Tis a Season for Giving & Sharing

Mother Teresa once said: “It’s not how much we give, but how much love we put into giving.” As we hasten towards the end of another year, many of us look towards Christmas and the New Year with much anticipation for gifts and merry-making. During this festive season of bright lights, vigorous parties and packed malls without the frosty snowman, let us retreat and reflect on those amongst us who are less fortunate than us. There is suffering along the corridors of hospices while the homeless dwell on being without shelter. The cries of the abused are silenced by walls of indifference, the poor wouldn’t mind being given a penny for our thoughts while the addicts of weaknesses desire relief from inner storms. Those forgotten are around us.

Despite the rose-tinted glasses, a bleak almost hidden landscape of reality planted around us blossoms during this season. It is perhaps that time to pace our lives somewhat slower and give generously to those in need of help and share whatever we have with them too. It does not necessarily have to be money but perhaps time or resources to lift a little weight off their shoulders. The “those” I refer to could be your relative, a friend, neighbour, classmate or even a stranger. We could make a difference to their lives with a little more love. More importantly, this “love happening” could spread its wings as we venture into the New Year with raised spirits and expectant resolutions.

Likewise, as alumni, we too could give and share our time as volunteers towards building a vibrant alumni community or sharing valuable experiences by being mentors to guide our fellow students. We could also make well-meaning monetary donations towards funding our less-privileged learners seeking new and greener pastures. It will be a revolution of mind and body this season where the virtues of giving and sharing intertwined with loving generosity under the holly.

Happy Hols

Gregory Francis  Editor (Alumni Volunteer)  Newsletter Editorial Group

Halloween Horror with Strings Attached

By Edmund Sim

Under the cover of darkness and thunderous toils of death knells, the supernatural forces of the nether realm stalk the empty streets of Universal Studios Singapore (USS).

On October 20, the family theme park fell to the sinister army led by the Puppet Master and his ilk, promising to terrorise any unwary traveller who dared to venture into its premises.

In the second edition of USS’s Halloween flagship event – Halloween Horror Night 2 – horror was introduced via its various nightmarish zones and haunted houses.

Unfamiliar visitors, including some 200 SIM University (UniSIM) alumni and their guests, were frightened beyond their wildest imagination. Many a complacent and inexperienced wanderer had their egos badly bruised when their mettle were sorely tested.

This year, the set was designed around everyday objects that everyone could relate to. Performers, dressed as ghosts, were no longer confined to scare zones. They blended into the crowd and pounced on visitors at the least expected moment.

As visitors desperately struggled to escape from the terrifying “ghosts”, they encountered horrifying scenes like a hospital with criminally insane patients; brutalised victims of a triad massacre in a Chinatown alley and a dungeon with tormented spirits writhing in pain.

Everyone was so terrified that they became paranoid at the slightest movement around them. Even guys who wanted to show off their rugged fearlessness had their plans destroyed.

While queuing for rides, some even wondered if the screen characters, like the Transformers, would deck themselves in ghastly outfits.

I, too, assumed that it would be a walk in the park just like the previous year. Unfortunately, the domain of fears created by the creatures of the night overwhelmed me.

After going face-to-face with terror, I realised that in the twilight realm of the Puppet Master, even death comes with strings attached.
You can make a difference

Established in 2005, the SIM University Education Fund is utilised to build up the capability of UniSIM including the support of scholarly initiatives. UniSIM’s bold vision and dreams can only be realised with the financial support of donors like you.

Your gift, no matter how modest, makes a difference because pooled resources have an exponential impact on UniSIM’s efforts to support the causes for which the fund was established. When you contribute to the SIM University Education Fund, you are pledging your faith and support for our students and academic-related causes. You are building a bridge for us to serve society directly by giving bright minds, unparalleled opportunities to develop to their fullest potential.

External organisations and individuals can make contributions and donations to the SIM University Education Fund. Donations will be channelled across the following:

- Infrastructure
- Systems development
- Course development
- Library development and administration
- Research and development projects
- Scholarly initiatives (including scholarships, sponsorships and study grants)

Donors can claim 2.5 times tax deduction on their donations (subject to change as announced by the Inland Revenue Authority of Singapore).

Pledge your support to our less privileged students with your generous donation online.

