

NGS SCHOLARS' ALLIANCE

EDITORIAL

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NGS Scholars' Alliance

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

Editors speak

By Husna B.

It's that time of the year when everyone welcomes the festive season of joy and the New Year, 2010! For some of us, it's time to head back home for the holidays and enjoy the remainder of the year 2009 as it comes to a close.

NGS has gone through many changes in these past few months like Justine's farewell from NGS. Turn to **page 10** to read some of our students' wishes.

For those who took part in the NGS Photo Competition, the results are out! Also, do look

Photo Competition

By Husna B and Elissa Horn

Over the past six years, NGS has grown into a vibrant and diverse community of budding scholars, with 440 students and alumni representing 15 countries of origin! And many of our students and graduates are amazing photographers! Students and Alumni were asked to send a photo that depicts the culture of another country and write a caption highlighting the uniqueness of this country. **Continuation on page 2!**

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out for the upcoming 2nd NGS Student Symposium in February 2010. Turn to **page 11** for more details.

First Place



Gao He (current student, Aug '09 intake)

Photo description: "Dong Zu Da Ge, an acapella-like traditional form of singing in Guangxi and Guizhou provinces in China. It is listed and being protected as one of UNESCO's non-material cultural heritages."

Runners up



Farhana Anuar (alumni, '08)

Photo description: "Where are the Vikings?" Boat in the 9th century Viking island of Birka, Stockholm. I feel that this picture reflects the serenity and natural beauty of Scandinavia.



Gao He (current student, Aug '09 intake)

Photo description: "Monks collecting alms in Luang Prabang, a major historical town of the Laos which is famous for its buddhism."

NGS Staff Favourite



Farhana Anuar (alumni, '08)

*Photo description: "Marionettes"
Swing carousel in Grona Lund, Stockholm. I was compelled to take the picture because it reminded me of a Marionette orchestra against a sunset backdrop.*



Yusuf Ali (alumni, '08)

Man on the moon - Picture taken on Arthur's Seat in Edinburgh. 10am climb with a planned wedding proposal on the peak. I felt like a man over the moon.

NGS Life!

By Alvin Loo

Two NGS students, Mr. Lim Sze Ter, Jackson and Mr. Eu Zhi Ang were part of a mass wedding in the afternoon of 20th September, 2009 in the Singapore Botanic Gardens. The mass wedding was organized to mark the 150th anniversary of the Botanic Gardens. Besides the numerical symbolism of the wedding day, 20-09-2009, the couples also got to have a unique outdoor wedding with 168 (which also symbolizes good luck all the way) other couples, all of them having their wedding vows solemnized within an hour.



A candid shot of Sze Ter and his wife Hazel (centre) in the Botanic Gardens.



Zhi Ang and his wife Audrey

Sze Ter, 28, is currently into the 3rd year of his Phd and is researching on spintronics. His wife is Hazel Wang, 28, was his Secondary school classmate. They both felt that their wedding had been very memorable as they both of them enjoy nature and greenery. Sze Ter said it was definitely more interesting and exciting to say "I do" in a relaxing garden as compared to an office in the Registry of Marriage.

Zhi Ang, 28, is going into the 4th year of his Phd and is researching on wireless communications. He got to know his wife Audrey Koh, 26, from the Social Development Network (SDN), an agency that allows singles to singles to widen their social circle and network. They both enjoyed the wedding as well because it was well planned and the venue was beautifully decorated. To top it off, they even had Minister Lim Boon Heng as a guest of honour to grace their wedding. As Zhi Ang is nearing the completion of his Phd, he and his wife already have plans to go travelling in Europe after he graduates. How romantic...

The NGS Alliance Editorial Team, on behalf of all NGS students, wishes the two couples everlasting marital bliss!



NGS Student Spotlight: Ng Ley Moy and Soo Fen Fen Jasmine

By Yim Guo Rong Daniel

Our fellow NGS students, Ley Moy and Jasmine, are the first co-authors of "*A Gate-Latch-Lock Mechanism for Hormone Signalling by Abscisic Acid Receptors*" published in Nature, December 2009. They are currently based in the Laboratory of Structural Sciences, Van Andel Research Institute, Michigan USA.

