School Highlights

Celia Moh Professorial Chair ~ Professor Etel Solingen

Chancellor’s Professor Etel Solingen, President, International Studies Association 2012-13, Department of Political Sciences, School of Social Sciences, University of California, Irvine, visited SMU School of Social Sciences from 27 May to 3 June 2013 under the Celia Moh Professorial Chair. During her visit, she conducted talk and lecture for SOSS Faculty, undergraduates, alums and academic partners.

The Celia Moh Professorial Chair was established at SMU in 2000 with a generous gift of S$2 million by the late Mr Laurence Moh, former Chairman, Plantation Timber Products, in honour of his wife, Celia Moh, on the occasion of their 40th anniversary. The purpose of the Chair is to acknowledge and award an outstanding female faculty member.

Dinner Talk, 29 May 2013
“The Politics of International Diffusion: Global and Regional Dimensions”

The Great Recession, Euro-contagion, Middle East upheavals, nuclear proliferation, and expansion of rights, among others, highlight the centrality of diffusion to international studies. This session offered building blocks for a shared conceptualization of diffusion; explored agents and causal mechanisms involved in this process, and outlined an agenda for future research. The talk was chaired by SOSS alumnus, Mr Tim Mou Hui, Class of 2012. SOSS students and alums had an engaging evening with Professor Solingen.

Prof Solingen presenting her findings during the dinner talk.

(L-R) Participants, Clayton Chong, Tim Mou Hui, Nathan Li & Nadim Ali Kapadia having a light conversation over buffet dinner before the talk with Prof Solingen and Prof James Tang.

Chairperson, Mr Tim Mou Hui, SOSS Class of 2012, opening the session.

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North Korea is involved in a cyclical pattern of threats and negotiations with neighbors, external powers, and international institutions. Sanctions and positive inducements have not yet yielded North Korea's denuclearization. Participants from Ministries and Education Institutions discussed whether or not this is likely to happen anytime soon.

Why do some states seek nuclear weapons while others renounce them? How have the nuclear trajectories of East Asia and the Middle East differed? What do answers to these and other questions say about North Korea and Iran's nuclear plans? Professor Solingen addressed these challenging questions in her public lecture. This session was chaired by Professor James Tang, Dean, School of Social Sciences and Assistant Professor Song Jiyoung was the discussant.
FORUM:
Ageing and the Wellbeing of Older Persons in ASEAN Countries:
Examples from Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam
25 March 2013

In coming decades, population ageing is one of the biggest demographic and socioeconomic challenges facing not only rich countries such as Singapore but also its less developed ASEAN neighbours. For example, proportions of population age 60 and older are projected to increase rapidly from 13% (Thailand) and 8% (Myanmar and Vietnam) in 2010 to 32% (Thailand), 31% (Vietnam), and 25% (Myanmar) by 2050 – trailing just behind Singapore where 38% of the total population is estimated to be age 60 and older. This public forum presented situation analysis of social, economic and psychological wellbeing of older persons in ASEAN countries, based on the first national aging surveys in Myanmar and Vietnam and the most recent national survey of older persons in Thailand. It was chaired by Assistant Professor Bussarawan Puk Teerawichitchainan. Speakers were Professor John Knodel and Professor Gavin Jones, experts on population ageing from respective countries. Lessons and policy implications for Singapore were also being discussed.
SOSS DISTINGUISHED LECTURE SERIES
By PROFESSOR G. JOHN IKENBERRY

America’s Grand Strategy in Asia

The United States has grandly announced that it is making a “pivot” to Asia. But for most of the last century, the United States has been deeply involved with Asia. What are America’s deep connections with Asia? How have America’s liberal ideas and global hegemonic ambitions shaped how the United States has fought wars, made friends, and build order in the region? How will the rise of China and America’s economic and political problems alter the United States role in Asia? Can the United States and China live together in Asia? Professor Ikenberry explored these questions during his lecture conducted on 31 January 2013 at the Mochtar Riady Auditorium. The great shifts in Asia are serving to bring the United States into the region in new and complex ways. The most optimistic vision of Asia is one where leadership is shared and great powers find ways to reassure each other and orient their relations toward solving problems of economic and security interdependence. More than 120 general public, SMU faculty and students attended the lecture.

Roundtable Meeting

Obama’s Foreign Policy in the Second Term

S'OSS co-hosted a roundtable meeting with Singapore Institute of International Affairs (SIIA), “Obama’s Foreign Policy in the Second Term”, on 1 February 2013.

