UniSIM Alumna Brings Smiles to Student with Autism

In this issue, we spoke to UniSIM alumna, Mrs Jenny Lai, who now heads Eden School, a school specially designed for students with autism. Mrs Lai shared on what drove her to take a one-third hefty pay cut to pursue her dreams.

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This issue, we feature alumna Mrs Jenny Lai, Principal of Eden School. She graduated from the Open University UK with a BSc Mathematics with Management in 2004.

Eden School, which was previously known as Singapore Autism School, provides an alternative education option for students with autism. This new moniker reflects a respect for and a valuing of every individual with autism for his/her uniqueness, according to Principal Jenny Lai. Eden School caters to those who require more time in building foundational skills as well as those who are assessed to be more suitable for a vocational route.

Tell us more about yourself. What were you doing before assuming stewardship of Eden School?
After completing my A levels, I worked in the private sector for seven years doing accounting work. Being restless by nature and sometimes quite rebellious, I decided to become a teacher, much against the wishes of my parents. I was drawing a decent salary then and took a hefty one-third pay cut.

My stint in the private sector taught me to value the training I received in the National Institute of Education and to give the best to my work with the students. It has been 22 years since I joined the Education service and I am still enjoying every moment of it.

What motivated you to be involved in teaching children with special needs?
I was approached by the Ministry of Education (MOE) in December 2007 to take up the challenge of helming a special education school. I was a Vice-Principal in a primary school then. With very little knowledge and no experience in the area, I was quite apprehensive at first.

During my years in the mainstream schools, I had encountered students with learning disabilities, behaviour disorder, autism and dyslexia. Many of the students had difficulties coping with school demands, resulting in low self-esteem, disinterest and sometimes behavioural challenges.

Going into the special education sector would give me a good opportunity to understand how education programmes are customised to engage the students in their learning.

I decided to go in with an open mind and see how I could value-add new perspectives to this field. I joined Eden School as its Principal in February 2008.

What were the interesting stories you had during your first few months with Eden School?
I remember standing at the entrance of the school on my first day at work and greeting every student with a hearty “Good Morning!” My students had no name tags on them then and so I could not address them by name. I received very different responses. Many “ignored” me, some made funny noises, a fewflapped their hands or came up to touch me. No one that morning returned my greeting in the manner I had expected.

I still take great pleasure in greeting my students every morning. A few would now look at me for a while and say, “Good morning, Mrs Lai”. Some would still shy away.

The difference? I have come to respect every individual for who he or she uniquely is, and to celebrate the steady progress that they made under the caring guidance of their teachers and parents.

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**UP the HiPPO!**

It was a hot and sunny Saturday afternoon on 6 June. Despite the blazing sun, the interests of the UniSIM alumni and their guests did not melt. About a hundred of them, including our alumni volunteers, gathered at UniSIM to board the HiPPO. Among them was a family of three generations! The HiPPO buses are not those grazing the grass at the night safari, but those that could shuttle around the city district and brought the crowd on a city heritage tour around Singapore.

Two HiPPO buses were chartered for this city tour and they were equipped with seats at the lower and upper deck as well as a “HiP-tainer” (tour guide) on board to provide details on the destinations which they visited.

**What did we learn?**

At little India, the different heights of the shop houses exhibit the wealth of the shop owners; the taller the building, the wealthier they are.

Tucked at a corner of little India, there was an infamous thieves’ market, where people could try their luck at finding their own lost items on sale there.

The Singapore Flyer moves in an anti-clockwise direction to “churn” money into the central business district.

The fountain of wealth and five buildings at Suntec City are shaped like a human hand. The inward flowing of water at the fountain symbolises the retention of wealth for Suntec City.

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**Unwind Saturday**

As a treat to our future alumni, the student leg of Unwind Saturday was held on June 27 at Golden Village, VivoCity. The sold-out event was put together by the Alumni Relations department in a bid to cultivate relationships with current students who would eventually graduate and become the University’s alumni. The movie featured for the day was the long-awaited, “Transformers – Revenge of the Fallen”.

Light refreshments were served before the movie and the event was graced by UniSIM President, Professor Cheong Hee Kiat. Professor Cheong urged the students to be more involved with the University, and to contribute to its development by becoming a student volunteer.

Refer to page 8 for details to the annual movie screening for alumni.
Who or what motivates and inspires you?
I believe that deep down in our hearts, every one of us has that inner calling to make a difference in whichever area we are serving. I had never dreamt that I would one day lead a school. My motto since secondary school days had always been, “Do the best you can wherever you are.”