About Ley Moy and Jasmine

Hi! I am Ley Moy!

I have always been interested in Science, especially Biology, since I was in secondary school. I did my undergraduate studies in NTU School of Biological Sciences, after which I worked for about 2 years in the field of biomedical research where I became certain that I wanted to develop my career as a scientist. As I decided to pursue a PhD, I came across the NGS '2+2' program which was just the right opportunity for me. So I enrolled and was almost immediately sent to the United States to embark on this exciting collaborative research project. Apart from work, I am an active individual who enjoys working out in the gym and I look forward to completing a Fitness Instructor certification when I return to Singapore in 2011.



And I am Jasmine!

I graduated from NUS in 2006 with B.Sc (Hons) in Life Sciences, majoring in Biomedical Science. During my undergraduate studies I participated in the Undergraduate Research Opportunities Programme in Science (UROPS) for a year, before doing my honours project in my final year. These 2 years of laboratory experience fueled my interest and enhanced my skills and techniques in scientific research. Upon graduation I worked in science-related industries for 2 years before deciding on pursuing a PhD, and NGS "2+2" program provided the right opportunity for me.

In my free time, I enjoy swimming and yoga and I also take joy in traveling and experiencing other cultural values and way of life. In addition, my stay in the U.S. has recently sparked an interest in gourmet cooking.

A conversation with Ley Moy and Jasmine

Amidst their busy schedules, the NGS editorial team managed to catch these outstanding students for an interview.

For the sake of our colleagues who are not actively involved in Biological Sciences research, could you describe your work very briefly?

Our current research focuses on elucidating the underlying mechanism on how plants recognize abscisic acid (ABA), which is a hormone involved in regulating plant growth during harsh conditions. Although it was known that ABA helps plants cope with stress such as drought, how it exerts its effects on plants was unknown. Using x-ray crystallography to analyze crystal structures of ABA and other associating proteins, we have demonstrated how plants perceive ABA and gained more understanding on the stress regulatory pathway.

In your opinion, what is most significant about publishing in Nature?

As Nature is a prestigious scientific journal, our findings will be highly regarded and other scientists will be able to make use of this newfound knowledge. Publishing in Nature allows us to communicate our high-impact findings which will open up the field for other scientists to further develop technologies to benefit humans, such as improving crop yields or even possibly human health.

What were some of the obstacles (scientific issues and others) you faced in your research journey?

The first difficulty we faced was that our work started immediately when we had just arrived and we had to juggle between the high-paced research work and sorting out settling-in issues such as getting our living necessities, applying for social security numbers, taking our drivers licenses, etc. Fortunately, the people we met in Van Andel Institute were very approachable and helpful with our problems in both work and personal issues. There were times when our experiments failed despite several attempts and we had to troubleshoot and optimize the conditions repeatedly. However, with our supervisor and the laboratory staffs close guidance, the project generally went on smoothly leading to the Nature publication.

Eventually we were fully settled-in after a couple of months, and that was also the time we made our first significant research finding. It was a lot for us to handle in such a short period of time, but at the end of it we felt very fulfilled especially when our paper was accepted by Nature.

You must be working really hard in the whole process, how do you balance work and life?

Amid our tight schedule, we take the time to work out in the gym during the weekends. In addition we take pleasure in preparing a good meal after a long day's work. We also make a point to dine out, sometimes going for a drink with our colleagues. The idea is to make an effort to set aside time for something we like or enjoy and simply take our minds off work. A good break can go a long way.

Any words of encouragement for fellow graduate students?

Although research can be frustrating and disheartening when met with setbacks, it is a very meaningful and rewarding experience. Every obstacle we met taught us a little more about the project and ourselves, and it is through this process that we improve our skills and knowledge. So do not be discouraged should you face any difficulty, as this will make the journey more memorable and the fruit of labor sweeter.

