacre and practice of comfort women, the downplay of racism towards African Americans in US history textbooks, etc. Clearly, these examples are far from exhaustive, but just these three examples alone contribute to some of the sharpest divides between populations in the world.

Ignoring past misdeeds of the country saves those in power from the embarrassment of admitting to mistakes, and it is a tactic that has been consistently practised across different societies and cultures in our world.

So, if deception and hypocrisy is always going to be a part of nations, are we doomed for conflicts eternally?

**Are we
Doomed
for Conflicts
Eternally?**



Conflict

Honestly, Isayama's answer to this was pretty much a resounding yes (or a rumbling yes if you will), but that wasn't the entirety of it. Isayama did not stop at showing the nuance and inevitability of war and conflict. After he laid out the entire cycle of vengeance, the last part of Attack on Titan was on how to move forward with conflict. Do we obliterate the enemy in the name of stopping the cycle of vengeance "once and for all", with disregard for the destruction of innocent lives along the way,

which was Eren's decision? Or do we insist on having dialogue and seeking out common ground to avoid the tragedy of war, which was what Armin and Hanji desperately sought for?

Thing is, talking is a possible resolution to decades of hatred, which was what Gabi and Kaya's storyline was dedicated to showing. Both girls have had important people killed in front of them for sins committed by their ancestors. Gabi killed Sasha, who was Kaya's life saver. This heroine in Kaya's life was in turn the cold-blooded murderer



Do we
obliterate
The
Enemy?

of guards and soldiers that Gabi grew up with. Both held intense hatred for each other, but through repeated interactions and being pushed by circumstances to save each other's lives, they eventually came to understand that none of them were villains. They both lost loved ones and their homes for reasons they are not responsible for, and ultimately they are both victims of war.



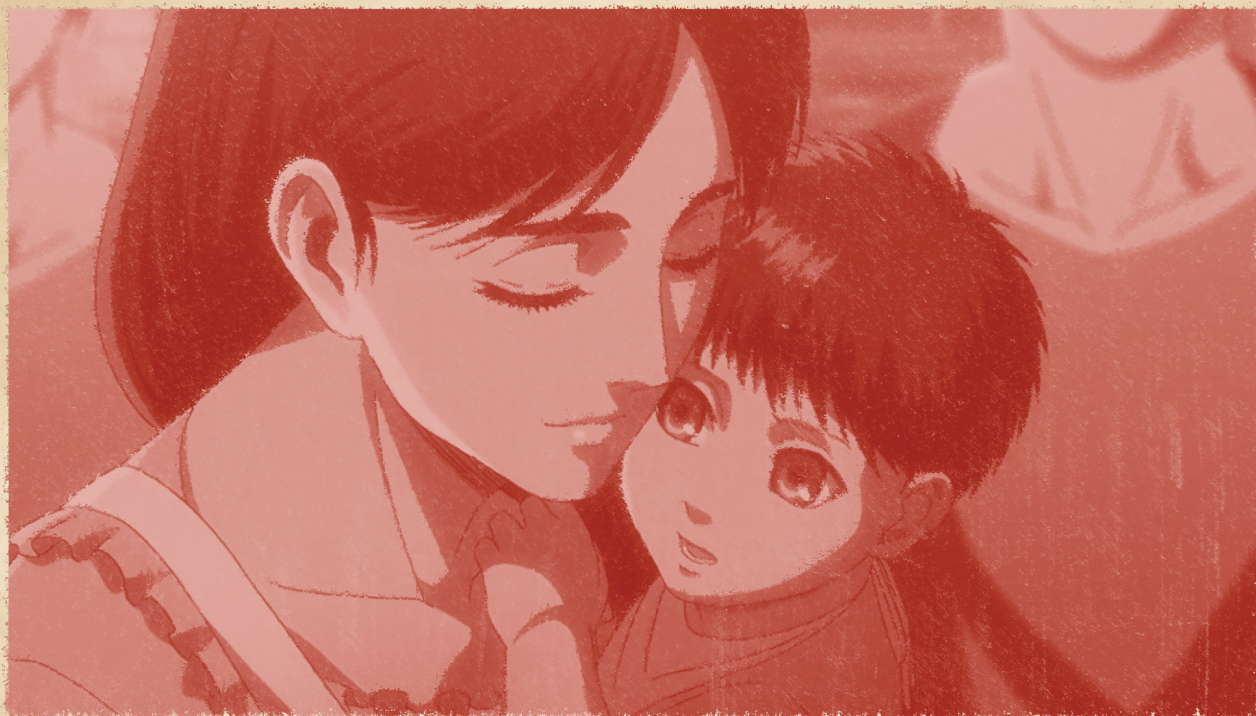
There aren't any devils.

