Good evening and a very warm welcome!

Thank you for joining us for this dinner to celebrate a true milestone, the 20th anniversary of the Special Programme in Science (SPS).

**SPS: NUS’ First Talent Development Programme**

SPS has a long and distinguished history. In 1996, NUS set up the Talent Development Programme (TDP) to better cater to the diverse interests of students and groom future leaders. TDP Science was the first TDP in NUS. It was known as the Special
Programme in Science (or SPS), and the name has stuck ever since.

SPS grooms a select group of students with the passion and aptitude for science. Students are introduced to broad areas of contemporary science through multidisciplinary research, peer learning and mentorship.

Students also have many opportunities to participate in scientific investigations and in-depth studies of advanced topics that are at the forefront of modern scientific endeavours. In short, SPS equips students with the skills and perspectives to be interdisciplinary scientists.

**Our Student Achievements**

These interdisciplinary research skills have helped our students gain recognition, both locally and internationally.
In September last year, nine of our students won a Silver Medal at the International Genetically Engineered Machine (iGEM) competition held in Boston, Massachusetts. For the competition, which was centred on synthetic biology, the SPS team modified *E. coli* to perform targeted delivery of anti-cancer drugs directly to cancerous cells in the tumour core. At this moment, our second iGEM team is competing in Boston. The team has trained hard for many months – so please join me in wishing them the best of luck!

At the seventh run of the Amazing Science-X Challenge also in September last year, a team of three SPS students won the Special Mention in the Open Category. Their project involved producing a simple, interactive exhibit which illustrated a complex scientific phenomenon, the Benham’s Disc, which creates an illusion of colour when its black and white patterns change.
Our Distinguished Alumni

With such great students and training, it is not surprising that over the years, the SPS programme has produced many outstanding graduates who have distinguished themselves in industry and academia, both in Singapore and beyond.

Allow me to highlight some notable examples.

Ms Shruti Kapoor is Director of Business Development & Head (India Office) at Intellectual Ventures, a leading fund dedicated to the development and licensing of intellectual property. She credits her SPS training with giving her a broad appreciation of science, to see connections between concepts that otherwise appear disconnected, and the ability to break down complex issues to analyse problems.

Dr Bernard Leong is a good example of the versatility of our alumni. He started as a theoretical physicist, publishing in cosmology, computational biology and economics. He then ventured into the start-up and corporate world. He is currently
the Head, Post Office Network & Digital Services at Singapore Post Ltd. He led the digital transformation of the Post Office, the redesign of the SAM kiosk and was the brains behind SingPost Alpha, the authenticated drone delivery that drew global attention.

**Adjunct Associate Professor Mahesh Uttamchandani**, who was the SPS Head Mentor in 2003, is making many important contributions as Assistant Director (Human Systems), Future Systems and Technology Directorate, Ministry of Defence (MINDEF).

He also teaches medicinal chemistry and molecular biology at NUS, with an innovative pedagogy inspired by his own SPS experience. He likes to keep his students "comfortably uncomfortable" in the classroom, by provoking them with ideas.

Apart from research and academia, some of our SPS graduates have become successful entrepreneurs. **Darwin Gosal** started CryoWerx in 2015 to change the way ‘Grab & go’ food kiosks
operate. Customers can use a mobile app to unlock the door of the smart refrigerator, and grab the items they fancy. Darwin plans to expand beyond the fridge, to the freezer, dry-box and food-warmer.

**Looking Forward**

Even though the SPS has been very successful, I am glad that the Faculty has worked proactively to improve it further, along 3 main lines.

First, **continue to create value** for our students, for Singapore and the wider community. SPS has implemented a new Integrated Science Curriculum with four themed modules and two research-based modules. This enhances the breadth coverage while strengthening the focus on fundamentals that are crucial for the future.

Second, **help every student to develop their potential**. It is heartening that many SPS students choose to serve as mentors
after they have finished the programme, as the best way to learn is to teach. In an era where lifelong learning will be paramount, we need to do more to foster curiosity and the zest and habit of lifelong learning.

Third, **encourage the spirit of giving back.** This evening, I am pleased to announce the launch of the **Special Programme in Science Fund.** The Fund will enable needy SPS students to attend supplementary academic programmes, overseas trips, and to participate in competitions and conferences.

**Closing**

From a modest start, SPS has grown from strength to strength. I would like to commend, and to congratulate, the Faculty of Science, the leaders, faculty, staff, students and alumni of SPS for the great achievements made over the past 20 years. As we reflect with pride on how far we have progressed, I urge you to continue to innovate and to seek even higher levels of global excellence.
Finally, I would like to thank the SPS20 dinner planning committee for this very successful event.

I wish SPS every success in the exciting journey ahead.

Thank you very much.