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S$12.00

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**UniSIM Graduate Bear (HDSS/SBIZ/SASS or SST)**

S$61.60
October 13 was a day to remember and cherish as we, the Graduates’ Night Committee, ushered in a night of celebrations. After four months of hard work, dedication and endless joyful meetings, the day had finally arrived.

Cheerful smiles and friendly handshakes accompanied the graduates and their guests as they started to stream into The Gig @ St James Power Station from 6.30 pm.

From lovely sexy cheongsams to polka dot dresses, from Elvis “collar up” shirts to “Wong Fei Hong” long sleeves, all were dressed to the theme of “Back in Time”.

From the antics of the emcee cajoling volunteers for his funny games, to the wonderful “scissors-paper-stone dance remix” that best dressed candidates had to do, to the live band performances and the lovely smiles from lucky draw winners, we certainly had a night filled with fun, laughter and memories.

Heartiest congratulations to the Class of 2012 and welcome to another milestone in your life.

You have conquered your graduation, it’s now time to take on the world!

Many thanks to the following sponsors:

[Image of sponsors' logos]
This year, 1,838 students were conferred their degrees by SIM University. Our Class of 2012 celebrated their success with their family, friends and the UniSIM community during Convocation 2012 which was held over five sessions from October 2 to 4.

Among them were our pioneer batches from the Master programmes in Counselling, and Urban Transport Management, and our Bachelor programmes in Malay Language and Literature, Business with Military Studies, Logistics and Supply Chain Management, and Aerospace Systems.

Convocation 2012 – themed “Success In Motion” with a butterfly motif as the icon to symbolise the transformational journey a student undergoes with an education at UniSIM – was a bright and colourful event, both literally and figuratively. Just as the butterfly begins life as a caterpillar, transforms into a pupa and then pushes itself out of the protective cocoon to strengthen its wings, ready to take flight, such is the learning journey of each UniSIM student. Congratulations to all our graduates and we welcome them to our alumni community which will now be 19,000 strong!

Our alumni, our valued partners

Dear Alumni,

Another year is coming to a close. Looking back, I am sure that most of us were rather amazed at how time has flown. It seemed like yesterday that we were just starting the new year. For UniSIM, 2012 has certainly been an eventful year. The most significant would, of course, be the government’s public recognition of UniSIM’s progress, with the announcement by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong during the National Day Rally that we will be offering full-time programmes alongside the other autonomous universities like NUS, NTU and SMU. UniSIM has again broken new ground by being the only private university to be granted this honour.

So, how does this impact YOU, our alumni? Well, the Government’s recognition is also an endorsement of your qualifications. You are holding in your hands a degree that is valued alongside those of the established universities. But beyond that, “the proof of the pudding is in the eating” as the saying goes. This means that your performance at your workplace as a UniSIM graduate would also have contributed to this recognition of the relevance of our programme offerings in grooming industry ready graduates. So the recognition gained is not just through UniSIM’s efforts in maintaining the academic standards, rigour and quality of our teaching but also due to the contribution of our many alumni who are flying the UniSIM flag high with your contributions and performance at your workplace. This is something that we hope that each alumnus will continue to do. Thank you for being a part of our success!

As 2012 comes to a close, my colleagues and I at UniSIM would like to wish you all the Best of the Seasons and may 2013 bring even more good tidings to UniSIM and to you in your personal and professional lives!

Best wishes,

Evelyn Chong
Director, Office of Student and Alumni Relations
BATTING ADVERSITY

The BALASARASWATHI Story

Alumna Renganathan Balasaraswathi, Class of 2009, BSc (Hons) Mathematics shares the incredible life story of how she persevered against all odds to overcome obstacles to fulfil her dreams.

As the festive season approaches, most of us will be busy with Christmas shopping in eager anticipation for year-end celebrations. In this seemingly joyous season, it is easy to lose site of the harsh realities of life.

Good health may not be high on the shopping list for most of us. However, one such individual who could not have wished for more than this is Ms Renganathan Balasaraswathi.

With her hair tied neatly, coupled with a radiant smile, this bespectacled lady, known to most as Bala, comes across as a typical office executive. Beneath her petite frame lies an indomitable spirit, which rose to conquer some of life’s toughest tragedies.