What is not possible, however, is expecting this process of forgiveness to be replicated across the millions of people involved in conflicts. Gabi and Kaya were placed in an environment of shared circumstances, through which Kaya got to learn Gabi's personality and on some level befriended her before she was revealed as Sasha's killer. In other words, Kaya got to know Gabi before her personal hatred set in. The moment she knew who Gabi was, her instantaneous reaction was to stab Gabi, which was only avoided because Sasha's father stopped her. It is not possible to expect this sort of circumstance to replicate itself for every person, or even just a majority of each side, who lost someone in war. If two people took this much time and effort to reconcile, how can we expect genuine reconciliation between millions of people on different sides of history? It was not possible in AOT, and it definitely is not possible in real life. And that is why it is so easy to label diplomacy and dialogue in conflict as inefficient or straight up useless—it is not (always) because diplomats are chronically ingenuine and only have their own interests in mind, but because de-escalating a conflict without violence while balancing expectations

fuelled by pride and hatred cultivated through generations of hurting each other is genuinely a herculean task even when there is a genuine intention to mend broken bonds.

This judgement of discourse as needless or useless is in turn the most dangerous thought of all. Eren's rumbling was an indiscriminate killing of every living thing outside of Paradis Island, including children, including infants. It doesn't seem possible to justify it, but yet an indiscriminate killing of this scale and nature has happened in our world's history when two atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which ended World War II by killing over two hundred thousand civilians in Japan. The bombs were dropped in the name of ending the war, but the truth is, the moment those bombs dropped, we lost any opportunity of finding out if the war could have ended in a less cruel manner.

I don't know if Isayama meant to answer this dilemma through Attack on Titan, but my personal interpretation of the series' ending is that dialogue should never stop no matter how difficult it is to listen when you hold prejudice and hatred towards the other side. Alternative destruction costs too much in terms of life, but also because no grand ideology or historical burdens should be more important than the smallest, simplest enjoyments in life. The rumbling wasn't stopped through a grand philosophy in the end; it stopped when Armin reminded Zeke that life was meaningful because of the tiniest things that he enjoyed, which was as simple as playing catch with his father figure. Zeke was another character that believed in destruction over dialogue, but when reminded of his fondest memories, he decided that at the end of the day his memories and feelings weren't less significant than ending the conflict. It is as Carla said in the very beginning as she cradled Eren in her arms: Eren was special for no reason other than being born. Each of us has a unique path ahead of us the moment we entered this world, and this invaluable path is worth our protection.



He's already special.
Because he was
born into this world.

And that's the message I think the series left us with. Dialogue about the biggest disagreements need to continue so that the smallest things we enjoy in life can continue. And maybe, these dialogues are not meant to end conflicts, because conflicts will always exist in tandem with diversity. So long as differences exist across societies, conflict will continue. But in a world riddled with these disagreements, maybe we should not only evaluate dialogue through its failure to end ongoing, highly visible conflicts, but also through its success in protecting us from the conflicts that could have happened but did not.

One of the central places in human life is occupied by interpersonal communication. This could look like camaraderie, acquaintance, love or friendship. This means having a strong support system comprising different types of relationships throughout one's life is immensely important. Conversely, US general surgeon Vivek Murthy has warned that "being socially disconnected" might be as detrimental as smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day. Doesn't that sound alarming? Yet, ironically, with globalisation, digitalization and the advent of social media in the 21st century, we have become increasingly reclusive and less invested in relationships, namely friendships. I see this as a Friendship Recession. Let's talk about it.

