

Annual Teaching Awards Nominees 2008 Citations
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

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Mr. Alexander Ian Mitchell

Communications and New Media Programme



Mr. Alexander Mitchell firmly believes that the theories that his students learn must be firmly connected with real world skills and understanding. Thus, a key component of his teaching philosophy is that students should learn through doing. His modules are thus designed so that students learn to apply the theories he teaches in hands-on projects. For example, in NM3216 (Game Design I), students are required to embark on group projects wherein they design their own game and play-test it. This enables the students to see more clearly *how* games work, and also *why* a game works or fails to. This process enables them to connect theories about game design with their own hands-on work. In his emphasis on learning through doing, Mr Mitchell epitomizes the

teacher who does not give his students fish, but teaches them how to fish. He thus provides them with the tools necessary for life-long learning.

Mr. Mitchell is also a dedicated teacher who gives close attention to his students' work. In a context where learning takes place through doing, effective learning can only be achieved if the instructor provides careful feedback on what the students have done. Students regularly comment that he is very effective in providing constructive and helpful comments on their work. For example, a student from NM3216 notes that he 'is very insightful and gives very very [*sic*] good comments to each group regarding their game design'.

Apart from his detailed feedback on their projects, students also point out that he is a very effective lecturer who is clear in his explanation of concepts, and makes effective use of examples to bring his points across. He encourages critical thinking and active student participation. Students regularly note that he is friendly and approachable and 'is more like a mentor and friend'.

He has also introduced innovative assessment methods to encourage student learning and exchange. To foster continuous enquiry and reflection, he provides a set of questions on their weekly readings and requires students to earn a portion of their grade by posting their answers on their blogs. Students are then encouraged to read each others' blogs and post comments. This provides a forum for student interchange.

He has taught a spectrum of modules involving both small and large classes. In 2007/08, he taught classes ranging in size from 21 – 139 students. His teaching scores are generally above both department and faculty averages – often by a considerable margin. He has also been actively involved in module development. Modules he has developed for the Communications and New Media Programme include NM2217 Creating Interactive Media and NM3216 Game Design I (both proposed with Irina Aristarkova), NM3321 Interactivity and Everyday Life, NM3222 Interactive Storytelling and NM 4209 Game Design II. His profile, all in all, is that of an innovative, passionate and committed teacher who aims to bring out the best in his students.

Assoc Prof Brian Farrell

Department of History



Assoc Prof Brian Farrell combines a hands-on approach to teaching with a high degree of intellectual rigour and an impressive versatility. He has taught modules at all four levels of the undergraduate curriculum as well as the graduate level and has proved effective and stimulating in all of them. Although his training and, indeed, his “first love” are clearly in the field of military history, he has expanded his teaching interests to include various aspects of European history, imperialism, and colonialism and has been directly involved with developing new modules in these areas. He is closely involved with students’ academic work as well as their personal lives.

One of the hallmarks of Brian’s pedagogy is the wide range of approaches he uses in his teaching. Group presentations, debates, and role-playing are a frequent component of his modules, and his high standards ensure that these exercises are effective and fruitful. Most recently, he has experimented with online tutorials and the use of full-length films in one of his modules. His incorporation of field trips (both within Singapore and overseas) has become a particularly important aspect of his teaching, and one which has been immensely valuable for the learning process. During the 2007/08 academic year, he led students on field trips to Vietnam, Melaka, and Sarawak. The value of these field trips and the time, effort, and expense he puts into them cannot be overemphasized. At the same time, he expects students to be able to write and argue effectively and provides detailed and comprehensive feedback for every written assignment.

Brian has also been heavily involved with graduate students both as scholars and as tutors and has played an important role in helping them to balance their responsibilities in these two capacities. He has also been a key player in curriculum development, where his extensive experience teaching different levels of modules and his regular contact with students ‘at the grassroots’ are much needed for planning new modules and shaping the department’s curriculum as a whole.

Brian could certainly be described as a ‘no-nonsense’ teacher who is rigorous and even demanding in his teaching. These traits are balanced by a strong sense of fairness and justice and a willingness to go the extra mile for a student in trouble. Students know that they cannot get by with poorly done assignments or half-baked excuses, but they also know that he will be a solid rock for them in times of trouble. A few years ago his modules attracted mainly male students drawn to the “military” element, but more recently his group of “loyal followers” has a much better gender balance, as female students have come to appreciate the quality of his teaching and mentoring. Despite his somewhat formidable reputation among students, he is one of the most popular and – even more important – highly respected lecturers in the History Department, and he unquestionably deserves another ATEA.

Assoc Prof Chang Tou Chuang
Department of Geography



Assoc Prof Chang Tou Chuang is unquestionably one of the outstanding educators in NUS. His pedagogy is predicated on the concept of the 'no-walls classroom'. Thus, he treats the surrounding environs in the NUS campus, the island of Singapore, and indeed the Earth itself, as 'classrooms' in which students can learn something valuable. For example, students this year recall that he brought them to a field outside LT 11 for a tutorial that 'truly inspired our thinking'. Again, he organized field trips to the Singapore River and Singapore Tourism Board where students applied concepts learnt in classes/books to 'real world' environments. He has also, in previous years, brought students on field trips to places such as Cameron Highlands and Malacca.