Some may recall hearing about Bala’s titular struggle with cancer amidst the loss of her parents as she was featured in September this year on a MediaCorp TV series, Anjarhey. Hosted by presenter James Kumar, the series features successful young adults who have conquered life’s hardships and obstacles.

Ms Bala shares her thoughts on her family relationships, her struggle with cancer, and her journey to earning an Honours Degree in Mathematics from UniSIM in 2009.

A Lifeboat in a Sea Storm!

I guess there are two things that fittingly describe my life journey and my character—sea storm and a lifeboat! My life was not a smooth sailing ride. I have traversed numerous high waves, and I am fortunate to be blessed with an indomitable spirit. Otherwise, I will not be where I am today.

Poor but Contented

I have a loving family. I am the second of three children in my family. During our childhood, my father was the sole breadwinner of our family.

Being a manual worker, his income was relatively low. My father taught us that contentment is more important than wealth. Although we used to live with scarcity, those childhood days were my happiest and most memorable moments of my life.

Sundari, my elder sister, is now working for the Ministry of Education and Murugan, my younger brother, is currently with the Immigration and Checkpoints Authority. The three of us are inseparable and my encounter with cancer has brought us even closer.

Losing my Mother Overnight

After completing my ‘A’ levels, I secured a job with the Singapore Prison Service. I recalled rushing home to hand my first pay cheque to my mother—my caregiver, mentor, friend and pillar of strength.

I would never forget seeing her smile, amidst her tears, when I held her hand. My only thoughts then were: “Mum, you have raised us and taken good care of us for so long. Now that we have grown up, it is time for us to take care of you”.

Little did we expect that we would never get to repay my mother’s kindness. That very night, my sister was awakened by my mother’s deep breathing noises. Sensing that something was wrong, my sister called us. My brother immediately dialled for an ambulance. We tried to rouse her but received little response. A while later, my mother passed away. The thought of losing her overnight was unbearable; we were devastated.

It was heart-wrenching for me as my mother had passed away resting on my lap while we awaited the arrival of the paramedics. They informed us that the cause of death was a “silent” cardiac arrest. I slipped into self-denial and depression, wondering how my mother could leave us so suddenly.

I was only in my mid-twenties, while most of my peers were embarking on exciting careers, I had lost my mother. Till today, my memories are still vivid, and I still miss my mother dearly.

Diagnosed with Cancer

After a long period of mourning, our lives returned to normal. My sister’s and late mother’s constant encouragement motivated me to further my studies. In 2002, I enrolled in a three-year diploma course in Mathematics at the then SIM Open University Centre, to increase my knowledge and opportunities.

Landing myself a job in the civil service, I was required to undergo a health examination as part of entry requirements. The doctor flashed my X-ray and told me that it had revealed a mass the size of a tennis ball near my left lung.

He referred me for a Computedised Tomography (CT) scan. I went for the scan, laughing it off, and thinking that the doctor might have mistaken my diagnosis. The oncologist diagnosed me with Stage Four B-Cell Lymphoma—cancer of the blood in the lymph glands—and recommended me to undergo immediate treatment.

My father and sister knelt beside me and cried. I felt especially sorry for my father, who was approaching retirement and should be enjoying his golden years. Instead, he had to cope with the loss of my mother and my illness. They both took a month off from work to accompany me to my treatments.

I still recall the traumatic experience of my first chemotherapy session. The nurse inserted a tube resembling an excretion bag given to patients with intestinal/bladder issues, into my chest area near my heart and administered some chemicals.

The medicine made me weak, and I did not have the strength to hold the tube. My father had to help me carry it wherever I went. I started vomiting and my feet swelled to the point where I could not get up and walk. Each step was accompanied by excruciating pain. After six rounds of chemotherapy, I went on to radiotherapy. As my voice turned hoarse and my hair fell, I became afraid of looking at myself in the mirror.
I was in the midst of my diploma during my treatments at the National University Hospital. I thought of throwing in the towel as I was simply too weak to step out of our home.

But my sister encouraged me to press on. She reminded me of how close I was to finishing my studies, knowing that I would never give up.

I thought hard and agreed with my sister to defer my studies for a year to recuperate before returning to school for lessons.

Suffering yet again
After an arduous treatment programme, I recovered from cancer and completed my diploma course at UniSIM. I was thrilled to then embark on my goal of obtaining a degree in 2006. I had overcome a killer disease, and was back in school again!