THE friendship RECESSION

written by **CHARMAINE**



Let's talk about: The Types of Friendships

To understand friendship, perhaps we should go back to its origins, or rather how ancient philosophers conceptualised it. In his work *Nicomachean Ethics*, famed Greek philosopher Aristotle elaborates on different types of friendships and their significance in the life of individuals.



First, there is the Friendship of Utility, which is based on mutual benefit or usefulness. People in such friendships derive utmost satisfaction from practical advantages they stand to gain from one another. This usually occurs between business partners or colleagues, in a formal setting. However, these friendships tend to be less enduring as they are contingent upon mutual benefits and become transactional.



Then, there is the Friendship of Pleasure, which hinges on enjoyment of each other's company. Individuals might derive pleasure from their interactions and share some sort of 'feel good' emotional high. These friendships are often centred around shared interests, activities or experiences. Whilst enjoyable, they can also be fleeting as they are dependent on the pleasurable experiences.



Lastly, and perhaps the highest form of friendship, Aristotle talks about the Friendship of Virtue. In such friendships, individuals love and accept each other for their virtuous qualities and character. These friendships are based on mutual respect, trust, and a deep admiration for the other as they truly are. As such friendships are built atop a strong foundation, there is a continual commitment to maintain it. It is also likely to be the most enduring among all three types of friendships. After all, there is nothing in it for us other than the relationship itself.

Take a moment to pause and think: Where, then, are we with our friendships now?



Let's talk about: The Current State of Friendships

While all the above friendships carry unique value, if there is insufficient space for us to cultivate them, we cannot hope to have any type of friendship flourishing in our lives. Genuine friendships, in my opinion, might not only resemble Friendships of Virtue, but simply means knowing the person as they are, being there for them, and having the time to catch up despite the hustle and bustle of everyday life.

The 21st century is a transformative period that has seen interconnected economies, cultures and societies across the world. We know this as globalisation today. Technological advancement has also precipitated the growth of businesses, its networks, and the way processes are run. Across many industries, there are expectations for workers to be productive and efficient in the form of longer working hours and tight deadlines. If not, how can workers ever rise the ranks and be successful? How can they

ensure they won't be replaced by technology? Because of this emphasis on career and work, we lack the energy to make appointments after our daily 9-5. Friendships are forged through social activities; they cannot be maintained or created out of nothingness. But with the new normal of career first, friendships are not high up the priority list for many.

Social media has also transformed the basis of friendships. People, especially adolescents, now spend more time on digital media (such as texting, gaming and social media) over physical interactions. While the virtual space might still provide some form of communication and interaction, it certainly isn't as desirable as in-person meet-ups. In some cases, social media friendships might also be superficial connections forged with self-serving intentions. After all, we only know as much of the other party as is presented by his or her internet persona.

“Friendships are forged through social activities; they cannot be maintained or created out of nothingness.”

Let's talk

about: Negative effects of Declining Friendships

A Friendship Recession spells trouble for us in more ways than imaginable, mainly in the social and physical aspects.

A 2019 study by the Journal of Social and Personal Relationships has linked social interaction and social support to a variety of positive outcomes for physical and mental health, whereas their opposites—social isolation, ostracism, and loneliness—have been linked to negative outcomes. This includes social anxiety, self-esteem issues, and depression. The decline in friendships means the lack of a healthy support system, which heightens the risk of having these issues develop.

Additional research from the Gerontological Society of America has highlighted the trajectories of cognitive decline and dementia in the absence of friendships. Friendships, as mentioned, are social relationships which can encompass productive and leisure activities. Frequent social contact and high rates of social engagement keeps the mind active and also moderates the effect of stress on the central nervous system; therefore, a lack of social relations may increase brain damage and the effects of ageing.

about: Where we go from now

While this might seem depressing, it certainly doesn't mean that all hope is lost. Let us be unafraid in addressing the real issues of friendship decline and take steps towards building up relationships again. Friendships don't form themselves, and we should create spaces where they can take root and flourish. Being open to wanting friendships also requires a certain vulnerability, and we should embrace it unabashedly in a bid to stronger and more lasting friendships.