Who would you like to acknowledge?

We would like to acknowledge NGS and Professor Yong Eu Leong for providing us the opportunity to participate in this overseas attachment and work in a multi-collaborative project. We would like to thank Dr Eric Xu, our overseas supervisor, for his close guidance in our work. We are also grateful to Dr Li Jun and all the staffs in Dr Xu's laboratory for their kind support and help. Last but not least, we thank our families who have given us much encouragement in our pursuit of this '2+2' PhD program.

Any other comments? (Here's your chance to voice out anything you want!)

Thank you for taking the time to interview us for the editorial issue. We appreciate the effort and we wish all our fellow graduate students success in their research.



Pulau Ubin Trip

By Husna B.

As a foreigner who has been in Singapore for a number of years, I was ashamed to say that I had never set foot in one of Singapore's beautiful islands, Pulau Ubin. NGS Scholars Alliance had organized a trip to this beautiful island on September 26th this year.

Like me, many others had to drag their sleepy bodies out of bed at an ungodly hour on a Saturday morning to make it for the trip. As we all boarded the chartered bus to Changi Point Ferry Terminal, we all made friends and introduced ourselves and most of us were wide awake by the time we neared our destination. Before we alighted from the bus, every student was issued with their 'survival pack', which consisted of 'eat-all-you-can' assorted flavor buns and bottles of 100-Plus – in case anyone got lost on the island. Due to our large group size, we had to split into groups to board the bumboats to Pulau Ubin. It was my first bumboat experience and oh boy, did I enjoy it! Despite forgetting to bring any cash (oops!!), I was enthralled with the wind and salty water sprinkling on my face against the beautiful morning sun in the bumboat.



NGS group photo as we reached the island.



NGS Students choosing their bicycles before heading off to Chek Jawa.

As we reached Pulau Ubin, we waited till all students safely arrived before we took off as a group. We then walked to a relatively secluded spot to begin our ice-breaker session. As Guan Hui recalls, 'we began our activities on the island with an ice-breaking session where we witnessed – as I perceived – NGS very own 'Brokeback Mountain', 'Moonwalk' and 'Ris Low'.' It was good weather when we all trooped over to the bicycle rental shops to choose our bicycles. Those who got their bikes excitedly started off while the rest of us followed behind. Our cycling adventure that day was to cycle to Chek Jawa, rest and then head back. Surprisingly, we had a special request from She Zhen to walk instead of cycle to Chek Jawa. She Zhen fondly recalls exploring most of the routes and resorts by bike when he went the last time. Though he got a general picture of Ubin, a lot of details had been missed. So he thought, why not appreciate the details of the scenery here? So he and another student took off on foot while the others were busy testing and renting their bicycles.

As we began our journey, I realized how tiring cycling could get up here at Pulau Ubin. The route to Chek Jawa can be tedious, daunting and treacherous as we had to navigate and weaved through steep slopes as well as rocky, muddy and slippery dirt track that cut through the forest of trees. Nevertheless, we all had a good time laughing and cycling all the way. As we reached Chek Jawa, we made our way on foot after parking our bikes to the Visitor Centre which showcases the wildlife living there. We also made our way towards the jetty nearby where we were greeted with refreshing sea breeze, not bad at all especially after the tiring bike ride, and not forgetting the panoramic seaview. Guan Hui disappeared for a while as he made a hasty exploration of the coastal and mangrove boardwalk, and the tall viewing tower that overlooks the surrounding tree canopy. On our way back, we passed by an iconic lake that was made out of one of the abandoned granite quarries on the Pulau Ubin (Granite Island), where we made a short pit stop to enjoy the view and, of course, took pictures.

She Zhen – I was so glad to be one of the students on this trip. Although it wasn't the first time I visited this island, a unique experience was obtained this time.

Guan Hui – I really enjoyed my trip as we had a lot of interesting conversations that filled with laughter, especially during the bike ride and also the lunch at one of the seafood restaurants on the island. I am glad that Ubin still retains its village or “kampong” (Singapore context) feeling though no escape from the hustle and bustle of mainland Singapore as there were many visitors on this very day.