In his teaching, Assoc Prof Chang aims to equip students with skills applicable across the university setting, as well as for life-long learning. Thus, in the course of his classes, he shows his students how to use 'mind maps' to organize materials, and imparts to them strategies for reading, skills in writing, and so on. He also bears in mind the need to prepare his geography students for their potential careers. Hence, in 2007/08, he invited three FASS/Geography alumni working at the Singapore Tourism Board to share their assessments, based on an industry perspective, on his students' projects. (The ultimate grading of the projects was of course done by Assoc Prof Chang himself.) These alumni were also invited to talk to students about their career and how their time at NUS prepared them for the working world.

His innovation and dedication to teaching have resulted in his obtaining consistently excellent scores in student feedback. These feedback scores are all the more praiseworthy when one takes into account the fact that those modules which Assoc Prof Chang has taught, such as GEK1101 and GE2218, had class sizes comprising hundreds of students. Given the well-known difficulties of teaching such large classes, his scores can indeed be seen as stratospheric. The same holds for his nominations for best teaching.

Despite his teaching success (which includes his winning the Outstanding Educator Award in 2006/07), Assoc Prof Chang remains humble and continues to learn from others. He points to Assoc Prof Milagros Rivera, Professor Alex Ip and the winners of the 2008 Outstanding Educators Award as educators who have helped him to discover novel learning approaches, and pointed to various in/out-of-class elements that can be used to engage students.

In keeping with his 'no-walls' philosophy, Assoc Prof Chang has contributed very actively to the betterment of overall NUS teaching, and of the teaching profession as a whole. He has, with Jon Goss and Christine Yano, authored a paper 'Travelling cultures: tourism and the virtual classroom in Hawai'i and Singapore', which is forthcoming in an edited collection by the University of Hawai'i Press. He also delivered two conference papers on pedagogy in 2007/8. He continues to be actively involved in CDTL programmes, and departmental and faculty teaching evaluation committees. He is thus not only an outstanding teacher, but an excellent citizen of NUS and the wider world of educators.

Dr Goh Pei Siong, Daniel
Department of Sociology



Dr Goh stands out as teacher who has, over a relatively few years, made significant strides in his own professional teaching development, as well as innovative contributions to curriculum diversification and upgrading. Already a good teacher with a naturally easy and productive rapport with students, he has become a powerful and effective educator, able to facilitate the acquisition of higher-level analytic and reflective skills by students.

There are several substantive indicators of Dr Goh's progressive development as an exceptional teacher. He has moved from playing junior roles in co-taught modules to take on full responsibility for module design, content, lecturing and coordination. He has shown himself able to teach across a range of modules, from extremely large first year classes of over 900 students to much a smaller, upper-level module that extends the mode of teaching and learning well beyond classroom-based activities. Further, he has reflectively assessed both the strengths and shortcomings of each module, and made significant changes in content, reading materials, structure and mode of delivery over time, with changes consciously designed either to address a point of weakness or to extend further the contribution of a module. This continuous, reflective refinement of his teaching shows a particularly high level of commitment to delivering the highest quality of education to his students, given that Dr Goh could have settled early into the role of being a merely (but no doubt gratifyingly) popular lecturer.

Dr Goh has built on his capacity to engage student attention to introduce a style of what he calls conceptual learning and teaching, in which the active interplay of empirical and theoretical material is used to develop students' capacity for analytic reasoning, methodological rigour and reflective breadth. Teaching materials introduce solid historical and political perspectives into sociology, offering truly multi-disciplinary scope. Required readings also offer a range of contrasting voices, calling upon students to engage actively with the ideas, not passively absorb them. This skill is reinforced by assessment tasks that require students to not only show understanding and the ability to apply concepts, but also to make an independent assessment of the relative merits and weaknesses of different arguments.

On more technical and managerial matters, Dr Goh has also excelled. He has shown exemplary management skills in coordinating large modules, which require running a team of co-teachers and tutors. His detailed guidance to tutors on matters such as assessment criteria testifies not only to the reflective sophistication brought to assessment tasks, but also a commitment to ensure parity across students taking the module. His use of technology to further teaching aims and improve effectiveness showcases the potential of services such as podcasting, the use of embedded video and anti-plagiarism software.

In qualitative feedback, Dr Goh's students frequently commend his ability to explain complex concepts, to relate them to real-life examples and to bring the subject to life in ways which prompt them to re-think many of their assumptions. He is also able to stimulate students' ability to think out of the box by developing a multi-directional learning approach, in which different activities and modes of delivery engage the students in peer learning, interaction with the lecturer, and interaction with their subjects. A commitment to taking the students out of the classroom to engage in experiential learning is complemented by making space in the classroom for practical activities, 'social artefacts' and structured game exercises. This is active learning at its very best.