Just when I thought that I had seen the last of my woes, my father was diagnosed with advanced stage cancer. We were shocked to learn that it had spread to every part of his body. We were told that he had only three to four months left.

At that same time, I started to experience tremendous stomach pains. I learnt from my doctor that my cancer had relapsed and had become more serious. I became hysterical and thought that no other person could have lived a more tragic life. Utterly drained, I resigned myself to my fate.

We encouraged my father to retain the hope and will to live on. I was glad that he had listened to us. The hospital staff, recalling our plight, would often see my father and me take turns to undergo chemotherapy.

After completing four cycles of chemotherapy, I was able to manage my daily affairs. But my father succumbed to his illness and passed away not long after.

I recalled the days shortly after my father’s passing when my sister and I were overcome by grief. We felt orphaned, left to fend for ourselves. We lost hope as both our parents had been taken from us so suddenly.

Sundari, taking on the mantle of leading the family, resolved to persevere. She told me our parents would not want to see us in such a sorry state. I was reminded of my father when he first told me not to give up and to live life to the fullest. He would not want to see us in such a sorry state. I decided to do well in my studies.

My Sister, My Strength
Sundari became my pillar of strength throughout those difficult moments. I was extremely lethargic and sleepy due to my medication and relied on my sister. She whispered to me what the lecturer was teaching, and took notes so that I could revise my lectures at home.

Sundari was retrenched in 2008, as I was about to complete my degree programme. This came at a bad time as she was the sole breadwinner in our family. Without any income, we relied on our rapidly depleting savings.

We ran into dire straits and constantly fretted over whether we had enough to settle our expenses. To reduce our expenditure, we resorted to eating less. We even went as far as travelling to school on foot! Leaving our home in Toa Payoh at about 1.30 pm, we made our way to school. After my lessons, we would walk back and reach home at about 1.30 am. Throughout the journey, I had to stop many times to catch my breath and to rest.

Physically weak, I wrapped my arms around Sundari’s shoulder for support. She even carried my bag. There were many times when I wanted to throw in the towel. But Sundari’s determination and the thought of completing my programme motivated me to soldier on.

Miraculously, and perhaps with the blessings of my parents and my sister, somehow managed to pull through. I had applied to the Lee Foundation for a scholarship, and received a bursary. I completed my basic degree in 2007 and went on to pursue my honours degree. Shortly after, my sister and I found our respective jobs.

I am very grateful to Sundari. Today, we are not only sisters; we are soul mates and the best of friends.

Reflections on Cancer
I was spiritually and physically worn out during my struggle with cancer. To me, cancer is an extremely scary disease. It does not only attack a person’s body but also the desire to live.

When I first knew that I had cancer, I had barely gotten over my mother’s sudden death. But I searched the internet for the cause and cure for this disease. I borrowed books on lymphoma from the library. I started talking to other cancer patients to seek solace for my condition. I even tried a healthy diet in an attempt to “reduce” the cancer cells in me.

My father and sister had high hopes for my recovery. My sister, who has always been the resilient one in my family, did not believe that my life would end just like this. She would ask me to make travel plans with her after my treatments; sharing with me how much she would love to travel with me to visit a particular monument or place of interest.

These small talks on our future plans gave me the desire to endure and excel. At every chemotherapy session, I would tell myself to “just endure the pain and it will go away very soon.”

I was also glad to have enrolled for the courses at UniSIM. Unknowingly, the hectic rush for evening classes and the constant pushing by the tutors for the submission of assignments steered me away from dwelling on negative thoughts.

My lecturers and classmates were very understanding towards me and I am extremely thankful to them for accommodating to my needs. One of my seniors even went as far as tutoring me on some of my modules without charging me. Without the support of my peers and the teaching staff at UniSIM, I do not think that I could have achieved what I have today.

The Gift of Life
The best gift I had ever received is the second chance at life. It is wonderful to be alive, to be free of health problems and to be able to pursue my dreams. Although I still fear that my cancer may relapse, I know that I will be able to overcome the odds. Nothing is impossible. It is up to you, whether you think you can do it or not. Personally, I prefer to think that I can.