For She Zhen, he chose a small route over the more commonly used routes by most car drivers and bike riders in order to enjoy the serenity and high chance to watch the wildlife. He experienced small rivers linking together to the sea; quarries with deep blue but transparent water surrounded by the valley; birds with colorful feathers and pleasant sound flew across lakes; a temple in memory of the ancient Chinese ambassador Zheng He standing on a small hill. Tall and strait coconut palms stood on both sides of the road like guardians; Bananas, Durian and other fruits were found on different trees. A few of us managed to catch the sight of the rare black wild pig, with long hairs covering its body as they neared the entrance of our destination, Chek Jawa Wetlands.

After returning back our bicycles, some of us decided to continue to explore the island while others went to take more pictures especially by the huge Pulau Ubin signboard to remind us of this memorable trip. Though we were all hot and sweaty, we all enjoyed our trip immensely and I for sure definitely look forward to the next trip organized by Scholars Alliance!



Nice view of Chek Jawa from the top.

GS5001 Awards Dinner at Justine's

By: Husna B.

On September 19th, a dinner cum Awards party was held at Justine's beautiful house at Gibraltar Crescent to mark the end of Ethics course for students who took the GS5001 Ethics module in 2009. As we arrived, we toured Justine's house and enjoyed the tranquility of the surroundings.

After most students arrived, we started the evening with some games hosted by Alan and Justine where each student had to pick up a piece of paper with a word in it and figure out which other students had words of a similar theme to form a group. Interesting and challenging words were given like MRT stations, name of countries where Olympic Games were held, mountains etc. As the students mingled and formed groups, dinner was served free and easy style. NGS Scholars Alliance was given an opportunity to mingle with both junior and senior students, as well as to recruit them to join actively in Scholars Alliance!

The highlight of the evening was after dinner with the announcement of the individual and group winners for the Ethics course. As Justine called out names of students who performed outstandingly during their Ethics course, the rest of the students cheered and gifts were given. It was nevertheless a very memorable evening with loads of yummy food and drinks.

Thank you Justine!



GS5001 award winners group photo.



Students helping themselves to the delicious food!



Group photo of all students who attended the Awards Party.

NGS Year End Party 2009

By: Husna B.

Exams had ended for most of us and I certainly was looking forward to the upcoming festive holidays. Scholars Alliance, together with our friendly helpful NGS staff, organized the NGS Year End Party 2009 at Shaw Foundation Alumni House Auditorium on 11th December. This event was important as it had 2 components: the Dialogue session with NGS Director Prof Li Baowen and our student games' session. Of course, we cannot forget the lovely food!

The event started at 4pm and surprisingly most of the students came much earlier. As we distributed name tags, lucky numbers and door gifts, the students mingled among themselves over light tea with assorted sandwiches and cakes. The party started out with 'find your groups' game where each student had to find their groups based on the lucky number they picked during registration. The first team to form won the game where they had to explain how the teams were grouped.

After that, we started on a series of dumb charades with several rounds where student representatives from all 8 teams had to come up to the stage to act out words of different themes, like movies. The top 4 winning teams went to the next round and it continued till we reached the final 2 teams. With all the hype of trying to guess the answer, students from the audience were excitedly shouting out answers! Nevertheless, our fellow NGS students do have good acting skills! 😊



Students finding their groups!



Dialogue session with Prof Li.

As for the serious part of the party, students brought up various issues pertaining to conference allowance, usage of IT and book allowance, undergraduate teaching hours with Prof Li during the dialogue session. Students clarified their queries while some had some useful suggestions on the current NGS curriculum and usage of NGS allowance funds. This platform provided an excellent opportunity for students to directly mingle with Prof Li on all aspects of NGS.