13 senior academics from SMU, NUS & NTU and senior business leaders attended the luncheon meeting lead by Professor Ikenberry. The Chair person, Co-chair person and discussant were Professor James Tang (Dean, SOSS), Mr Nicholas Fang (Director, SIIA) and Mr Parag Khanna (Director, Hybrid Reality Institute & Senior Fellow, SIIA) respectively.
School Highlights

Brown Bag Session -
Research Grant Writing

School of Social Sciences faculty members are active in research and are regular recipients of the MOE Tier 1 Research Grant. To encourage a vibrant research environment and sharing of ideas, SOSS organized its very first brown bag session on research grant writing on 22 January 2013.

Associate Professor Angela Leung and Assistant Professor Bussarawan Puk Teerawichitchainan were speakers for this session. They shared on where to get “good ideas” from, important things to include in grant proposals and how to identify fatal flaws in grant proposals.

Hear what faculty members who attended the session said about this session:

“It was great to have an opportunity to hear of the experiences of other faculty members, and begin the process of thinking more systematically as a faculty about how to obtain research grants.”

“I thought it was helpful to hear the experiences of other colleagues who have applied for grants—the amount of work it takes, the planning required, and how important it is to be able to sell your idea to an interdisciplinary audience.”

“I enjoyed hearing the different perspectives from Angela and Puk on how to write a grant with a broad enough question to attract funding, but specific enough to address in a limited time frame. I think having more of these discussions will go a long way in helping us secure external funding.”

“Session was very informative. Puk and Angela highlighted many important points to consider when submitting a research grant. Other senior faculty shared their expertise, providing insight to how grant reviewers consider a proposal.”
“...And the winning team of this year’s HR Challenge goes to.....THE AMAZING LIFE!!!!!!”. We could hear the roar of applause that engulfed our cries of happiness and excitement as we walked suavely to receive our plaques and prizes. It was an unforgettable moment of joy and pride, and it also marked the end of our intensive journey that we embarked on in December 2012.

It all started out as an ambitious dream for 5 passionate HR students – the desire to represent our university in the National HR Challenge 2013 organized by Singapore Human Resources Institute. The theme for the case challenge is a relevant and interesting one “Shrinking Workforce – Tackling Work-Life Balance”, and also inspired our team name– “The Amazing Life”. We represented the School of Social Sciences, Kellie and Tai Yong from Lee Kong Chian School of Business, and of course, Anna, who was from the School of Accountancy.

This topic captured the broader national agenda, as it dealt with the government, corporate sector, and the society. Work-life balance is multi-faceted and we are glad to have established a cross-functional team from different fields to provide various perspectives on this particular case. We were also very honoured to have inputs from our very own SMU professors, Prof Chung Wai Keung from the School of Social Sciences and Prof Lau Tat Chuan from the Lee Kong Chian School of Business.

Of course, we were also fortunate to have Dr Thomas Menkhoff, an Organisational Behaviour and Human Resources Professor from the Lee Kong Chian School of Business, as our mentor. Holding a track record of three consecutive wins for the previous HR Challenges, our team felt the heat and pressure to defend the title for SMU. He was a great mentor, and never failed to give us his utmost support, guidance and advice, not forgetting the many evenings he stayed back just to watch us rehearse over and over again. Our team was very grateful to be under his supervision for the competition.

Our case dealt with a local seafood restaurant whereby we analysed their work-life balance policies and issues and provided innovative recommendations to tackle productivity and manpower shortages. We leveraged on a great deal of classroom knowledge from our different disciplines. Being from different faculties, we could pool our resources together and engage in tasks as diverse as suggesting changes in policies to be implemented by the government, estimating Returns of Investments (ROI) and deriving a strategic human capital strategy for our case organisation. Such diversity, complemented by our camaraderie and synergy, drove our success, and propelled us ahead of our competitors during our final presentation held at NUS. It was a remarkable achievement and we felt elated to emerge triumphant over the other participating teams.
Guo Ping: The greatest challenge was probably the report-writing phase during December 2012, where we only had one proper week to consolidate our interview pointers, research, generate ideas and recommendations to tackle the case, and convert all these into a coherent and structured report. I honestly felt the inertia to return to the report-writing mode, especially when it was the time to relax and enjoy before the academic term commenced. Knowing that my friends were on holidays did not really help much. We even had a meeting on the Christmas Eve’s and New Year Eve’s morning. However, looking back, all the time and effort spent, and all the late nights together were definitely worth the while for that single moment of victory.

Bhuvan: For me, I would say the greatest challenge was to manage the many commitments I had taken up, starting from December onwards. I had to ensure that I could allot sufficient time to those regular commitments as well as meeting the various deadlines for the HR challenge (e.g. submission of report, semi finals and so on). However, as our team was always ready to help one another out to accommodate everyone’s schedules and put our best efforts forward, we managed each deadline to the best of our abilities.

