

# NGS SCHOLARS' ALLIANCE

## EDITORIAL

13<sup>th</sup> April 2009  
2009, Issue 1

**WANTED:**  
NGS Alliance  
logo

Official student group for NUS Graduate School for Integrative Sciences and Engineering  
Web site address: <http://www.nus.edu.sg/ngs/index.shtml> E-mail address: [ngs.alliance@gmail.com](mailto:ngs.alliance@gmail.com)

## Editors speak

By Alvin Loo, Alex Mitchell, Husna Begum and Kingshuk Poddar

If you have been a loyal follower of the NGS student quarterly, you would have noticed a change in the frequency of our publication. The NGS Scholars' Alliance Editorial, as it is now called, will only be published thrice-yearly instead of quarterly. Even though the frequency of publication has reduced, the editorial team can assure our readers that the quality of the newsletter has remained, if not improved.

The format of the newsletter has also changed slightly. The first page is reserved for the editors to ramble about our lives as well as important announcement from NGS Alliance and NGS office. As far as possible, stories will be arranged in a chronological order, so please do not get upset if your favourite event did not appear as the headliner! "The last page" will be used to

## Wanted: NGS Alliance Logo

By Alvin Loo

Yes !!!!! NGS Scholars' Alliance Needs a LOGO. Didn't you notice that the top right corner of this newsletter looks awfully empty? Don't you find it funny that we don't have a logo for our facebook group? (You didn't know we have a facebook group????!!)

More importantly, this is a chance for you to win a gift voucher. The winner gets to walk away with a \$100 gift voucher! What are you waiting for? Start designing the logo now!

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Editors speak	1
Wanted: NGS Alliance Logo	1
Annual year end party 2008	2
Induction day, Jan 2009	4
NGS Student Spotlight: Zhang Jing	6
First Joint NGS Supervisor and Student Retreat	7
An evening at the Botanic Gardens...	9
Inaugural NGS student symposium	11
The last page.....	13

publicise upcoming NGS Alliance activities you should look out for. The success of our events depends very much on your participation!

The past four months have certainly been an exciting time for the NGS Alliance. We had just held our inaugural NGS Student Symposium on 26-27th Feb. Read all about it on page of this editorial!

### Rules and regulations:

- The design should include, the words "NGS Scholars' Alliance"
- Distinctive element which should be original (Do not use any part of the NUS logo)
- The participant's name, contact details, matriculation number and a brief description about the design should be provided
- Email to [ngs.alliance@gmail.com](mailto:ngs.alliance@gmail.com) in jpg format
- Closing date: 4<sup>th</sup> May 2009

## Annual Year End Party 2008

By Alvin Loo

The year end always bears special significance to many. It is a time to forgive and forget. It is a time to review recount our triumphs and failures throughout the year. It is a time for some to review how much closer (or further) we are away from graduation. Most importantly, it is also the time when our deputy executive director, A/Prof. Justine Burley Clare and Dr. Alan Coleman, welcome all NGS staff and students to their lovely home in Gilbatar Cresent on 19<sup>th</sup> Dec 2008.



*NGS student Chen Zhixiong with wife Shan, son Emmanuel and host Justine*

The evening started off with an opening address by NGS Executive Director, Prof. Lee Baowen followed by a splendid buffet dinner and free flow of alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages. The MCs for the night, first year student Sampath Jeewantha Wijesinghe and second year student Timothy Merritt entertained all students and guests with games thoughtfully prepared by the NGS administrative staff.

One of the games was a charade so the MCs also took the chance to publicize NGS Alliance activities in the form of a charade. Another game played was the human bingo in which guests interacted with each other to find people who matches the criteria given for the bingo. Example, someone who lives in Prince George Park residence.



*MCs: Sampath Jeewantha Wijesinghe (left) and Timothy Merritt (right)*



*Two students interviewing each other to find a match for human bingo*

However, the show stealer was A/Prof. Michael Raghunath who performed Christmas carols on the piano and enchanted all the guests. The party ended with a karaoke session before a chartered bus sends the guest to the nearest MRT station.

Beside all the fun and entertainment, awards were also given out to students who performed well in GS5001. Below are the awards given and the winners:

**Best group presentation:** Ethics of team interactions in scientific research. Members include: Chong Mei Ling, Chu Duc Hiep, Ho Mien Ivan, Mohamed Feroz Bin Mohammed Omar and Nguyen Anh Tuan.