[Ms Bala is currently pursuing a Masters degree on a part-time basis while working full-time as a Finance Executive at the Nanyang Technological University. She has plans to further pursue a PhD programme. She aspires to be a lecturer after obtaining her graduate qualifications.]
International Congress of Psychology 2012

An Interview with Alumnus Lim Aik Meng, Class of 2012, BSc (Hons) Psychology

Aik Meng’s presentation on “The effects of bilateral eye movement and presentation modality on memory” at the 30th International Congress of Psychology (ICP 2012)

Tell us about your experience at ICP 2012.

It was both a cultural and study trip for me because ICP 2012 was held in Cape Town, South Africa, a country that I had never set foot in. This was also the first time I had to attend a conference of such scale and magnitude. The ICP opening ceremony was an eye opener for me not only because of the interesting African cultural performances but the attendance of guests such as Archbishop Desmond Tutu, a world-famous social activist and Nobel Peace Prize laureate. There was even a video speech by Albert Bandura, one of the greatest psychologists and the originator of the Social Learning Theory. Having studied his work in psychology textbooks, it was electrifying seeing him on video welcoming the attendees as he is such an inspiration to all psychologists-to-be.

The chance to rub shoulders with psychologists and psychology students from all over the world was definitely an enriching experience as it was a rare occasion to gather so many people from such diverse backgrounds united by their dedication and passion towards the field of psychology. Having to present my paper in front of psychology academics was nerve-wrecking, but it was a wonderful learning opportunity for me to gain experience in presenting to an audience of strangers and also in answering any difficult questions that they may field. Besides attending the various presentations at the conference, I had time to explore Cape Town which is truly one of the world’s most beautiful cities. Table Mountain, the Cape of Good Hope, Big Bay Beach and Victoria & Albert Waterfront were some of the sights that I managed to see and visit during my stay there.

What have you learnt from this trip?

Attending this conference had allowed me to gain much valuable knowledge and exposure to the wider psychology community. The opportunity to present at a conference in a foreign land widened my horizons and allowed me to experience the world out there. It was truly a life-altering experience and I am truly grateful for this chance.

In addition, I learnt to be more independent because this was the first time I had to travel alone and stay in a foreign country not within Asia. After going to Cape Town, I learnt to be more appreciative of Singapore’s safe and secure environment. Being able to walk alone at night without fear was something that I had taken for granted in Singapore. It was an unpleasant experience walking alone at night in Cape Town and I had to get used to being approached by strangers asking for money on a daily basis. But Capetonians are friendly people who do not hesitate to help you when needed.

Aik Meng is currently working in Lumaxis and has the intention to pursue his graduate studies. We wish Aik Meng all the very best in his career in psychology.
The School of Arts and Social Sciences (SASS) held a get-together dinner on October 31, especially for its alumni. Associate Professor Genice Ng, Dean of SASS, warmly welcomed the 108 alumni and staff, who filled the entire Kintamani Indonesian Restaurant at Furama Riverfront Hotel. The alumni consisted of those who graduated in October 2012, and as long ago as 2001 (with degrees from the Open University, UK). They reminisced fondly about the old days, recalling who had lectured or tutored them, and recounted how they had climbed over fences and escaped barking dogs just to hand in tutor-marked assignments (TMAs) to their tutors on time. This event was a good opportunity for them to re-connect with old friends, make new ones, and find out about the latest developments in SASS and UniSIM. SASS staff also found the get-together a valuable opportunity to appreciate their alumni’s many successes in life and career. Many alumni expressed their appreciation to have been invited by the School and to have been made a part of the UniSIM family.

Twilight Welcome for Class of 2012

By Denise Ong

UniSIM alumni and graduates from the Class of 2012 gathered for a movie screening of the Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn – Part 2. The movie was the latest installment of Stephanie Meyer’s Twilight, and concludes the popular supernatural romance saga. Our guests began their afternoon with a delightful tea reception. Collecting their popcorn, they headed off to witness the final titular struggle between vampires, werewolves and mortals. The movie struck a chord with our graduating cohort. Like a closure to a chapter in their own stories, the graduation is a mark of the realisation of sweet success.

As the curtains draw to a close for 2012; so too does the hard work, sweat and toil of our graduates. Congratulations to the Class of 2012! To new beginnings and an awesome 2013!
5-2-2-3: The Right Balance of Nutrition

By Janet Yong

Have you ever wondered if you are consuming the right kind of food with nutritional balance? You are not alone.