The three greatest takeaways for this case competition were: 1) Staying relevant and up to date with the current affairs is important, specifically knowing about the White Paper and the Singapore’s economy and industrial outlook; 2) Practice makes perfect – our performance at the Finals was near-perfect due to the countless number of rehearsals we had as a team prior to the competition. We also solicited help and feedback from Professor Menkhoff as well as our seniors, the winners of last year’s HR Challenge so that we could work on our areas of improvement to perform even better; 3) Appreciate diversity – We were successful as a team not because we were similar, but because we were different in terms of personality, perspectives and skill sets. Each of us in the team had a specific role to play and contribute to the project in various ways – Anna was resourceful in searching for relevant news articles and statistics; Tai Yong was an expert in Political Science and knowledge on current affairs; Bhuvan was extremely hardworking and artistic in terms of the designing of diagrams for our report and slides and Kellie was a superb leader and integrator of information and ideas.

If there is something we would like to share with the SOSS community out there, it would be to highlight that “how much you really want it” really counts. If you desire to achieve something very badly, just like how our team wanted to win and do our mentor and SMU proud, then you will definitely put your heart and soul into doing it, and doing that to the best of your abilities. That is our main source of motivation, and that is what kept us going despite the challenges faced.

Winners of HR Challenge 2012 and 2013 – our mentors and seniors from SMU!
Can order emerge from chaos? On 16 March 2013, over 180 participants from 26 tertiary institutions across Singapore set out to discover to that question at the Social Sciences Conference 2013 (SSC13).

Set around the theme “New World (Dis) Order”, the Conference began with the keynote address by Mr. Simon Tay, Chairman of the Singapore Institute of International Affairs (SIIA). In his address Mr. Tay spoke about positioning Singapore in the world 50 years into the future and how the country not only faces increasingly difficult choices, but also the need to deal with the unintended and sometimes unpredictable consequences of each choice. During the forum discussion, Mr. Tay also discussed how a multi-disciplinary approach is increasingly necessary towards understanding and analysing the challenges of tomorrow in order to make better, informed decisions.

SOSS faculty also delivered a series of intriguing and intellectually stimulating seminars where SSC13 participants got a taste of SOSS’s signature style of discussion-based, interactive learning. The seminars were centred around current issues facing the world today and provided multiple new perspectives not only in approaching them but to also think critically and generate deeper analysis, before culminating in a capstone panel discussion with both SOSS faculty and participants.

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SOSS Dean James Tang (center) sharing a light-hearted moment with SMU President Arnoud de Meyer (left) and SIIA Chairman Mr. Simon Tay (right)

Mr. Simon Tay delivering the keynote address

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Student Activities

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Prof John Donaldson strikes a pose(!) for the camera

Behind the Psychology with Prof Ivy Lau

Participants listening eagerly to Prof Kirpal Singh’s sharings

The Organizing Committee of SSC13 would like to thank SOSS for the tremendous support and also everybody involved for helping in one way or another in making the Conference a continuing success!

Capstone Panellists (from left): Prof Serena Wee, Prof Ijlal Naqvi, Prof Nicolas Harrigan, Prof Ivy Lau, Prof John Donaldson, Second-Year SOSS Student Vignesh Kumar (Moderator)
Last November I went to London to receive Lloyd’s List Award for having achieved the highest score worldwide in the Institute of Chartered Shipbrokers (ICS) Professional exams in 2012. Balancing work and study required tremendous effort, the material was substantially large and the work oftentimes required irregular hours. I was blessed to have great support from the company and my fiancée throughout the process.

Candidates for ICS membership usually take 1-2 subjects per year and complete all required professional examinations in 3-5 years time, but I took all required exams in one year. Without previous exposure to shipping industry, it was not easy to learn the nuts and bolts of shipping business within short period of time and complete all exams at one go. However, in the spirit of SMU philosophy, I took it as a matter of embracing challenge and striving to succeed against all odds.

To this end, I am proud to have graduated from SMU - the multidisciplinary approach and seminar-structured classes formed holistic, interactive and intellectually-stimulating learning environment. I am also grateful for the opportunity to go on International Exchange Programme at Queen’s University which provided me with additional international exposure. Social Science Degree in particular has been helpful for my career development - in-depth understanding of social forces and psychological drivers of human behavior have been essential in the business of bridging cultures.”