Best presenter: Sampath Jeewantha Wijesinghe

**Best IVLE participants:** Chandana Tennakoon and Husna Begum

**Best class participation:** Kingshuk Poddar

*Best Class Participation for GS5001:  
Kingshuk Poddar*



*Charade for "I promise to be a hardworking and loyal lab slave!"*



*A/P. Michael Raghunath charming all the guests with his music.*



*Zhao Pan sang so well during the karaoke session that she received flowers from her admirers.*



*Timothy performing a charade of a bicycling trip in Pulau Ubin, an activity previously organized by NGS alliance.*

## Induction Day, Jan 2009

By Alvin Loo

Starting a PhD programme is always stressful. You have to find a lab that you think you would like to work in; establish good working relationship with your co-workers and supervisor; figure out how to register for classes and also deal with various other administrative issues. It is doubly stressful if you have to move to a new country and cope with an entirely new environment. With that in mind, the NGS office held an Induction day on 06 Jan 2009 for the latest intake of NGS students.

The purpose of the Induction day is not only to register new NGS students but also to introduce them to NUS and Singapore. The day started off with an opening address by Deputy Executive Director, A/Prof Justine Burley. After which, second year student Lai Chow Yin introduced the first year students to the various facilities, ranging from academic (e.g. libraries) to non-academic (e.g. swimming pool and clinic) available in NUS. He also gave useful everyday tips, such as the procedure for opening bank accounts and where to buy groceries, to help students settle in easier.



Second year student Lai Chow Yin shares his experience on studying in NUS and living in Singapore.

To help students cope with stress, Senior Counsellor Mr. Low Teck Keong from University Health Centre also gave some advice on mental fitness. Representatives from the NGS Student Alliance, Alvin Loo and Timothy Merritt, introduced the function of the NGS student Alliance as well as enticed the first year students to participate in upcoming Alliance activities.



Representatives from NGS student alliance Timothy Merritt (left) and Alvin Loo (right) explaining the organization function of the NGS student alliance.

In case students are overwhelmed by the truckload of information forced upon them, NGS staff Elissa Horn had also prepared the NGS Student Guide which they can refer to in the future. For seniors who feel that they are not very familiar with the facilities in NUS or their graduation requirement, you can always check out the softcopy of the student guide at [http://www.nus.edu.sg/ngs/NGS\\_Student\\_Guide.pdf](http://www.nus.edu.sg/ngs/NGS_Student_Guide.pdf)

*"A PhD isn't about how smart one is, but how long one can persevere"*

*- Lai Chow Yin*



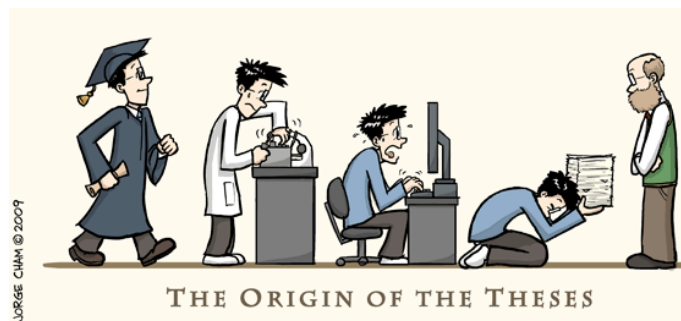
The surest and best way to cope with a new environment is to establish rapport. Therefore, each first year student was paired up with a senior as a buddy. The first year students and buddies enjoyed a sumptuous lunch to round up the induction day. Students who are interested in taking part in the next induction day either to share your experience in NGS or as a buddy can contact the NGS student alliance at [ngs.alliance@gmail.com](mailto:ngs.alliance@gmail.com)



*“NGS welcomes you, and look forward to working with you to ensure that your PhD experience is challenging and rewarding.”*

*– Prof. Li Baowen*  
*Excerpt from NGS student guide*

Senior students and their buddies enjoying a sumptuous (complimentary) lunch after induction day.



[www.phdcomics.com](http://www.phdcomics.com) 25/2/2009



## NGS Student Spotlight: Zhang Jing

By Alvin Loo

Zhang Jing is a third year student working in Prof. Ding Jeak Ling's lab. She came from Hebei Province, China armed with a Bachelor of Biological Engineering from Tianjin University. Recently, her work was published in the prestigious journal Public Library of Science, Pathogens and was also the featured research for the month of February. [PLoS Pathogens, 5 (1) 1-15, 2009]

