



NUS Arts and Social Sciences

BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

Granting a highly comprehensive education in humanities, social sciences and Asian studies, the National University of Singapore's Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (NUS FASS) is anything but prosaic. Meet two charismatic students who recount their experiences with one of the most vibrant faculties to date.

| by julailah wahid |

Bubbly, eloquent and cultivated are the adjectives that come to mind when we first cross paths with Faizal Bin Abdul Aziz and Lee Zi Xin Michelle. A joint-degree student from NUS and the University of North Carolina (UNC), Faizal's passion for landscapes and relationships between people and their natural environment instinctively prompted him to specialise in Geography. Likewise, Michelle's fascination with literary imagination and the human condition made English Literature an obvious field to major in, as she describes the written word to be "one of the most powerful tools in the world".

DESCRIBE THE ENVIRONMENT AND CAMPUS LIFE IN NUS FASS.

Faizal Bin Abdul Aziz: The fast-paced albeit competitive environment at NUS FASS encourages students to strive harder. At the same time, you will never get bored in school as there are always activities going on such as orientation camps and the annual rag and flag competition even before the semester begins! Lecturers and professors here are really helpful, and have even been affectionately coined the "Care Bear" department. Although geography majors form a relatively small division, the professors here are well-known and respected in North Carolina as they have articles published internationally.

Lee Zi Xin Michelle: Lecturers at NUS FASS are true experts in their field of study and are always willing to share personal experiences with us. Besides encouraging us to be independent and critical thinkers, the professors here are really approachable and take time out of their busy schedule to attend to our queries. Additionally, honours students can study together at the honours room, where we would also retire textbooks as a guide and passing of the torch to our fellow juniors. Such a holistic environment makes studying a lot more enjoyable!

TELL US MORE ABOUT THE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED BY NUS FASS.

Faizal: The joint-degree is really unique because students get to graduate from both NUS and an international institution. My experience at UNC as part of the overseas exchange programme was extremely fun! Being there for a year has certainly left a deep impression on me as I could study and explore the beautiful state of North Carolina at the same time. The differences in curriculum framework also moulded my adaptability because in NUS, a bulk of our grades depends on our final exams whereas in UNC, students are encouraged to put in consistent effort to maintain a good



Faizal Bin Abdul Aziz
NUS Shaw Foundation Scholar

Studied:

Joint Bachelor of Arts (Geography), awarded by National University of Singapore and University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill

grade through cumulative assessment. People in UNC are really welcoming and friendly, and lean on a culture built upon mutual respect and trust. The student body is evidently very diverse and exchange students are immediately embraced, no matter where you're from. NUS FASS also offers a wide variety of language courses like French, Japanese and even Arabic!

Michelle: NUS is known for its many partnerships with universities all over the world, which offers students a variety of study destinations and options. As a literature major, I was beyond ecstatic when my student exchange programme transported me all the way to Shakespeare's place of birth – England. Such global exposure has definitely made me more independent and confident. NUS FASS also holds the exciting FASSTalk: The Alumni Series, where FASS alumni pay students a visit and offer some industry knowledge and experiences, which helps us to chart our career plans. During the exam period, meditation and relaxation sessions are also available in school to help students de-stress. The school's efforts in engaging its students are truly heartening!

WHAT ARE SOME KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS YOU'VE GLEANED SINCE STEPPING INTO NUS FASS?

Faizal: The many presentations and projects have developed my communication skills and confidence in conveying my ideas. I'm more open to interacting with people and have learnt to work with peers from diverse backgrounds. Besides teamwork and relationship management, I've grown to be more independent thanks to my overseas exchange programme provided by NUS FASS.

Michelle: It can be incredibly tough to endure university studies without self-discipline and resourcefulness. Besides enabling me to respond to questions with grace, my course has also instilled a spirit of critical inquiry in me, and emphasised that we should always put forth our ideas but remain respectful of other people's views, allowing them to challenge you. Professors always go the extra mile in going through your essays with you, which helps me to form coherent and compelling arguments and improve my abilities as a writer. The greatest takeaway from my course has to be intellectual humility, where I've learnt to view situations from different perspectives and be more empathetic towards others.

BESIDES COMPELLING MODULES LIKE ROMANTICISM AND ANTHROPOLOGY, WHAT OTHER MODULES CAN STUDENTS TAKE UP IN SCHOOL?

Faizal: I recently studied a module called Geographies of Social Life, where I learnt about society and its many distinctions such as identity, age, disability and sexuality. There are many things that we know exist but have never paid much attention to, like our daily word choices. For example, when you describe someone as having a normal appearance or demeanour, how exactly do you define the word "normal"? It was an eye-opening module because I realised the variety of situations that we take for granted each day.

Michelle: My science fiction and fantasy module made me realise the power of literature as a mirror to society. By magnifying a particular social issue and using it to paint a dystopian future, we got to see how the world would look like if global warming or environmental disasters weren't managed. As a result, I've become more reflective and aware of society, spurring me to contribute to its prosperity. Texts such as George Orwell's "1984" really portray society in an acute

manner as it examines the government's power of surveillance and the dangers of being under constant scrutiny.

WHAT CAREER TRACKS CAN GRADUATES OF NUS FASS EMBARK ON?

Faizal: As I've always been interested in foreign affairs and cultures, my future plan is to venture into international relations. Geography majors needn't worry about career opportunities as they can even enter the public service industry with organisations such as NParks, Housing and Development Board and Urban Redevelopment Authority. Graduates can also try their hand at geosciences, especially since the geographic information system is a big thing now because countries are always looking to locate where oil and resources are in different parts of the world.

Michelle: Upon graduation, I will be working with the Ministry of Communication and Information as an Information Officer in the Public Communications division. Despite many misconceptions that literature majors can only be teachers in the future, there are actually many career paths that graduates can undertake such as public relations, corporate communications and marketing. What many employers value are eloquence and the ability to write well. ▽



Lee Zi Xin Michelle

Studied:

Bachelor of Arts with Honours (English Literature), National University of Singapore