Special mention should be made of a particularly innovative module taught by Dr Goh, GEK1052: Community Service and Social Action. This service learning module was introduced by Dr Goh in cooperation with a faculty member from Political Science and then subsequently taught entirely by Dr Goh, who has now twice carried out an extensive redesign of its structure, content and assessment components in response to feedback and observation. Despite the inherent challenges of teaching a module such as this, which introduces students to tasks and experiences which fall outside the traditional pattern of university learning, the module clearly offers students a valuable learning experience in which their own initiative is given broad range, within a careful structure provided by the lecturer. The activities carried out by students showcase the enterprise and creativity with which they met the module's challenges. One group, for example, developed a board game as an educational tool designed to foster awareness of racial harmony and went on to co-operate with different social

sector organizations in introducing the game at a number of events involving schools and community groups. Other groups worked with different social sector non-governmental organizations in a variety of practical activities, developing materials, raising awareness and holding events that engaged with the wider community. Overall, Dr Goh's commitment to this module has made its educational value exemplary while also fulfilling the university's mandate to contribute to the country.

Assoc Prof Huang Jianli

Department of History



Assoc Prof Huang is an experienced teacher, who is driven by the desire to share both knowledge of Chinese history and the critical interpretation of that knowledge.

Assoc Prof Huang's self-proclaimed "passion" for his subject is more than just a slogan. It both motivates and shapes his teaching, moving him, for instance, constantly to encourage students to go beyond the confines of curriculum and set readings. The level 2000 module, "Struggle for Modern China," includes three ungraded enrichment projects – looking at documentary and fictional films, and attending scholarly talks. In the same way, the guidelines for the final essay of the same course explicitly direct students to "look for one or two additional reading materials which can sustain a good discussion." As students remark on the feedback, the aim is for them "to ask questions beyond the lectures" and to "take ownership of their work." Similar things happen in the level 4000 module, "Approaches to Chinese History." The list of previous research topics undertaken for the main CA component includes tradition and modernity, the problem of objectivity, gender, gentry, Sun Yat-Sen, Buddhism, songs and communism, the press, and the list goes on. Clearly, these are students who have taken seriously the invitation to range widely in their reading and interests.

The student ownership is more than just learning facts and dates. Assoc Prof Huang's teaching makes students attempt to understand something of the construction of knowledge and of the range of interpretations available. The "Struggle for Modern China" examination, for instance, includes a compulsory source question, in which candidates must use quotations from Sun Yat-Sen in order to answer focused questions about him. At the Honours level, "Approaches to Chinese History" emphasizes different approaches and interpretations. The first session devotes time to considering different paradigms at work in the writing of history, and to the impact of social science theories. A later session explores the possible uses of cultural studies towards the understanding of Chinese history. Again, there is the attempt to have students take the initiative and think for themselves. Three sessions are given over to student roundtable forums, and the main piece of CA is a research project.

Assoc Prof Huang's efforts to engage students intellectually are appreciated by students and peers alike. In addition to according him high scores in feedback, students commend the specificity of the advice he gives, his readiness to listen to them and to help them form their own arguments, his careful guidance and his ability to arouse interest. Peers praise not only the professionalism of his organization and presentation, but also his promotion of independent thought. "He was also able," they write, "to stimulate students' critical thinking by highlighting scholarly debates, such as the different interpretations of Zheng He's voyages, without imposing his own views on the students." That observation confirms what is evident in the module folders – that Assoc Prof Huang includes and interrogates a broad range of scholarship in his classes.

Mrs. Izumi Walker
Centre for Language Studies



Over the past few years the study of “non-mother tongue” languages has become an increasingly important part of the FASS curriculum, first through the area studies departments and now through the Centre for Language Studies. Lecturers in the field of foreign language face the challenge of generating interest in studying third languages among undergraduates who often have an aversion to them because of previous experience with language study at the primary and secondary levels. At the same time, language teachers must be constantly reworking and upgrading their modules and programmes in order to make them useful and relevant for the students. It is clear that Izumi Walker has been consistently successful in facing both of these challenges.

The Japanese language programme is the largest of those offered at CLS, and Mrs. Walker is currently convenor in charge of the programme. She has been heavily involved with curriculum and staff development and has taken numerous initiatives to strengthen and expand the programme, such as the “Project Work for Learning Authentic Japanese” described in her portfolio. The teaching materials make clear that the students are helped to go well beyond dabbling in the cultural base of J-pop, *manga* or *anime* to seriously engage with the language and to learn to use it with fluency and in socially and culturally appropriate ways.

At a personal level, Mrs. Walker is clearly a gifted teacher, as reflected in the quality of her materials and the strength of the student feedback. Her lessons are both pedagogically sound and innovative, exploring and explaining the complexities of the language while also making its study both interesting and relevant for the students. There is an excellent balance between learning to use the language in its “native” context in Japan and utilising it in the expatriate context of Japanese in Singapore.