Is Singapore Boring?

The first and last time I heard the claim “Singapore is boring”, it came from Singaporeans, born and raised. Now, as an exchange student who, in all transparency, has spent just a little over a semester in Singapore, I found this a baffling accusation. So I, the outsider, have taken it upon myself to understand (and maybe debunk) this argument.

The Origins of “Boredom”

In my unofficial interviews I found a couple of common threads: expenses, repetition and inauthenticity. Let’s talk about them.

1.Singapore is expensive. In fact, the Economist Intelligence Unit found Singapore to be the most expensive city in the world. While the methodology and impact of this finding is up for debate, it definitely does cement the city as extremely expensive. In addition, Singapore’s Southeast Asian neighbours don’t help the reputation, offering high standards of living for a fraction of the price.

2.Singapore is small. You could theoretically cross the entire island from east to west in under an hour (although it sometimes takes me an hour to get downtown from NUS). While the merits and demerits of this are an non-exhaustive list, one thing it does ensure is repetition. People have been eating brunch at Lola’s since the beginning of time (and will probably continue to do so till its end).

3.This one might be more of a complaint from non-Singaporeans: Singapore feels gentrified, sanitised, perfect. Although I myself have been guilty of saying this, I’m torn. Is this a valid criticism? Or is it outsiders complaining that Singapore doesn’t fit into their vision of Asia (like some sort of poverty porn). That’s a debate I’m more than happy to have. Personally, I do find some truth to it. Everything is very well done. Prim and proper. Nothing weird, or out of the ordinary. No cultural quirks like throwing up in the New York subway (although, I did hear news about someone going number 2 on the MRT). It’s what makes Singapore so unique and nothing like any other big city I’ve been to. Good administration, minimal crime and low pollution (but complaining about this is a fool’s game).

An External Perspective

What I find extremely interesting is that, for the most part, exchange students tend to disagree with the idea that Singapore is boring. Even though we’re here for a much shorter period of time, I still wonder why we’re on the other end of the spectrum. Here are some theories:

1.Nightlife

There are only a handful of clubs in Singapore and drinking is expensive. So yes, it gets repetitive. But bars and clubbing in Singapore can still be really fun. There’s a wide variety of bars with really good drinks that are cheaper or the same price as most big cities (Sago House is one of my favourites). Clubbing is always safe, which combined with ladies night, is a massive win for women. Plus, cabs back are not super expensive compared to other cities. And (even though I’m not a fan) Marquee is definitely a required pilgrimage for anyone with an interest in clubs in Southeast Asia (I did like the slide).

2.Food and Culture

I’ve seen my fair share of big cities. Rarely do countries with such high standards and costs of living have food this cheap. Most hawker centres feature a trove of cuisines, and in many cases, you can get a meal for under \$5. AND it’s good. You are definitely spoiled for choice between the Malay, Chinese and Indian food alongside those cultures. Eid, Diwali and Christmas, all in the same year (I’d never heard of Thaipusam and I’m Indian). The party never stops. Sanitised, yes; but it is also an incredibly diverse culture to be in, especially if you’re not from Asia.

3.Travel

Singapore is very conveniently located for travel across Southeast Asia. If you have any exchange friends, you know they’re in Malaysia every weekend. Singaporeans are privy to this too. You get to earn in the Singaporean Dollar and spend in the Thai Baht. I feel like Southeast Asia was this wonderful, tropical secret that I’m finally discovering (cheesy I know, but try being in Europe in January).

4.Comfort and the People

Having spent some time in France, I like to juxtapose Singaporeans with the French. While the French are polite but cold, Singaporeans are rude but warm. On the spectrum of having been screamed at, to given the cold shoulder from the bus drivers to the hawkers centres, every international person has had an experience. But Singaporeans are also uncharacteristically nice. People always stop to give detailed directions, sometimes they walk with you. If you’re staying on campus, people on your floor you don’t talk to you will take care of you. Help with the printer, food, language, everything. The safety and convenience of the city, coupled with the warmth of the people (and the weather) makes for an attractive destination.