On November 3, more than 40 alumni and guests attended a health talk organised by the Alumni Relations Department. Two speakers, Ms Fiona Chia, a nutritionist, from Dayspring Wellness Pte Ltd, and Ms Loh Win Nie, senior dietician at Changi General Hospital covered two aspects to proper nutrition.

Approaching the topic from different aspects, Ms Chia covered nutrition for healthy bones while Ms Loh spoke about nutrition in general. After their individual segments, both speakers took questions from the audience.

Ms Chia began with an interactive perspective on healthy bones. Defining osteoporosis as “a skeletal disease with porous and brittle bones, she highlighted risk factors that contribute to the onset of osteoporosis include age, size, inadequate exercise, smoking and alcohol consumption.

Breaking down the balanced diet diagram of an inverted pyramid focusing on calcium intake, she suggested that the right proportion was about 5 servings of whole grain products, 2 servings of vegetables and fruits and 3 servings of meat.

She emphasised that regular exercise and sufficient intake of Vitamin D supplements could help minimise bone loss.

Calcium-rich food like dairy products, soya beans, small fishes, nuts, leafy green vegetables and fruits were also high on her list of recommended foods.

Ms Loh, on the other hand, touched on nutritional needs at different life stages. Using pregnancy as an example, she shared that mothers-to-be need only consume 30 percent more food. Infants and young children should not be given food with high salt or sugar content as their taste buds have yet to develop.

Both speakers also took questions from a concerned audience. The talk also received very positive feedback from them.

Ms Linda Wong, Class of 2011, BA Psychology with Business, expressed that the talk helped her to “understand more about healthy nutrition”. Mr Colin Loo, Class of 2011, BSc Business, attended the talk “hoping to be healthy”. He also found the talk to be “enriching and full of valuable information”.

Ms Yvonne Koh, Class of 2012, Bachelor of Human Resource Management was happy to be invited. She found it “very informative, insightful and learnt a lot about the nutritional values that we need to take note of in our daily life.”

Many expressed that they had found the talk informative and would encourage their friends to attend subsequent health talks organised by the Alumni Relations Department.
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**CONTEST GIVEAWAYS!**

We are giving away four pairs of Golden Village movie passes. Simply SMS the answers to the three questions below to 9113 6795 in the following format.

Newsletter <space> IC number <space> Email address <space> Answers for Q1, Q2 and Q3

Example: Newsletter S1234567X alumni@unisim.edu.sg Answers for Q1, Q2 and Q3

**QUESTIONS**

**Q1**  
We organised a forex seminar early this year. Name the forex expert who delivered this seminar.

**Q2**  
Where did we go for our first overseas trip?

**Q3**  
What is the name of the SIM University mobile application launched on July 2012?

**Closing Date:** January 18, 2013

**Congratulations to the Contest Winners of Issue 19!**

- Ong Soo Ching (Weng Suqin)  SXXXX122H  
- Ponnana Cynthia  SXXXX689H  
- Thow Chun Meng Bronson  SXXXX514E

For advertising enquiries, call 6248 9245 or email alumni@unisim.edu.sg
Feng Shui Seminar 2013

Grand Master Tan Khoon Yong will unveil the 12 horoscope forecast and the global outlook for 2013 at this seminar to be conducted in Mandarin and English.

Born in Singapore, Grand Master Tan is a veteran of geomancy studies and has provided feng shui consultancy services for more than 20 years. Since 2004, Grand Master Tan has been representing Singapore in the International Feng Shui Convention. In 2008, he was given the prestigious title of “Feng Shui Grand Master” by the International Feng Shui Association and is the first feng shui practitioner in Singapore to be awarded this title.

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<tr>
<td>Venue</td>
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<td>Time</td>
<td>2.00 pm to 5.00 pm (Registration starts from 1:30pm)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fee</td>
<td>$8.56 for UniSIM Alumni $13.91 for Guest (Price inclusive of 7% GST)</td>
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Request for your Red Packets from January 15, 2013!

UniSIM alumni may request for complimentary red packets through the Alumni Portal (www.unisim.edu.sg/alumniportal). Each alumnus is entitled to two packs of red packets (10 pieces per pack).