Mrs. Walker has also been active in presenting and publishing papers on Japanese language pedagogy, and she is currently pursuing a PhD in this field, an accomplishment which will strengthen both her individual qualifications and the credentials of the NUS programme as a whole. Her commitment to excellent teaching and to the building and strengthening of a key programme at NUS has earned her the right to be nominated for an ATEA award.

Assoc Prof Milagros Rivera

Communications and New Media Programme



Assoc Prof Rivera is able to challenge students to think critically and “think academically” about objects and activities which are part of their everyday lives in order to place them within a broader intellectual framework and discourse. Her instruction techniques, choice of materials, and selection of assessment tasks work together to transform students from users of technology into students of communications able to examine and analyze it from many different perspectives. Her objective is to produce articulate, confident, and knowledgeable students with critical thinking skills who will be able to apply their knowledge from the classroom in order to address key developments in

media and communications.

Assoc Prof Rivera places a high priority on providing a nurturing environment for students within her modules, no matter what the class size. This is the case beginning with her 1000-level exposure module and extending through modules at other levels as well, and it is centred around a maximum amount of personal interaction with the students, as well as structured interactive and communicative exercises which help them to find their footing in an unfamiliar subject and begin to engage with it at a conceptual level. While making the classroom a comfortable place, at the same time she insists that students must be prepared to go beyond their “comfort zone” in order to challenge assumptions and common practices and look critically at the issues confronting a technology-savvy society in the twenty-first century.

Assoc Prof Rivera places great emphasis on techniques like presentations and IVLE Forum postings which encourage a maximum degree of participation on the students’ part. The use of the Forum is particularly effective; given that the topics being studied are issues which relate to students’ daily lives and on which they will certainly have ready opinions.

That her enthusiasm for her field is not only effectively communicated to the students but infects them from the start is made abundantly clear from their feedback. She is constantly encouraging self-reflection and questioning of their assumptions about the world of information around them and helping them to engage with this world at a more conceptual, analytical, and theoretical level.

As mentioned above Assoc Prof Rivera has made significant contributions to the CNM curriculum, first as a lecturer and then as Head of Programme. Over the past three years CNM has created more than twenty new modules, some of them taught by Assoc Prof Rivera herself and others by her colleagues under her supervision and guidance. Her upper-level modules have emphasized policymaking and legal aspects of information and communications technology. These topics challenge students not only to examine these issues in an academic framework and to consider the implications of rules and policies for society as a whole, but also to look at such ethical issues on a personal basis.

Assoc Prof Rivera places great emphasis on the value of project work by students working as individuals or in groups. Particularly valuable is her involvement with internships (including Lucasfilm, Singapore Airlines, and Sun Microsystems) and other student activities outside the campus (notably projects to help government agencies and non-profit organizations such as Health Promotion Board and NUS Centre for the Arts). She has also supervised a number of graduate and Honours students and has guided several of the latter in getting their research published in professional journals (*Media Asia*, *Asian Journal of Communication*). In addition, she provides a tremendous amount of practical advice to students preparing to look for jobs, giving direct hands-on guidance for preparing CVs, handling interviews, etc.

Assoc Prof Rivera has taught at all levels from 1000- through 5000- and has developed several of these modules herself. Her effectiveness in the exposure module is particularly noteworthy as such modules are notoriously difficult because of their size (up to 450 students), the lack of academic experience of the students, and the challenge of introducing the key points of an entire field in a single semester. Her use of tasks such as “reaction papers” and “buzz moments” during the lecture sessions helps to engage the students and to demonstrate to them how communications can be studied as a subject, which is the most fundamental objective of a 1000-level module.

Assoc Prof Rivera uses a wide variety of materials for her various modules. The readings represent a balance between theoretical/conceptual approaches to provide a broader framework for the topics, very practical documents on the “nuts and bolts” of IT, and discussions of the social and cultural issues involved. Students are exposed to cutting-edge scholarly literature and receive a firm grounding in the latest developments in the subjects they are studying. The module on *Cybercrime and Society* (NM3201) is an excellent example of this, as the readings cover a comprehensive spectrum of subjects, and many of them are virtually “hot off the press” analyses of ongoing issues, such as electronic theft and cyberstalking. This allows students to directly and thoughtfully engage with topical and even controversial matters to which they have already been exposed online or through the media.

Assoc Prof Rivera’s assessment tasks emphasize interaction among students and engagement by students with the material they are studying. This includes reaction papers and brief presentations which ensure that students are keeping up with the pace of the module and absorbing the material as it is presented rather than trying to learn everything at the end of the semester. Some projects involve “fieldwork” whereby students are sent to public places to interview people of various ages in order to understand the “digital divide”, thus emphasizing the direct social relevance of the topics they are studying in the module. Others are more research-oriented but very much focused on practical issues in the field. Exams are geared to the level of the module, ranging from challenging multiple choice and short answer questions in the introductory module to broad and practical essay questions at the upper levels.