So what’s my conclusion? Is Singapore boring? I hate to be that person, but it depends on you. How much you want to see, where you want to go, and (unfortunately) how much money you have. Singapore is like the stable, dependable partner with a finance job who has a taste for the “finer” things in life. The partner you move in with after 1 year of dating, marry after 5 and have 3 kids by 35 (I find BTOs completely jarring). That partner is not for everyone. Some people want partners so toxic that you can’t breathe but you’re always entertained like Delhi; or partners that are the life of the party like Bangkok. Everyone gets to pick. So no, I cannot answer the question but I can offer synonyms to “boring”. I prefer reliable, calm, safe, well kept. For that I will always recommend giving Singapore a chance, there’s more than what meets the eye.

Puff, Prosperity or Politics?

Rethinking Tobacco Bans

Tobacco use kills 8 million people a year, according to the World Health Organisation. As one of the top killers worldwide, it is associated with numerous health risks like lung diseases, heart disease, stroke, and cancer. Over the years, governments have implemented various policies to mitigate this prevalent public health risk, including restricting indoor smoking, taxing on tobacco products and moderating advertising and promotion schemes of such products.

Recently, a handful of countries decided to be more ambitious with their smoking policies to further bring down smoking rates: Canada will soon be printing warning labels on cigarettes directly, France hopes to ban e-cigarettes completely, and New Zealand and Malaysia planned generational smoking bans...which, somehow, got backtracked suddenly a few months ago.

What Happened in New Zealand?

As the first-of-its-kind legislation in the world, the proposed restrictions were introduced by former Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern's Labour-led government that envisioned a completely smoke-free country. This included implementing a generational smoking ban prohibiting the sale of cigarettes to anyone born after 2008, reducing the legal amount of nicotine content in tobacco products, and capping the number of approved stores to sell such products from 6000 to 600. Scheduled to start later this year, these laws aimed to reduce the number of tobacco users almost immediately and, in particular, to target the Māori population with high smoking rates. The government was lauded by international health professionals for its foresight in managing public health risks and inspired other countries like Britain to devise similar laws. But it unavoidably received complaints from some business groups and owners of newsagents and corner shops for the loss of revenue.

The policies were more than ready to be rolled out anytime soon, until Christopher Luxon stepped up as the new prime minister last November. He swiftly announced the decision to repeal the ban before it took effect, even though it was never an item on his election campaign in the first place. Leading the country's new centre-right coalition, Luxon's goal as president was to prioritise economic recovery and curb inflation. He stated that tax revenue from cigarette sales could help finance the proposed tax cuts in an attempt to stimulate economic growth, though Luxon later reiterated that this was not the primary motive for backtracking the ban.

Further justifying his decision, he mentioned another perceived benefit of preventing black markets (that were largely untaxed) from emerging, since 'concentrating the distribution of cigarettes in one store in one small town is going to be a massive magnet for crime'. His concern is, in fact, validated from the consequences of The Prohibition in the US. Rolled out in 1920, it aimed to ban the production, transportation and sale of alcoholic beverages, but soon led to the rise of organised bootlegging and smuggling of such products.

In ongoing controversy, the policy breakdown was commented 'a major loss for public health, and a huge win for the tobacco industry, whose profits will be boosted at the expense of Kiwi's lives' by Health Coalition Aotearoa, a local anti-smoking group. The U-turn may also prompt UK policy makers to reconsider their plan in phasing out the sale of cigarettes.

Trade-off between Growth and Social Good?

According to modelling estimates, the ban would have saved 5000 lives annually and the country's national healthcare system \$1.2 billion over the next 20 years. Despite possibly being fully aware of these long-term benefits, decision makers opted for the sub-optimal solution to prioritise apparently more urgent problems that require immediate attention, that is, economic recovery following the pandemic and recent global economic downturn. Among different tax sources, tobacco revenue seems to be a relatively manageable and autonomous stream for the government. It poses fewer contradictions with the current government's goal compared to other methods like raising tax rates for Goods and Services Tax and corporate taxes.