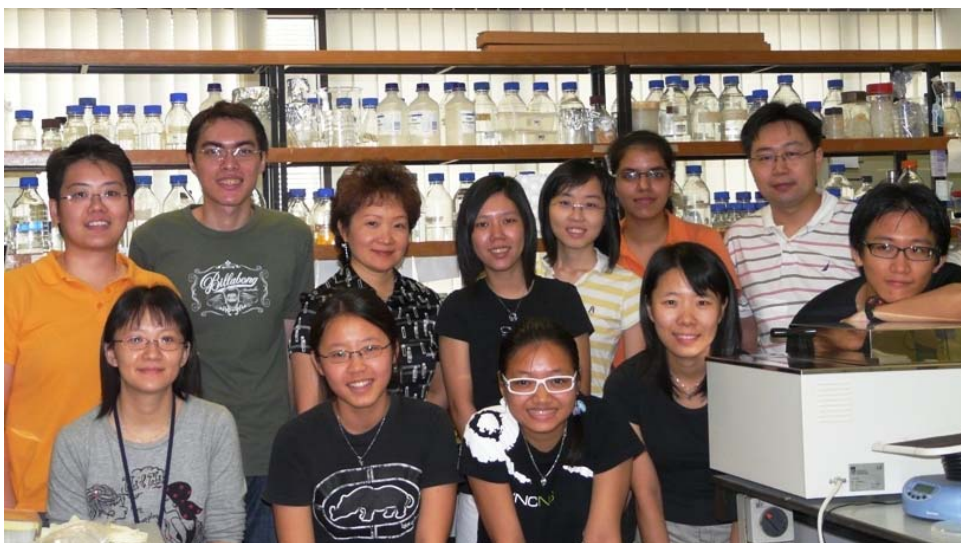
Her work is about the bacteria, *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*, which is usually harmless but can cause infections when a person is ill or injured. It causes inflammation in various tissues and is an important cause of hospital-acquired infections. It usually manifests as a hot-tub rash but can develop into life-threatening septic shock, leading to multiple organ failure and possibly death. What is worse, the bacteria is increasingly becoming to the antibiotics that we used to kill it.

In the published study, Zhang Jing discovered the underlying mechanism by which the body kills *P. aeruginosa*. Insights gained from this work offer fresh perspectives on the potential development of therapies to enhance eradication of *P. aeruginosa*.

Zhang Jing is still in the midst of preparing two more manuscript, which she hopes to publish before graduation. She remains very enthusiastic about science and academia and hopes to get a post-doctoral position after graduation. In the future, she hopes to become a principal investigator.

A graduate student often requires a lot of assistance in his or her work and the same is true for Zhang Jing. She would like to express gratitude to Prof. Ding Jeak Ling who had always supported her, encouraged and helped her. She would also like to thank her Thesis Advisory Committee, Prof. Lu Jinhua and Prof. Ho Bow for their invaluable advice.

Zhang Jing is working on how the body fends off infections caused by the bacterium, *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*. This study may translate to potential therapies against this bacterium in the



Zhang Jing, front row second from right. She likes to hike and enjoy nature during the weekends.

## First Joint NGS Supervisor and Student Retreat

By: Alex Mitchell

The first joint NGS Supervisor and Student retreat was held at Rasa Sentosa on Friday, 13 February, 2009, starting bright and early at 8am. After a short bus ride from the Harbourfront Center, we reached the Rasa Sentosa hotel, and descended several flights of stairs to the conference hall, where we were greeted by smiling NGS admin staff bearing free gifts (a water bottle and the ubiquitous NGS laptop pouch) and, of course, coffee!



*NUS President, Professor Tan Chorh Chuan, giving the opening address*

The retreat started with an address by NUS President, Professor Tan Chorh Chuan. Professor Tan apologized for getting us all up so early, and then gave an opening address in which he presented an overview of how he sees NGS serving as a key element of the drive to make NUS a world-class research university. None of us seemed to mind the early start, with a total of 41 supervisors and 77 students in attendance. Following the NUS President's talk, Deputy President (Research and Technology) and former NGS Executive Director Professor Barry Halliwell spoke briefly about his view of NGS and its role within the university.

NGS Executive Director Professor Li Baowen then gave a presentation about NGS (the graduate school, not the supermarket in Shanghai, as he was careful to point out), its achievements, and his view of the future directions for NGS.



*An NGS franchise in Shanghai?*

After the opening talks, supervisors and students adjourned to two separate rooms, and the students were involved in a series of icebreakers. The madness started with a game involving sticking a sticker with the name of a famous "personality" on the back of someone nearby. Everyone then had to go around asking other people questions about their own "personality", until they could successfully guess the name. Personalities ranged from fairly easy (mine was Charles Dickens), through to rather more difficult (Bart Simpson and Papa Smurf). From this game, we moved on to a "massively multiplayer" version of Rock-Paper-Scissors, which ended with everyone following one of two players around the room as a "snake". The icebreakers were just that, effectively breaking the ice and getting students to interact.