Dr Narayanan Ganapathy
Department of Sociology



Dr Narayanan Ganapathy has been the recipient of many teaching awards over the years both at Faculty and University levels. It is easy to see why. Articulate and knowledgeable, creative and charismatic, his effectiveness as a teacher and the degree to which this is agreed upon may be seen in the many nominations for the Teaching Excellence Award for SC2212.

One of the things that makes Dr Ganapathy's teaching so effective is his blending of praxis and theory. Dr Ganapathy's desire to 'bridge the realm of conceptual thinking and teaching with ... [the] lived realities of individuals and social groups [under study]' has led him to build field research into his teaching at all levels. Project work emphasizes the importance of making links between real data and the theoretical models being worked with, and the relevance of the abstract discipline to the 'real world' is constantly reinforced. Dr Ganapathy's own experience in the field is brought in to illustrate and flesh out the ideas in his lectures, and this obviously works very well, to judge by the frequency of qualitative comments in his feedback that say how helpful to the understanding of theory it is.

One of the hallmarks of an excellent teacher is his/her ability to inspire critical thinking in students. Dr Ganapathy's statement of teaching philosophy expressly articulates his desire to encourage students to 'engage in a process of self-reflexivity which involves a critical appreciation of their own world view vis-à-vis the phenomenon under investigation'. That he has succeeded may be referenced against the constant refrain in his feedback to that effect: 'forces you to probe into topics', 'He's ingrained in us a critical non-biased approach to societal workings...', 'Extremely knowledgeable and has really introduced elements of critical thinking' etc. are just a small sampling of such tributes.

Other strengths are in evidence as well – his ability to hold student attention effortlessly is one such strength. And the articulation of his ideas – clear without yielding sophistication – is yet another. But passion, that important intangible that best fuels communication and motivates students by example is perhaps the most outstanding element of Dr Ganapathy's teaching: 'Very passionate, ... sustains our interest week after week.' 'He is very passionate in his area of study and his passion is contagious.' 'It is highly obvious that Dr. Gana is very passionate about what he is teaching and this inevitably affects students.' It is best summed up however, in the words of the student who wrote:

The greatest strength of Dr Gana is, without a doubt, his passion for Sociology. He doesn't speak about it, but it shines through during his lectures. It is this passion which has inspired me to further my knowledge in Sociology. ... I always felt that attending his lecture is akin to ... listening to Passion speak...

Assoc Prof Philip Holden

Department of English Language and Literature



Assoc Prof Philip Holden has been the recipient of numerous awards for teaching over the years from the Faculty Teaching Excellence Awards to the Outstanding Educator Award. It is easy to see why this has been the case. The four modules he teaches: EN2101E: Literary Appreciation and Criticism, EN3269: Southeast Asian Literatures in English, EN3262: Postcolonial Literatures in English and EN5231: Asian and Other Modernities, have been put together with an extreme care and thoroughness, and Assoc Prof Holden's student feedback is full of praise for the clarity of his teaching and his ability to engage and hold the students' interest and attention, as well as his ability to stimulate critical thinking.

Assoc Prof Holden's teaching balances guidance with flexibility and autonomy. His Teaching Statement says that his methodologies are 'there to empower students'; rather than aiming at fulfilling some particular 'higher level outcome', his aim is to allow students to 'create their own outcomes from what is at hand within a defined field.' He provides comprehensive frameworks for students in each module, giving them a set of readings and questions which they have to think about before each teaching session, and assessment is so structured as to provide both a sense of closure to each component of the module, as well as, to the students, a continuous sense of where they are, both with regard to the module and to their own learning. That his pedagogical methods provide the sense of guidance he intends them to may be attested to by the student who writes that 'this creates a sense of security for the student for s/he knows that the material is being taught according to a certain progression.' That they also facilitate independent thinking may be attested to by the postgraduate student who writes that '... he encourages us to go beyond the curriculum and explore things on our own and never ... makes us seem like anything less than mature, independent, thinking postgraduate students.'

Assoc Prof Holden's teaching also manages to balance the needs of theory and practice. One of the modules he teaches, EN3269, is a demanding module in which students have to read, side by side with their primary texts, theoretical material which they are required to apply to those primary texts. This not only forces the students to become aware of exactly what they understand of the theory (as one can't apply what one doesn't understand), hence facilitating Assoc Prof Holden's intention of making the students more self-aware about their own learning, but also results in knowledge that is reinforced through practice. The connection between the practical and theoretical in Assoc Prof Holden's teaching also manifests in other ways, for example the off-campus trips to areas of Singapore where abstract questions of how communities might imagine space might find a grounding and realization in the contemplation and inhabiting of actual environments, e.g. Little India.