We ended with gifts for the winning teams in the form of vouchers and NGS logo products. By then most of us were starving and we all rushed out to dig in the sumptuous buffet dinner. Students continued to mingle till around 8pm when most of them went home, happy with the day's events and a full stomach! Certainly looking forward to next year's year end party!



Hungry students queuing up for the sumptuous dinner.

Farewell Wishes for Justine

By Husna B.

With Justine leaving NGS, Scholars Alliance had asked NGS students to send in their farewell wishes to Justine as part of our efforts in saying goodbye. Some of our students' wishes are as below. We wish Justine all the best in her future endeavors!

Yuke Sasmitra: Dear A/P Justine Burley, Thank you so much for your dedication and amazing hard work for all of us at NGS! I have only briefly known you since I started my study this semester but it is clear to me that you are always ready to assist all students.

We all will fondly miss you and wish you greatness in your next endeavor!

Hope to see you around campus and please stay in touch with us :-)

Andy Yeo Yee: "You are an analytical and inspirational leader. It has always been a joy and comfort exchanging thoughts and concerns with you. As much as to your capability, you have been relentless in fighting for the welfare of NGS scholars. A BIG thanks again for the extra mile in bringing a positive impact! In case you do not know, being a member of the GS5001 class was one of the best things that happened to me after joining NGS. It has been an honor knowing and remembering you for who you are. Although you may have left, your legacy remains. May you continue to touch others and shine in your new endeavor."

Shalin Mehta: Dear Justine, NGS has been a wonderful program for graduate study in which students are given freedom and opportunity to reach their potential. Thank you for inculcating this culture in NGS and wish you success and peaceful times at your new venture.

Right: Appreciation Dinner for Justine by NUS President Prof Tan Chorh Chuan, with NGS Staff and Scholars' Alliance leaders.

If you haven't sent in your farewell wishes, do write in to ngs.alliance@gmail.com by 29th January 2010!

Sue Minglue: I would like to thank her for her efforts on the education and administrative work in NGS. Justine came to NGS with her own ideas and she wants to make a big difference for this project and for everybody. I strongly appreciate this great endeavor and unique style that she has input in NGS program.

Personally I would like to thank her for the recruitment. I have to say I feel sorry that I didn't achieve good scores in the past exams, unlike my research. Anyway, Justine is destined to be a crucial person in my life.

Ang Kailian Priscilla: Dear Justine, Thank you very much for your time and effort dedicated to NGS. Your hospitality is greatly appreciated! And thank you for putting together useful materials for the research ethics course which is really an eye-opener as to how lessons should be conducted in Singapore. The interactive approach towards teaching has impacted me a lot. And I feel you truly epitomize what it means to be a good teacher. Your personality exudes great leadership and I am sure you will continue to be a blessing to NUS. We wish you success in your future endeavors!



The Last Page.....

If you would like to share your joyous events with fellow NGS students, just send us the photos at alvinloo@nus.edu.sg

Any comments or suggestions for the editorial?

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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 Jan 2010 to April 2010.

- **NGS Induction Day**

Our new intake of students will be having their Induction day on 11th January 2010. As we have students from different nationalities, current NGS students are encouraged to sign up for the Peer Mentorship Programme. DO drop us an email if you are interested with your name, contact details, nationality, year of study and area of research.

- **2nd NGS Student Symposium**

Following the success of the 1st NGS Student Symposium held in February 2009, the NGS Scholars' Alliance is in the midst of organizing the 2nd NGS Student Symposium. We are seeking volunteers to help organize this event.

Date: 5th February 2010

Venue: University Hall

Time: 9am–6pm

Call for papers are now open! Contact us at ngssymp2010@gmail.com to submit an abstract by 17th January 2010.

- **NGS Student–Supervisor Retreat**

NGS will be organizing the NGS Student–Supervisor retreat on 22nd February 2010 at Legends Fort Canning Park from 8.30am–2pm. Do sign up soon as places are limited!

- **NUS Open House**

NGS will be having a booth for the upcoming NUS open house on 13th & 14th March 2010. Interested volunteers – please contact us at ngs.alliance@gmail.com!