Welcome Remarks by
SMU President Professor Arnoud De Meyer
at the SMU-SPD Conference on
"Building a Culture of Inclusion within
Institutes of Higher Learning"
Friday, 7 February 2014, 9:00am

Ms Sim Ann, Minister of State for Education, Communications & Information;

Ms Chia Yong Yong, President of Society for the Physically Disabled;

Distinguished speakers and guests;

Ladies and gentlemen;

Good morning, and welcome to SMU.

We are proud to co-host today’s conference on "Building a Culture of Inclusion within Institutes of Higher Learning".
**Diversity and Inclusion in SMU**

This topic is especially close to our hearts because inclusion is an important cornerstone that guides all that we do here at the university.

We are a diverse group. Our community of students, staff and faculty form a microcosm of nationalities. They are drawn from some 50 countries across six continents. They represent a breadth of talents, identities and cultures. It will be impossible, if not highly impractical, to work if our people or environment cannot welcome differences.

We believe that everyone does their best when they can bring their whole selves to work. Inclusion helps us to be better teachers, researchers, administrators, and learners. When our students know, for example, that their ideas and perspectives are valued, they will be more inclined to contribute within their classrooms.

We also believe that no deserving student, staff or faculty should be denied access or opportunities at SMU on the basis of their physical, social, economic, cultural attributes or backgrounds.

However, inclusion isn’t just about taking care of our minorities. It is an important end in itself. Studies⁴,² have shown, for example, that

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campus diversity initiatives benefit not only the marginalised, but the entire community of students.

In teaching and research, it stands for the value we place on multi- and inter-disciplinary scholarship.

Within our classrooms and offices, it is a promise of safety and support; of fair access and equal opportunities for our students, staff and faculty.

As an institution of higher learning, Diversity & Inclusion is also our social responsibility. It challenges our young and young-at-heart to seek knowledge about others, to examine their own assumptions, and to develop informed perspectives\(^3\).

Finally, it reminds us that, just as it is our mission to make a difference in the realms of business and society, it is equally important for us to stand for a world that welcomes the different.

Many of you will know that Diversity & Inclusion is already a standard feature across many universities, institutions and corporations around the world. SMU is proud to be among that group.


I am happy to say that SMU is the first educational institution in Singapore to initiate a D&I function more than a year ago. Some of our initiatives include:

– Organising the GLUE series of workshops and conferences, which have set us thinking and talking about inclusion, discrimination and biases;

– Through increased global exposure, our students are better prepared for the diverse world that awaits them. These include student exchanges that inject cultural vibrancy, student involvement in planning business-cultural study trips, international festive celebrations, and diversity competitions;

– A new undergraduate course about diversity, global citizenship and cultural intelligence, is being discussed and developed;

– And we have started planning and implementing various initiatives to provide better support for disabled students.

**Collaboration with SPD**

As we continue on this endeavour to lead and promote best practices in Diversity & Inclusion across institutes of higher education, it's important to engage with like-minded partners. We know full well that it takes more than just the work of a few to become a truly inclusive institution. There is much to learn, and we are prepared to study, to consult with the experts, and to do our homework.
Here at SMU, we believe in group work; that learning is enhanced when there are peers to affirm or challenge us – and so we are happy to announce, today, a Memorandum of Understanding with the Society for the Physically Disabled.

This MOU is a statement of intent, for both organisations to work on integrating services that will benefit our students, staff and faculty.

It leaves the doors open for us to collaborate on a range of activities, events and provisions; for example:

i. Building awareness and sensitivities within our campus community;

ii. Support services, such as the use of assistive technology, learning, assessment and job accommodations, as well as issues with accessibility;

iii. As well as new approaches that can enrich learning and working.

All in all, this MOU signifies a first step towards – what we believe – will be a long and meaningful journey.

I can say with good faith and confidence, that our students, staff and faculty will gain immeasurably in time to come; and perhaps we will be able to share what we've learnt at this time next year.
In closing, I would like to thank our Guest-of-Honour Ms Sim Ann for gracing this conference. I would also like to express our appreciation to the Society for the Physically Disabled for co-organising this conference, as well as our esteemed speakers and panel members for taking the time from their busy schedules to join us this morning.

I wish you all a good conference; and I hope the ideas discussed, and the people you meet today will stick with you till then.

Thank you.