Assoc Prof Holden's dedication to his students is evident, not merely from the student feedback which constantly refers to his patience and readiness to answer questions, his readiness to help them even with projects not associated with his own modules, but also in the level of detail to which he is prepared to go in giving feedback to the students on their work, as seen in the sample emails to his students. His strengths as a teacher are many and may perhaps be summed up in the words of the student who writes: 'This is the work of an outstanding educator – someone who possesses much and imparts much as well.'

Dr Pow Choon Piew
Department of Geography



Dr Pow is a young teacher who has already taught and succeeded in a range of contexts. He has, for instance, contributed towards the large introductory geography module, as well as to modules in his own area of specialization, urban geography. Students comment on his enthusiasm, passion, clarity, care and humour, but also on his demand for critical thinking. "His lectures don't just give information," one writes. "He actively encourages you to think further and decide for yourself."

This encouragement of thinking is the second objective (after "knowing the world we live in") Dr Pow gives himself as a teacher. He sets out to encourage students to "question how we know the world." One of the examples he himself gives is the invitation to students to interrogate the different categories of city found in geography textbooks. In other words, they are prompted to enquire how adequate different categories are, and to consider the ways in which knowledge is constructed.

Further examples can be found in the module folders. Students of the module "Cities in Transition," consider different rankings of cities and the criteria they are based on. In other sessions they look at the images of cities in movies, and different varieties of the "urban." In the final examination they are required to "critically evaluate" or "critically examine" approaches or propositions. The level 4000 module "Urban Space" is necessarily more challenging and continues the emphasis on the student's thinking. Students must weigh up different conceptions of the "good life" in the city, and (again) in the examination, they must evaluate, assess, and examine limitations. There is also a creative element in, for instance, the group projects of either photo essay or multimedia project, both of which have to be grounded in theoretical readings, issues and understanding.

As a geographer of cities, Dr Pow moves beyond critical understanding with his students to the imagination of "a better world for people to live in." He has them think about urban planning in "Cities in Transition," and the final seminar topic of his section of "Urban Space" addresses "what it means to talk about the morally and ethically 'good' city or urban development." Many areas of the social sciences lend themselves to the shaping of policy, and such disciplined attention to issues of this kind is productive and worthwhile.

Dr Pow's success has not come without effort. He regularly evaluates his teaching and makes adjustments in accordance with that. His module folders include reflection on the difficulties encountered in particular modules, such as the challenges of teaching a large class with diverse backgrounds.

Dr Valerie Wee

Department of English Language and Literature



Dr Valerie Wee teaches within the English department's media/cultural studies track, where she chairs four modules each year: EN2113: *Reading Film and Cultural Texts* (enrolment: 80-90), EN2241: *Introduction to Film Studies* (enrolment: 45-55), EN3242: *History of Film* (enrolment: 30-40), and EN5252: *Movies, Spectatorship and Subjectivity* (enrolment: 10-20)

Dr Wee has conceptualized these modules as a related set in which students are exposed to increasingly challenging material, her goal being to place our students on par with graduates from any established North American film/media studies program and to provide a sound foundation for those wishing to pursue graduate work in this field.

The strengths of Dr Wee's teaching are many. As reflected both in the peer reviews and qualitative student feedback, Dr Wee has a deep passion for and mastery of her subject. She is very knowledgeable, at the same time able to transmit that knowledge clearly to the students, making complex concepts easy to grasp with her 'detailed and yet understandable explanations'. As also pointed out in her feedback, this is facilitated by the obvious rapport she has with the students, and also by the extreme clarity of her articulation and well-paced teaching; here, there is energy without rush, calm without stasis. She is engaging and her enthusiasm for the subject is contagious.

Dr Wee's teaching strategies reflect her belief that she and her students are collaborators in learning. Acting as guide and facilitator, she patiently and expertly draws out students' extant knowledge, using it as a foundation upon which to build a more nuanced understanding of film theory (EN5252) or the socio-cultural, political and economic roles played by different media texts in contemporary society (EN2241 and EN3242). The expectation that students will take responsibility for their learning results in increased student proactivity and interactivity; it was noted by the peer reviewers that in Dr Wee's lectures, students were comfortable about venturing questions and contributing, both during the break and in the spaces during the lecture which had been designed to facilitate student engagement with lecture material.

The desire to encourage autonomy in her students is especially evident in tutorials, where students are given the opportunity to pursue what they deem interesting, setting the agenda and leading discussion each week. In qualitative feedback, students consistently highlight how much they enjoy learning from one another, with Valerie tactfully guiding this process through timely feedback (in person and via email), thereby generating further group discussion, self-learning and critical reflection.

The theme of encouraging critical thinking, specifically, making connections across topics and pursuing an idea in depth (rather than just talking/writing superficially about it) appears consistently in both her undergraduate and graduate student feedback. Also worth highlighting is Dr Wee's pursuit of a key educational goal at NUS – developing articulate communicators.