*Icebreakers!*

Another highlight of the day was the lunch. Besides the amazing variety, quality and quantity of the food, the lunch was memorable as a great chance for supervisors and students to mix. I was sitting at a table with a mix of students from biology and medicine, and a professor from biology – all from completely different areas than me.

After lunch, we had an open discussion about issues that NGS students face. One recurring concern was the issue of getting access to popular non-NGS modules. Students also raised concerns about the lack of any formal training in teaching and classroom management for new grad students, and the possible difficulties that students will face under the proposal to make it compulsory for every student to have a co-supervisor from a different discipline.

*The difficulties NGS students faced regarding access to popular non-NGS modules were discussed during the retreat.*

Following the afternoon tea break, we came back together with the supervisors, and ended the day with an open discussion about issues that had come up during the day. Professor Li was there to address these issues from the NGS perspective.

Overall, it was a productive day, presenting both an opportunity for supervisors and students to interact, and a chance for supervisors and students to voice any concerns that they might have. Personally, I felt that it was worthwhile for all of us to take a day out for the retreat, and hope that this becomes an annual event.



*A chance for supervisors and students to interact*



## An evening at the Botanic Gardens...

By: Husna B.

Huh? What's that? Ok if you are one of those who just said that, then you really missed out on one of our major fun events at the Botanic Gardens held on 21st February 2009.

We arrived at Botanic Gardens around 4.40pm and it was still pouring. The weather didn't hold any promises so we sought shelter at the Symphony stage lake area until we were shooed away by some personnel there. The weather finally started to clear up! We grabbed our stuff and moved it over to Palm Valley, our destined location. As some of our strong grinning men went to get the food (picture on upper right), the rest of us hesitantly started on the balloon game.

We huffed and puffed as we blew the balloons (at least I did....hmm) and attached them to our legs. The sound of balloons bursting could be heard even before the game started. When the game finally started, balloons were bursting everywhere. Squeals of laughter and pacts (I don't touch your balloon and you don't touch mine ah) were made. Finally we were down to the final 2 and it was a tough one. Madhu was constantly in danger of slipping but after some strategic moves and quick action, he won the game! (picture on lower right). By then, everyone was in good spirits and new friends were made.

The next event marked the highlight of the day...the scavenger hunt! We were divided into groups of 3-5 and were given a list of 10 things to find and take pictures with in the gardens. Everyone ran as if their lives depended on it. We had amused bystanders looking at us doing our strange poses and imaginative styles in front of the camera. Never have my leg muscles groaned so much!



*The symphony stage where we seek shelter from the cruel rain*



*The strong men who were carrying our dinner.*



*Madhu, the winner of the balloon game, shown here protecting his ball.*

Dinner was served after the scavenger hunt. While the food was catered, students were encouraged to bring desserts to participate in the "Best Dessert" competition. The winner of the "Best Dessert" competition was first year student Joanne James who made some very wonderful muffins. For her effort, Joanne walked away with \$10 Kinokuniya vouchers. Happy shopping, Joanne!

Winner of Best Dessert Competition:  
Joanne James

After we were sufficiently full, we played a rubberband-stick game. The winners of the Scavenger hunt, Apple & Banana group also won this game too! My my, the Apple & Banana group (picture below) did take their games seriously!



*The big winner of the day, The Apple & Banana group*



*Yes, heavy petting is indeed allowed during the rubber band & stick game.*

With the tidbits (which were the gifts actually) being passed around, everyone started to clear up the place. We then headed back to the pickup point to board the bus back to NUS around 8pm. We must have been an odd looking bunch of people, being all sweaty, muddy and laughing out loud. The most important aspect of the event was that I met a lot of old friends and also made new friends, which were doing research in different department. "It created a bonding among the NGS students and a sense of oneness that I had not experienced before at NUS," said Zhaoqin. As for Zhaoyan, burning fat in the scavenger hunt was definitely a plus point! The 'thank you' by those who attended was sufficient to put broad smiles on mine, Alvin and Jee's face. We had accomplished what we hoped for...our event was a success!

This NGS alliance picnic was really great. I really enjoyed it and had a very unforgettable weekend with so many friends. Thanks for your guys' organization for this good activity.

-Email from Guo Zhaoqin

## Inaugural NGS student symposium

By: Alvin Loo

The Inaugural NGS student symposium was held at the University Hall Auditorium on 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> February. There were a total of 14 speakers, including 2 keynote speakers, Prof. Paul Madudaira, from Department of Biological Sciences NUS, and Prof. Masahiko Inami, from School of Media Design, Keio University (KMD), Japan. The remaining speakers were NGS students from various faculties and school. In addition, 20 posters were showcased during the poster session. About 100 students attended the symposium.