Being here at Eden School has been a very humbling experience for me and I am constantly reminded in my daily interactions with my staff and students of the need to always start by listening and seeing things from my students’ perspective; encourage them, and walk this journey of lifelong learning with them.

I am very blessed to be supported in my work by the Special Education Branch in MOE as well as a team of trained professionals from Pathlight School and the Autism Resource Centre. I also have the honour of working with and being mentored by Ms Denise Phua, Member of Parliament for Jalan Besar Group Representation Constituency and President of the Autism Resource Centre, who is a full-time volunteer and advocate for the special needs sector. We are constantly exploring ways in which we can raise the quality of education programmes for the students we serve and equip them with skills for independent living and/or supported employment.

What do you enjoy doing most in your teaching career?
Interacting with my students keeps me young at heart. I am sure many of my teacher colleagues will agree with me. Over time, as we become more experienced, we learned the art of sensing our students and relating to them as mentors and facilitators, rather than as “knowledge dispensers”.

What advice do you have for current teachers or aspiring teachers graduating from UniSIM?
Teaching is all about Heart, Respect and Compassion. When students know that you genuinely care and have their interests at heart, they will reciprocate with respect and a willingness to listen to what you have to share with them. This is what “Touching Hearts, Changing Lives” is all about.

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The Newsletter Editorial Group spoke to two alumni who graduated from the then SIM Open University Centre (SIM-OUC) and are currently teaching at UniSIM!

They were previously students like many of you at the then Open University UK (OUUK). Now, both of them teach at UniSIM as Associate Faculty staff. Mr Peter Hung and Mr Goh Boon Yeow are two out of a few other alumni who made teaching at UniSIM part of their careers.

“I studied at the SIM-OUC from 1994 to 1997. When I graduated in 1997 with the degree awarded by the OUUK, I was interested in teaching and was looking for opportunities to join the public education sector or some private schools. However, I realised my qualification and experiences were not adequate. Hence, I took up Masters in Business IT with Curtin University. In 2001, the opportunity came when the SIM-OUC had vacancies for the posts of associate lecturers and tutors and I applied for it immediately,” said Peter.

While both of them now “watch” students rushing for deadlines to hand in assignments and projects, they had their fair share of such experience too!

“It was rigorous! But it was time well-spent. I remembered having to complete about six assignments per subject and there was never enough time! On top of that, there were the tough final examinations at the end of the year,” said Boon Yeow as he recounted the days when he studied on a part-time basis.

This means that they are able to empathise with students more, having been in their shoes many years ago.

“I understood their challenges and needs. They are independent learners but they also need a lot of motivation to overcome many obstacles, such as juggling career, family and study, in their learning journey. Hence, teaching is not only about sharing knowledge with them but also providing them with help when needed,” shared Peter.

In commemorating Teachers’ Day, Boon Yeow and Peter would like to take the chance to thank all the teachers who had previously taught them in one way or another. Boon Yeow would like to specially thank Assoc Prof Neelam, Dean of School of Arts and Social Sciences at UniSIM, for inspiring him to pursue teaching as a career.

Now, both of them share one common goal to further their education in hope to obtain a doctorate. Indeed, they are the epitome of lifelong learners!
Get Certified as an **SAP Solution Consultant** with UniSIM-SAP eAcademy

"UniSIM has provided me a conducive and flexible environment to learn. The support staff are quick in responding to our enquiries. As a pioneer of this eLearning course, I am impressed with the course and content provided."

Mr Teh Teik Lee, SAP eAcademy graduate 2008.

UniSIM-SAP eAcademy was launched in July 2008 to train SAP Solution Consultants for industries in Singapore, where the country is facing a critical shortage of skilled manpower in the area of ERP implementation. UniSIM is the first and only SAP training partner which runs an eAcademy in Singapore.

The unique features of the SAP eAcademy allow working adults to learn at their own pace with a flexible schedule and in a more cost-effective way. All courses are delivered online with student support provided by SAP. Each course comprises an estimated 250 e-hours of learning or contact time over five months, after which an SAP certification examination has to be taken.

The SAP eAcademy course is open to the public. You can be trained and specialised in SAP ERP Financials, Human Resources, Order Fulfillment, Procurement, Production Planning or Advanced Business Application Programming. This programme will be of interest to both IT and business professionals who are considering a career in SAP as solution consultants.