Malaysia's Generational Endgame Clause Scrapped

Fast on the heels of New Zealand's announcement, the Malaysian government similarly eliminated the Generational Endgame (GEG) Clause from its Control of Smoking Products for Public Health Bill 2023 last November. With the GEG being meant to ban tobacco and vape products for anyone born from Jan 1 2007, it was rebuked as unconstitutional for creating two sets of laws for two different groups of citizens based on age and was therefore a contravention of Article 8 of the Federal Constitution that guaranteed equality before law. Simply put, just to implement the GEG, the Federal Constitution would have to be amended with the approval of at least two-thirds majority in the House, which was a level of support the Cabinet was not confident in achieving.

Just last April, the government amended laws to exempt the ban on selling nicotine liquids and gels to minors in order to tax vaping products. While the Public Health Bill 2023 addresses restrictions on advertisements and sponsorships for non-tobacco smoking products, the absence of the GEG hampers efforts to bolster existing tobacco laws and safeguard minors, ultimately undermining the Bill's impact. This puts Malaysia in a difficult position to achieve its vision to be a smoke-free country by 2040, which entailed reducing the number of regular smokers to less than 5% of its population. With more than 20% of Malaysian adults, or almost 5 million citizens, being smokers (according to its 2019 National Health Survey), the country is indeed in a dire need for more bold steps for public health.

The GEG was removed due to an inertia from the parliament to refine constitutional laws, when the anti-tobacco law would not have been compromised if exceptions to Article 8 were made. This scenario highlights a broader trend observed in democratic systems: when new governments take office, their priorities and interests may diverge from their predecessors. Consequently, the continuity and sustainability of policies are often undermined by the transition of dominant political parties.

Conclusion

Both cases in New Zealand and Malaysia echo a universal dilemma of economic development versus environmental protection faced by many nations.

Over the past years, efforts to address environmental conservation have remained stagnant despite widespread recognition of the looming threat of global warming to future generations. The tension between pursuing sustainable economic development and blindly chasing growth targets is similarly common. China's emphasis on prioritising quality development sets it apart from many other countries, as evidenced by its implementation of policies like adjustments in the real estate market debt cycle and crack-downs on its entertainment, gaming and tutoring industries. But let's save that discussion for another time!

A Smart Nation

A Smart Nation

As our lives are seamlessly being supported by digital networked technology in 2024, Singapore's progress as a Smart Nation is also steadily moving forward. Singapore was ranked third in the 2023 IMD World Digital Competitiveness Ranking (WDRC), which evaluates 64 countries based on the adoption of digital technologies, including AI, by governments, companies, and individuals. While Singapore is being recognised for its consistent progressions and investments in the digital world, there are still challenges faced after achieving this status.

The rise and prevalence of scams and fake news in Singapore

The digital landscape has become an area of both convenience and peril as people continue to integrate technology into their daily lives. The pervasive influence of technology has brought about unprecedented connectivity and accessibility but also leaves people increasingly exposed to the proliferation of digital fraud and the rapid spread of misinformation. While it is known that fake news has become a ubiquitous issue in our information ecosystems, the number of scams that have been happening has also skyrocketed. Singapore has witnessed a disconcerting trend, showcased by the unfortunate victimisation of at least 219 DBS customers who collectively lost about S\$446,000 to scams in the first two weeks of 2024. These are SMS phishing scams where scammers impersonate banks to warn victims of "possible unauthorised attempts" to access their bank accounts and urge them to click on the embedded links. The scammers would then use the one-time passwords (OTP) and internet banking details provided by the victims on the fake DBS websites they are directed to to make unauthorised withdrawals. This is just one instance of the kinds of scams and digital fraud that Singaporeans are falling victim to with the rise of digitalisation.

Therefore, it is crucial to verify the legitimacy of any communication, particularly those related to financial transactions. Exercising caution when faced with unsolicited links and information is paramount, as DBS has emphasised that banks and financial institutions will never send clickable links through unsolicited messages. The DBS #BSHARP campaign spotlights the latest scams happening as well as a six-step guide on how to stay vigilant and prevent oneself from falling into the trap of fraudulent websites.

