

# PRESIDENT'S STATE OF THE UNIVERSITY ADDRESS 2021



To help the community make sense of all that is going on, Prof Lily Kong used the metaphor of a plant for the different types of initiative. A plant's roots, stem, leaves and flowers are all important in enabling it to thrive, just as the different categories of initiative reinforce and support each other and together will help the University to advance towards SMU2025.

SMU President Professor Lily Kong gave her third annual President's State of the University Address in a hybrid event on 24 September 2021, with around 50 members of faculty and staff joining her at SMU Hall and some 650 participating online. She gave a progress report for the past year and discussed SMU's strategic priorities, planned initiatives and enablers towards achieving the

University's goals for the years ahead.

In last year's Address, she had announced an ambitious programme of initiatives that would help to propel SMU towards SMU2025. Prof Kong said that all units were very responsive to the strategic plan and over 200 initiatives had been received and supported for implementation from FY2020 to FY2023. They

span across our three strategic priorities, and strategic enablers. Some are now in the planning stage, others are in progress and some are already completed.

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enabling it to thrive, just as the different categories of initiative reinforce and support each other and together will help the University to advance towards SMU2025.

### The Roots of Our Plants

Fundamental to our progress towards SMU2025 are many initiatives that function like the roots of our plant, drawing water and nutrients from the soil and supporting the plant above.

For example, the Office of Integrated Information Technology and Services and Office of Business Improvement are collaborating on the eForms project which aims to progressively equip up to 20 per cent of colleagues with digital processing skills and automate 100 per cent of simpler forms and processes by late 2022.

The SMU Digital Learning Framework includes a range of education enablers such as collaborative project-based tools and digital assessment, use of Artificial Intelligence to personalise students' learning, and provision of student learning data to undertake analysis and track learning outcomes. There will also be initiatives to implement support platforms for students and faculty development, and digital and physical infrastructures to enhance digital teaching and learning.

### Our Sturdy Stems

The stem is the centre of the plant, without which there can be no leaves and flowers. Within SMU's context, it is formed by our educational and research initiatives. They enhance, sharpen and expand our value proposition, and

they can be introduced rapidly within existing frameworks and structures, Prof Kong said.

Examples include enhancements to the undergraduate core curriculum and new modules in the strategic priority areas of digital transformation, sustainable living and growth in Asia; a new LLM track in Law and Technology will be introduced; proposed research on smart cities in ASEAN, and research symposiums and workshops on green finance and sustainable ageing.

### Our Verdant New Leaves

From the stem come new leaves, drawing energy and turning nutrients into growth. Initiatives which will differentiate SMU and which require a degree of structural change to effect are our leaves.



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2 SMU Provost Prof Timothy Clark (centre) among members of the audience.

## PRESIDENT'S STATE OF THE UNIVERSITY ADDRESS 2021 (CONTINUED)



For example, SMU will move from offering work-study electives to a full work-study degree for the very first time. The first such work-study degree launched is the new Bachelor of Science (Software Engineer) degree at the School of Computing and Information Systems. It requires a new structure, and co-design with an industry partner so as to closely integrate classroom learning with structured work experience and training.

New degree programmes are of the same ilk. Our new leaf in this regard will be a PhD in Law, Commerce and Technology.

### Our Blossoming Flowers

The flowers of a plant are more difficult to nurture and tend, and generally take a longer time to emerge, said Prof Kong. In our context, they are initiatives which

we believe will significantly differentiate SMU, mark a key step forward which can only be achieved through making substantive structural changes or even require building new structures.

Over the last year, many colleagues have been involved in brainstorming, studying, data-collecting and discussing how the University contribute to more sustainable futures as a city campus. This has resulted in a vision, titled "SMU:

Towards sustainable futures", activated by four strategies:

1. Embed Sustainability Thought and Action Across Campus Functions
2. Develop Sustainability Leaders Through Education
3. Develop Research Leadership in Sustainability
4. Develop Resilient Communities

Prof Kong mentioned that as we tend the roots of our plant, grow the stem and leaves, and nurture the flowers, she is reminded of words that John F Kennedy once said, "There are risks and costs to action. But they are far less than the long-range risks of comfortable inaction."

In closing, SMU's President remarked, "Thank you to everyone who is tending the SMU garden – you chose action over comfortable inaction. Let us continue to choose action in realising our Vision 2025."



3 Prof Kong answering questions from the audience.

4 Prof Kong (front centre) with members of the audience after the President's State of the University Address.