For details, visit UniSIM-SAP eAcademy microsite at [http://sst.unisim.edu.sg/sites/SAP](http://sst.unisim.edu.sg/sites/SAP) or contact Ms Kam Yoke Fong at 6248 9249 or yfkam@unisim.edu.sg.

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**UniSIM Offers Chinese PhD Programme in Collaboration with Nanjing University**

UniSIM signed a memorandum of understanding with Nanjing University, one of the leading universities in China, to offer its first PhD in Chinese Language & Literature. It is also currently the only Chinese PhD programme in Singapore that is offered in collaboration with a China university.

Currently, UniSIM offers its own Bachelor Degree in Chinese Language and Literature and a Masters equivalent with Beijing Normal University.

Applications for the PhD programme have commenced in August and classes will start in January 2010.

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**UniSIM Launches eShop for its Alumni**

Alumni can purchase the University collection of memorabilia, with the launch of the eShop. For a start, the eShop is selling merchandises such as luggage tag, EZ-Link card holder and umbrella etc. Visit [www.unisim.edu.sg/alumni](http://www.unisim.edu.sg/alumni) to purchase now!

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**Moving House?**

If you have shifted and would like to update your records with the University, you may do so now via the Government’s eCitizen portal ([http://www.myeCitizen.sg](http://www.myeCitizen.sg)) under its Moving House initiative. The latter seeks to provide a one-stop solution for Singaporeans to update their new addresses through a centralised platform. All you need to do is to select UniSIM as one of the organisations to inform. Apart from this, you may also personally update your new addresses through the alumni portal.
Leading @ Work

Generation Y, the new workforce, is making significant waves in the work environment. Many managers now face “inter-generational tension” leading this group of subordinates. According to a global report by PricewaterhouseCoopers, 61 per cent of employers have trouble integrating this new workforce.

Applying traditional management methods that resonate with them can be a challenge. How managers work with this new generation will have significant impact on the organisation’s success in future.

Characteristics of Generation Y
Some research define Generation Y as those who were born between 1979 and 1991, during the period of global economic prosperity and evolution brought about by the internet. Their parents are mainly from the baby boomers generation who had accumulated wealth during the boom time and are providing unconditional financial support to this generation. Such environments have significantly influenced their values and attitudes at work.

To better understand the behaviour of Generation Y, we have carried out a research using Harrison Assessment, a psychometric assessment tool. Some established research on this subject have been reviewed and the characteristics of this generation are summarised as follows:

- Technologically savvy – grew up during the age of technology
- Knowledgeable – information easily accessible through the internet
- Multi-tasking – perform tasks faster, leveraging the power of technology
- Optimistic - thanks to their over-indulgent parents, they have a stronger sense of security and are optimistic about the future
- Social inclination – civic minded and care for society and environment
- Self-acceptance and self-motivation – self-driven, confident and like challenges

Challenges when working with Generation Y
These technologically savvy youth constantly search for new mountains to climb. They seek quick career progression, greater work-life balance and demand to use cutting-edge technology. They are constantly looking for new things to do and job hop when they lose interest in their work. They show little distinction between occupation and life and like to merge fun with work.

However, it is also shown that Generation Y is highly productive and innovative. They constantly seek feedback to improve though they are knowledgeable and have the ability and flexibility to deal with diversity.

Change your leadership practices
To bridge the generation gap, managers working with this generation should take steps to level the playing field by adopting and using new technology platforms such as Facebook and Twitter.

Managers should:
- play the role of a mentor, show them the ropes, be open and accessible rather than being a “manager”.
- empower their subordinates and use a coaching approach. Hear from them on how they would prefer to get things done rather than micro-manage and tell them what to do.
- provide variety in the tasks to be performed by this generation such as job rotation, foreign posting, learning new skills, and involve them in projects out of their routine role.
- display basic qualities such as integrity, credibility, skills and mastery, someone whom Generation Y can shadow and learn from. The element of fun and flexibility should be built into the work culture and environment.

Engaging the new generation is not as difficult as it is envisaged to be. If managers take steps to align the work environment and change some of their leadership practices, the work relationship with Generation Y will flourish.

What is your Financial Worth?
Do you have any idea what is the status of your financial health since you graduated and landed the dream job with your hard earned degree? One of the assessments is through your net worth valuation, i.e. Total value of what you own less off everything you owe. The balance of the two will be your net worth value. There are two ways to enhance your net worth – increase what you own and reduce your liabilities and debts.