Her peer reviewers praise Dr Wee's assignments not only for being creative and thought-provoking but also for their coherence – the second assignment builds on the first, reinforcing earlier skills, while extending the range and depth of what is being asked for. Students, similarly, mention how much they appreciate the way Dr Wee "paces the written assignments", setting aside class-time to discuss the requirements of each assignment and to provide hands-on experience of self- and peer-critique.

Here's how one of her students describes Dr Wee's impact: "I think a great teacher does not just impart knowledge but encourages questioning and critical appreciation of such knowledge. Dr Wee's seminars are conducted in the spirit of questioning and debate that made the classes not only enjoyable, which learning should be, but also encouraged me to want to read wider and explore deeper beyond what was covered in class. That is real education – the lesson that learning isn't about exams or grades but about a way of life."

Assoc Prof Winston Goh

Department of Psychology



Assoc Prof Winston Goh is a passionate and committed teacher who places great emphasis on getting his message across in a clear and relevant manner; and making classes lively and interactive for students. He is a strong advocator of 'going beyond textbooks' to achieve 'conceptual understanding'.

The above principles are borne out in the modules he teaches. Students have consistently praised his clear and concise delivery. They note that he makes difficult and complex concepts easy to understand, and that he is able to able to captivate student interest even when the subject matter is dry and technical. They find his use of concrete examples to 'give flesh' to theoretical ideas very

effective.

Assoc Prof Goh also emphasizes interactive learning and engagement. Alongside classical lab experiments, he conducts informal in-class experiments with pairs of students working together as experimenter and participant, respectively. Engagement with the topic and lively interaction between students are thus achieved. Student feedback indicates that his teaching methods have been highly effective: the most consistent feedback pertains to his memorable experiments in lectures and the way concepts/ideas are brought across with passion and precision.

His assessment tasks are also aimed at relevance and application. He demands that students apply what they have learnt in class to real world situations and research problems. It is clear that much thought has been invested into devising scenarios to which students are expected to respond critically (project assignments). The learning goals and assessment criteria are also clearly spelt out to students in order to ensure congruence between instructor-intention and student-output. For PL2132, for example, he sets various assignment tasks posed as research problems/scenarios, which students are expected to solve systematically, creatively and thoughtfully, using the research methods they have been introduced to.

Assoc Prof Goh displays flexibility in his teaching range. In 2007/08, he taught two Level 3000 modules (with enrolments of 19 and 147) and a Level 2000 module with 140 students, in lecture, tutorial and laboratory settings, with content ranging from methodological/statistical topics to conceptual/theoretical issues.

He has also been actively involved in departmental curriculum matters. As level 3000 curriculum coordinator (2002-08), he was instrumental in introducing lab sessions in the curriculum, effecting changes to the level 1000 module, and rationalising the undergraduate programme. In Psychology, modules on research methods are foundational, and he has been involved in revamping and teaching such modules (PL2131 and PL2132).

He also works closely and productively with his students. Five of his Honours students have subsequently co-authored papers with him in NUS Tier-1 journals or peer-reviewed conferences.

Although he has had his excellent teaching affirmed by very positive student and peer review, as well as his receipt of ATEA and FTEA awards in 2007/08, he does not rest on his laurels. He continues to work at raising his teaching to even higher standards. Evidence of this is found in his continuing to seek regular mid-term feedback for modules, and tweaking them in response to student comments. (See, for example, the feedback he sought for PL 3233 in 2007/08).

Dr Wong Wei Kang

Department of Economics



Dr Wong Wei Kang brings both rigour and innovation to the teaching of economics. He has found ways to inspire interest in what might otherwise be dusty and dry topics in his introductory macroeconomics module, and he has developed an upper-level module that offers students the chance to explore the boundaries of the field, where cross-fertilization between economics and psychology has been particularly productive.

One of Dr Wong's evident strengths as a teacher has been to increase student interest in the subject by offering clear explanations and constantly relating classroom material to events in the outside world. Students have responded by noting not just how much they have learnt, but how surprisingly enjoyable he made it. To make long-dead economists 'come alive', to use the phrase of one student, in a second year undergraduate module is an impressive feat. One teaching technique that has served Dr Wong well in this regard has been to develop the use of 'story telling' as a classroom method to arouse student interest and provide intuitively understandable applications of the concepts and theories being introduced. He has also made extensive use of news articles covering contemporary economic news, both in lectures and as emailed handouts to students, which connect the potentially dry and abstract content of an economics course to the sometimes dramatic events in the news. Students frequently comment on how much they appreciated these news items as a means of applying concepts, extending their knowledge and developing their capacity to not just solve technical equations but to understand the world around them.

Student engagement and learning have also been facilitated by Dr Wong's use of technology. He has gone beyond using technology as an instrument for disseminating information via IVLE or email, to develop it as a resource for conveying visual representations of concepts, to promote classroom connection in innovative ways (such as the setting up of a facebook group for his class), and to offer students the chance to review lectures using the webcast facility.