Vulnerability of Singaporeans

Although the elderly and individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are perceived as being more susceptible to false information, information-savvy Singaporeans with tertiary education are equally vulnerable. Results of the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) survey substantiates that everyone is susceptible to false information, regardless of age, socio-economic status and educational background, as the majority of the respondents fell for a manipulated "news article" that was shown to them. It was revealed that the social networks of Singaporeans bolstered the dissemination of false information, as close to three-quarters of respondents shared that they had spread false information because it came from people they trusted like close friends and family.

Similarly, another study done in Singapore found that despite nearly 90 per cent of tertiary students rating their digital literacy skills from "fair" to "ex-

cellent," their actual proficiency level fell short. This reinforces the notion that nobody is immune to these scams and false information. However, when Singaporeans were asked about this subject, the older generation replied that the younger generation is more prone to falling for scams as younger people are presumably in the online space more and do not have the critical skills to identify fake news or scams. The younger generation on the other hand was certain that the older generation is more susceptible, believing they had a lack of understanding of the online space and inability to fact-check the things they see online. Interestingly, despite acknowledging vulnerability in other demographics, respondents did not perceive themselves as highly susceptible to false information. This discrepancy highlights a level of complacency and a lack of self-awareness regarding personal susceptibility to misinformation. Such attitudes, paired with the belief that others are more vulnerable, contribute to a passive outlook towards addressing the issue of fake news and scams.

How Singapore can combat this

Overall, in order for Singapore to advance as a Smart Nation, solutions have to be implemented to strengthen the citizens' digital psyche, which encompasses the psychological aspects of how individuals and society adapt to the digital world. This includes factors such as trust in technology and digital literacy to ensure that citizens are better prepared to engage with the digital world effectively and responsibly. To build national resilience against misinformation and scams, a notable solution that is being implemented involves public education initiatives like digital literacy programs to equip citizens with more knowledge about the digital media landscape.

On top of the government's efforts against this fight, law enforcement agencies, financial institutions and individuals must also collaborate to establish preventive measures. It is especially vital that individuals are not only equipped with digital media literacy but are also guided by scepticism. Verification of communication sources, scepticism toward unsolicited messages, and the adoption of security features like two-factor authentication have become essential shields against the evolving tactics of cybercriminals. By staying informed, exercising caution, and collectively advocating for a secure digital environment, individuals can fortify themselves and the people around them against digital fraud in an era where technology offers both benefits and risks.



The Word Affinity

— glendas ng

Have you ever felt like a sound or a word grated on your nerves, revolting you? Or the opposite—have you ever felt inexplicably drawn to the sound of a word? Language, words and phrases: the cornerstone of human communication, are a rich tapestry woven with diverse shapes, sounds, and meanings. Amidst this vast linguistic landscape, certain words just seem to captivate our auditory senses and evoke profound emotional and physical responses, while others might fail to resonate with us the same way.

The Brain At Play

At the centre of our preference for sounds and words lies the intricate workings of our cognition. Words are not merely arbitrary symbols; they also carry semantic weight, evoking mental images, memories, and associations. Our preference for certain words could stem from their phonetic characteristics, such as rhythm, euphony (ie. how sweet the word sounds), and phonological distinctiveness (ie. how unique the word sounds). For instance, words with mellifluous sounds like “serendipity” or “luminescence” often elicit a positive aesthetic response due to their euphonic qualities, while harsh-sounding words like “putrid” or “disgusting” have pre-existing nasty aversion effects already built into our subconscious, making it almost impossible to simply look at one and separate it from its meaning. Take a word that has a rather unpleasant meaning like “syphilis”. The meaning of the word is neither soothing nor beautiful, but attempt to simply sound out the word in your head (or say it over and over again if you’re not in a public place). The sound should sound pleasing and euphonious to most.