Acquisition of some assets purchased under credit terms can increase the corresponding liability amount. This will bring a negative impact to your net worth when the value of assets drop in value. As such, one has to be cautious in accumulating assets with credit. An individual does not own the asset until all loans are paid off from the purchase. Also, if the asset does not generate sufficient cash to service the debt, the individual could risk insolvency.

Tips to Maintain Healthy Net Worth
- Develop good financial habits such as living within your means and avoid spending future money with credit cards.
- Protect your earning ability by getting a disability income insurance plan.
- Financially buffer yourself and family against unforeseen circumstances that may rob you of your plan to enhance your net worth position.
- Prior to exploring suitable investment instruments, seek to understand your risk appetite and desired rate of return, targeted net worth amount, targeted duration of investment, and usage of the enhanced net worth balance.
- Always maintain a positive cash flow position while setting aside an emergency fund.
- Increase your financial quotient and work with a competent financial professional on plans to enhance / increase assets and reduce liabilities.

In the next issue, we will discuss how you can increase your assets and reduce your liabilities effectively. Stay tuned!

The author Cai Zong Zhen has over 10 years of experience in the financial market and was an AIMEMA & AWFPA graduate of Financial Perspectives (FP), an approved CFP® Education Provider since 1999. Visit www.fp-edu.com for more information.
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Special Deal for UniSIM alumni!

Werkz Photography
$250 Family Package (Usual Price: $430)
1) 1 x 28cm by 35cm canvas print with frame (Family)
2) 1 x 20cm by 25cm digital print with frame (Individual) - Free!

Kublai Khan Mongolian BBQ & International Seafood Buffet Restaurant
Special rates of $24++ and $26++ during weekdays and weekend respectively.
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For details, visit www.unisim.edu.sg/alumni.

CONTEST - GIVEAWAY!

To commemorate the launch of the eShop, we are giving away EZ-Link cardholders to 20 lucky winners! Simply answer two questions and mail it back to us! Please paste the cut-out coupon at the back of an envelope.

Closing Date: 20 October 2009
Winners will be notified by e-mail.

Mailing address:
SIM University
Alumni Relations Department
535A Clementi Road
Singapore 599490

Name: ____________________________
NRIC no: _________________________
Telephone: _______________________
Mobile: __________________________
E-mail: __________________________
Address: _________________________
Mailing Address: _________________

1) Name the two featured alumni who are teaching at UniSIM now?
_________________________________

2) Suggest an alumni event that you would like UniSIM to organise in the next year.
_________________________________

Congratulations to Contest Winner of Issue 6 K Hew Su-Lyn SXXXXX258D

For advertising enquiries, call 6248 5782 or e-mail alumni@unisim.edu.sg.
UniSIM Graduates Night 2009

**Venue**  
ZIRCA Mega Club

**Date / Time**  
10 October 2009, 7pm - 10pm

**Fee**  
$20 per pax (includes food, 2 drinks and entry to ZIRCA)

**Special Promotion**  
Buy four tickets at $60

**Registration**  
Register at www.unisim.edu.sg/alumniportal

**Theme**  
Retro Party (1950s to 1990s)

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**Unwind Saturday – Episode 3**

The third run of Unwind Saturday is back! Get your hands on the tickets before they are gone!

**Venue**  
Golden Village, VivoCity

**Date / Time**  
14 November 2009, Timing to be confirmed

**Fee (Alumni)**  
$6 per pax

**Fee (Guest)**  
$6 per pax (limited to 1 guest per alumnus)

**Registration**  
Registration starts 1 October 2009. Purchase your tickets at www.unisim.edu.sg/alumniportal

**Movie Title**  
“2012”

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**Be the First Sponsored Couple to Solemnise Your Marriage at UniSIM!**

Starting June 2009, UniSIM added to its current list of alumni services, a solemnisation package to all alumni. For its inaugural solemnisation ceremony, the lucky couple will enjoy sponsorship of food and beverages as well as bridal services. For details, visit www.unisim.edu.sg/alumni_solemnisation.

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**Calling for Alumni Volunteers!**

Do you always have the passionate desire to contribute to your alma-mater? Now you can! The annual recruitment drive for alumni volunteers is now on! Choose among the marketing communications, events or newsletter editorial groups or student mentor programme. For details, visit www.unisim.edu.sg/alumnigroup.