Dr Wong's teaching stands out for being able to combine the task of teaching 'content' with teaching analytic skills and critical thinking. The task of teaching a critical awareness of the limits of a discipline and stimulating students to think independently is particularly challenging when teaching modules that require students to come to grips with a considerable amount of content that constitutes the cumulative knowledge base of a discipline. Students must understand a model before they can critique it, and modules such as the undergraduate introduction to macroeconomics taught by Dr Wong must, of necessity, cover an essentially well-trodden path if students are to be equipped to continue in the discipline. It is therefore particularly noteworthy that Dr Wong has taken care to teach the module in such a way that holds the door open for students to develop their own ability for independent thinking. One way this has been achieved is by introducing students to the *debates* within macroeconomics that have unfolded over the decades, pitting contending theorists against each other and thereby calling upon students to see the field as a dynamic one in which the scope for further enquiry remains alive, not a set of static knowledge to be absorbed. As students frequently note in their feedback, Dr Wong has not only explained concepts with clarity, he has pushed them to think.

In advanced modules, Dr Wong has been able to extend requirements for independent thinking and critical enquiry even further than is possible in an introductory module. He has achieved this through a number of classroom techniques and assessment tasks, such as adopting a Socratic style of teaching and by setting assessment tasks such as developing a critique of a published article or requiring students to evaluate, not just show understanding of, different theoretical models. In order to avoid the potential pitfall of allowing the subject to be ruled by its instruments, in this case mathematics, he has defined one of his core teaching rules as being to use maths, but teach economics. This injunction is especially important in view of the criticism academic economics has faced in recent years, of indoctrinating students into a self-referential mathematical world divorced from actual economic problems and empirically-observable behavioural patterns. No such charge could be brought against Dr Wong's teaching. In fact, his Honours module on behavioural economics stands as a showcase for economics teaching that is both foundational, in the sense of critically investigating the core assumptions the discipline, and at the cutting edge of new developments in the field.

Dr Yoshinori Nishizaki
Department of Political Science



Dr Nishizaki is a new faculty member in Political Science who has made an impressive teaching debut. The extraordinarily positive responses he has elicited from his students testify to a teaching method that is demanding, but encouraging and rewarding. His modules are well-designed, favouring depth over superficial exposure. And his care and dedication to teaching are evident, as demonstrated both by student comments and the extensive preparation involved in curriculum design and delivery.

Dr Nishizaki is clearly a scholar with a deep and broad knowledge of the countries and issues he works on. To be an outstanding teacher, however, expertise is not enough: it must be translated into qualities that can capture student attention, engage them in active exploration on their own account, and inspire them with something of the passion felt by their teacher. On these counts, Dr Nishizaki has excelled. Students frequently note his knowledge and expertise, but they are even more appreciative of the way he has related it to them. They point to his ability to simplify concepts and bring them to life, to his enthusiasm and to his commitment to taking *them* seriously. As one noted, 'He is fair to all students and gives everyone a chance to speak and listens to all opinions.' Perhaps more than anything, Dr Nishizaki's evident willingness to show his concern for students and their learning has made him able to engage and motivate them. All components of Dr Nishizaki's student feedback scores are exceptionally high, but the items that speak to his willingness to go the extra yard – in terms of providing useful feedback and being approachable for consultation – are particularly distinguished.

Dr Nishizaki's effectiveness as a teacher is underpinned by his ability to understand his students. His teaching philosophy statement, refreshingly free of jargon, sets out apparently simple precepts to teach by: be well prepared, take the grading task very seriously, take the time to give students the tools and background knowledge they need, encourage their critical questions, be accessible – and be fun. These are things that most teachers aim at, but their ability to deliver on these goals depends on understanding their students well enough to know what will work and what will not. What makes feedback useful to the student, for example, is not simply its quantity or absolute quality, but its calibration to them personally. Similarly, the injunction to be 'fun' or interesting will remain empty unless a lecturer has a good sense of what appeals to his or her students. Dr Nishizaki's empathetic understanding of his students is made obvious in the repeated student endorsement of his lively humour, his ability to interest them, and his readiness to take extra time to advise or offer extra explanations, in and outside the classroom.

Nearly all teachers use examples that, they hope, will be accessible to their students in order to illustrate abstract theoretical concepts. Dr Nishizaki's teaching and module design take this use of illustrative examples several steps further. His brand of political science is one that values a commitment to exploring 'cases' in terms of their internal significance, rather than taking abstract theory and simply applying it. This concrete grounding in the lived experiences and realities of the political systems under study is likely to be an important reason why students report that their interest in the subject matter has been stimulated, and they are inspired to look out of the classroom with fresh eyes. This does not mean that Dr Nishizaki just serves up doses of uncooked, a theoretical empirical material. The assigned readings in Dr Nishizaki's modules make it clear that core analytic debates and issues are central, but his approach is one that shows the dynamic development of theory in relation to its empirical referents, as the field has evolved both over time and from one empirical setting to another. Students report emerging from his classes with both a more developed set of conceptual tools and analytic capacity, but also a deeper knowledge, interest and appreciation for the region in which they live.