Connotations and semantic richness of words play a pivotal role in shaping our preferences. Words imbued with positive connotations or associations, such as “harmony,” “serenity,” or “blossom,” tend to elicit better, more positive responses due to their alignment with desirable concepts. Conversely, words carrying negative connotations or semantic ambiguity may evoke discomfort or avoidance. What is intriguing is what these words have in common: two or three syllables, short vowels, easy-to-produce consonantal sounds such as /l/, /s/ and /m/. None of these sounds—or phonemes—require excessive effort to be pronounced and thus evoke natural and peaceful tones. Some good examples are: autumn, melody, lullaby, velvet, whisper, and caress. Our cognitive appraisal of words encompasses not only their phonetic properties but also their semantic resonance and associative networks within our minds.

Feeling A Word Deeply

Predictably, beyond the subconscious effect they have on our brain, words wield a profound emotional power, capable of eliciting a spectrum of affective responses ranging from joy and nostalgia to fear and revulsion. Our emotional responses to words are shaped by a myriad of factors, including individual experiences, cultural norms, and linguistic context.

Words endowed with emotive potency, such as “love”, “freedom”, or even “home,” resonate deeply with our emotional centre, evoking sentiments of warmth, belonging, and yearning.

serendipity
freedom
harmony
wossolq

These words often serve as linguistic anchors, encapsulating complex emotions in succinct form. Conversely, emotionally charged words associated with trauma, loss, or adversity may evoke visceral reactions, triggering distress and discomfort. The context in which words are encountered can also significantly influence our emotional response—one generally cannot and would not wish a word of condolences at a wedding and “heartiest congratulations” at a funeral. A word that evokes indifference in one context may evoke profound emotion in another, depending on the salience of its meaning and the emotive charge of the surrounding discourse. Our emotional engagement with words is, no doubt, a dynamic process shaped by contextual cues, individual differences.

The Word Exchange

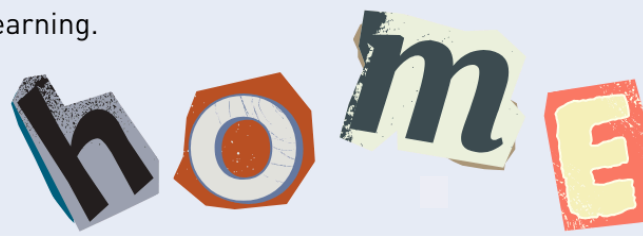
Our linguistic preferences are not formed in isolation individually but are deeply intertwined with social and cultural dynamics. Language serves as a prominent vehicle for social identity, often reflecting our values and cultural heritage. As such, our preference for certain words is often shaped by socialisation processes, peer influences, and cultural norms.

Words that resonate with our social identity or cultural worldview are more likely to garner favour, serving as linguistic markers of group membership. For example, colloquial expressions or slang like Singlish may hold special significance for its members, evoking a sense of camaraderie and belonging, perhaps more so when one is foreign in a place. Furthermore, linguistic trends and fashions play a role in shaping our preferences for words, since certain terms become en vogue or fall out of favour over time. All things considered, you would more likely be repulsed by the words “on fleek” right now, than eight years ago, when it was a trending slang term amongst teenagers and young adults. The rise of social media and digital communication platforms has facilitated the rapid dissemination of linguistic innovations and memes, influencing the lexicon of popular discourse and shaping linguistic preferences across diverse demographic groups.

Obvious to most is the fact that some languages consist of lexicons that are sounded from the throat and will sound harsher, unfriendlier and colder, as do most words in German, Arabic or Russian. In contrast, other languages like French, Italian or Latin have softer sounding words. Its vowels are quiet and consonants are relatively phonetically soft: /s/, /m/, /z/, for example. It is unsurprising that its linguistic organisation of both vowels and consonants creates softer and gentler sounding words. There is a reason why these languages are called the language of love, and are likely able to induce the spirit of desire, sensuality and romance within some cultures.

Punctuating The End

Our preference for certain words over others is a nuanced phenomenon shaped by a myriad of cognitive, emotional, and social factors. From the phonetic allure of euphonious sounds to the emotive resonance of words imbued with personal or cultural significance, by unravelling the complexities of linguistic preference, we gain insight into the profound impact of language, illuminating the rich tapestry of human communication.





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