Peter Hoang

Congratulations to SOSS Alumus, Peter Hoang, Class of 2011 for scoring:

Highest score worldwide in Institute of Chartered Shipbrokers (ICS) Professional exams
If someone would have told me two years ago that I could study and travel around China by myself, I wouldn’t have believed them, but here I am, I did it! I remember leaving Singapore crying and nervous about coming to China – all the creepy stories about how outdated the country is, how there are no doors in the toilets, how you might be shot dead if you disobey the law...let’s just say that one shouldn’t judge the country until they have live in it for more than three months. The first two months in Beijing was a whirlwind of changes, frustrations and language barriers. Life did not seem so perfect and communicating was a challenge. I suffered from my social media withdrawal symptoms as the “Great Firewall” made life rather difficult for me to reach out to my friends and stay connected to the WWW. My language proficiency has greatly increased as a whole and now I can carry a conversation with the locals without going “sorry, can you speak slower?” or asking “what does (insert word) means?” Chinese is definitely not something new to us Singaporeans who are supposedly bilingual but our standard in Chinese is way behind as compared to even primary school students in China! I believe that while learning a language, “if you can’t learn to laugh at yourself, you will never improve.”, if you are afraid of speaking the language – you’re bound to crash and burn. So laugh away and talk to the locals who are more than happy to help you out, or even teach you a few Pekingese’s lingo!

Adjusting to a new culture is always an eye-opening experience; culture shocks are bound to happen. To quote Cesare Pavese, “Traveling is a brutality. It forces you to trust strangers and to lose sight of all that familiar comfort of home and friends. You are constantly off-balance. Nothing is yours except the essential things – air, sleep, dreams, the sea, the sky – all things tending towards the eternal or what we imagine of it.” Instead of saying, “that’s not how we do it in Singapore!” I thought to myself that there must be a reason for doing it this way, or at least it does not make it the wrong way. It is always good to take time to forget familiarities and understand a new culture on a higher level. One of the hardest challenges was mastering the squat style toilet without falling in!
My classmates and I cooking an international spread for dinner!

My International MA degree in Comparative Education (Education Management and Policy) is a English-taught programme and I have many opportunities to do group work with 15 others students coming from all over the world. SMU has definitely prepared me well for graduate school. I faced no problems in either presenting in class or participating in international conferences. Perhaps we are the pioneer batch of International students from my course, the university is very welcoming and try to accommodate to our needs as much as they can. I am really thankful for the “SMUggers” days in Singapore that made this two years studying in China a breeze.

Traveling to different places within China has provided me with a deeper understanding for the Chinese culture, I have travelled to a handful of provinces within the country and each province specializes in something different. For instance, you will get to see the Russian influence in Qinhuangdao and the beautiful European architectures in Tianjin. Of course, not forgetting China’s natural beauty like the mountains and lakes that we, city kids, will not have a chance to experience! I highly encourage others to take time to explore not just the city you live in but also the surrounding cities as well, because you never know what surprises awaits around the corner. I would encourage students to pursue their interest in studying abroad and experience a different culture. Stepping out of your own comfort zone is difficult but in return, you build rewarding relationships and create life-long memories during the time away from home. I am glad I took the courage to step out of this sunny island and pursue a whole new experience with my international family that I have met in Beijing!
Associate Dean Tan Yoo Guan received the Student Life Recognition Award (Staff and Faculty). This award recognises staff and faculty members who have significantly supported or contributed to co-curricular learning.

Professor David Chan was awarded the prestigious Lee Kuan Yee Fellowship for Research Excellence 2013. This award was established in 2001 and is given to outstanding SMU faculty based on their research performance in the previous year.

Assistant Professor Bussarawan Puk Teerawichitchainan was awarded Della Suantio Fellowship. This award was established in 2012 by Dr Della Suantio Lee and DS Lee Foundation. It is given to support junior faculty members for conducting academic and industry relevant research and to participate in international research programs that are crucial to improving the understanding of business.

Associate Professors Forrest Zhang (Left) and John Donaldson (Right) received the Ministry of Education Tier 2 Grant for their project titled “The Transformation of Rural China: Central Policies and Local Innovations”. The collaborators for this project are Professors James Tang and Ann Florini.

Congratulations!
Faculty in the News

Christie Scollon - 22 May 2013, The Global and Mail
The business case for happiness in the workplace

Norman Li - 12 May 2013, The Straits Times
Bold and Beautiful

Kirpal Singh - 29 Apr 2013, The Philippine Star
Spreading the word

Faculty Research

Journal


Books & Monographs


“NAKED APE. NAKED BOSS” by Kirpal SINGH, 06/2013, Bernard Harrisson

Conference Papers

“Exploring bilingual phonological awareness and executive attention in preschoolers” by Hwajin YANG, 2013, 9th International Symposium on Bilingualism (ISB), Singapore