Besides providing the platform to interact with other scientists and students outside of one's field, the symposium was also a good opportunity for students to hone their presentation skills. All this is made possible by the hard work of the organizing committee which comprises of Felicia Celeste Loe, Hong Li Wen Michelle, Kyaw Htet Hlaing, Lukas Tanner, Tim Merritt and Toh Pang Kiat Benjamin. The committee was in charged of all aspects of the symposium from inviting speakers to the sourcing of banners, door gifts and food. In fact, Tim Merritt, one of the organisers, had a hard time interpreting the Chinese catering menu and nearly ordered multiple rice and noodle dishes for the dinner!

Despite having started planning half a year before the symposium, Lukas, one of the organisers, still felt that future organising committee should begin planning even earlier as many famous scientists have very packed schedules and they have to be invited very much in advance.



*Keynote speaker, Prof. Masahiko Inami from Keio University*



*Keynote speaker, Prof. Paul Madudaira, from Department of Biological Sciences NUS*

**We should begin planning for NGS student symposium 2010 now in order to invite higher profile keynote speakers!**

**– Lukas Tanner**

Nevertheless, we must all agree that the organising committee did an excellent job and kept the symposium going smoothly. Well done!

The organisers hope to be able to invite more high profile speakers, possibly even Nobel Laureates, for future NGS student symposiums. Lastly, but most importantly, the organisers hope to see even more students and supervisors participating in the symposium in the future. After all, it is the participants that determine the success of a symposium. See all of you at NGS student symposium 2010 next year!



**ATTENTION!**

The NGS Scholars' Alliance is currently seeking students to help organise NGS Student Symposium 2010. It will be a good opportunity to learn more about how symposiums are organised and better understand the scientific fraternity. Email us for more details:

[ngs.alliance@gmail.com](mailto:ngs.alliance@gmail.com)



*Registration of student participants*



*The symposium is a good chance for students and other scientists to interact.*

Any comments or suggestions  
for the editorial?

Email us at:

NGS Alliance email:  
[ngs.alliance@gmail.com](mailto:ngs.alliance@gmail.com)

Alex Mitchell:  
[cnmmai@nus.edu.sg](mailto:cnmmai@nus.edu.sg)

Alvin Loo:  
[alvinloo@nus.edu.sg](mailto:alvinloo@nus.edu.sg)

Husna Begum:  
[husna\\_b@nus.edu.sg](mailto:husna_b@nus.edu.sg)

Kingshuk Poddar:  
[kingshuk\\_poddar@yahoo.co.in](mailto:kingshuk_poddar@yahoo.co.in)

*We're on facebook! Search for NGS  
Scholars Alliance on facebook or  
Visit us at:*

<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=43836796068&ref=ts>

*Upcoming events from April to August 2009  
(continued)*

### • Induction day August

The Alliance will be collaborating with the NGS office in organizing the next Induction day. We are currently actively seeking seniors who would like to be buddies for the first year students. Register to be a buddy by emailing to [ngs.alliance@gmail.com](mailto:ngs.alliance@gmail.com).

### • Induction day tie-in activity

An event is being planned to welcome the first year students. Seniors are also welcomed to join in. Keep a look out for it in your email!

## The Last Page.....

Upcoming events from April to August 2009

- Closing date for NGS Scholars' Alliance logo design competition: 4<sup>th</sup> May 2009

### **VIP** NGS Scholars' Alliance Chalet **VIP**

The Alliance will be organizing a chalet on 17<sup>th</sup> May at Aloha Changi to celebrate the finish of EXAMS! Do join us! Register by emailing to [ngs.alliance@gmail.com](mailto:ngs.alliance@gmail.com).

- Launch of monthly movie screening

The Alliance is planning to launch a monthly movie screening event on every last Friday of the month at 7pm, starting this April. Students are encouraged to lend their own movie collection for screening. Email [alvinloo@nus.edu.sg](mailto:alvinloo@nus.edu.sg) if you are interested in screening your **original** DVD or VCD. The venue is the NGS multipurpose room in CELS. The tentative movie screening schedule is as follow:

April 24 <sup>th</sup> 7pm –	Sicko
May 29 <sup>th</sup> 7pm –	To be confirmed
June 26 <sup>th</sup> 7pm –	To be confirmed

Synopsis: In Sicko (2007), the director/writer Michael Moore exposes the dysfunctional North American health care system, oriented to huge profits and not for their mission of saving lives. Sicko is not only entertaining, informative and thought provoking. Definitely a must-see!

