

## Farewell To Tembusu College

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Professor Ho Chee Kong

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Fellows and Students

1. Thank you very much for your kind tribute to me.
2. It is not easy to say farewell to an institution which you helped to create and which you have loved for so many years. I may be stepping down as the Rector at the end of June, but I will never stop loving the college. I will always be at the service of the college. I will always remember my friends at the college.
3. In 2010, Professor Tan Eng Chye and Prof Tan Tai Yong invited me to lunch. I should have listened to my wife's warning that there is no such thing as a free lunch. They asked me to be the founding Rector of a new college, at University Town, to be named, fortuitously, after my favourite tree, the Tembusu tree. I met the Master of the College, Professor Gregory Clancey. We clicked and worked very well together.
4. In 2010, Prof Clancey ran a pilot project at the Prince George's Park Residence. Sara, Yee Han, Connor and Shamraz were members of that pilot project. They brainstormed and agreed that the new college would have gender equality and racial, religious, social class diversity. They wanted the students to come from the different faculties and schools of the university. They wanted the college to be nurturing, safe, intellectual and open to a world of possibilities.
5. There is a wonderful saying in Chinese that when we drink water, we must remember its source. This evening, I want to acknowledge our debt to

Professor Greg Clancey and his team for giving the college its vision and mission.

6. If my successor were to ask me, what is so special about the Tembusu College, I would reply that it is special for the following 4 reasons.
7. First, the college is named after a wonderful tree. The five student houses are named after five endangered Asian animals. The college has a strong commitment to sustainability, to the environment and to the protection of biodiversity. Tembusu College is the greenest college at NUS.
8. Second, the college is more than an institution. It is more than even a community. It is a family. We care for each other. In Tembusu, as in Liverpool, you will never walk alone. In April 2018, 4 of our students met with a horrific car accident. One of the students, Kathy Ong, was killed. To honour her memory, we have planted a Tembusu tree on the hill opposite the college. We have also named a book prize after her. We invite her parents, Keith and Jacqueline, to come to the college, every year, to give the prize to the winner.
9. One of the other students, Ting Jun Heng, suffered multiple injuries and was in a coma for many days. I was inspired by the fact that during that ordeal, the Master, Fellows and Students of the college visited him regularly. We never gave up on him even when the doctors were not optimistic. We continue to support Jun Heng in his long journey of recovery.
10. Third, the college is the home of possibilities. We empower our students to pursue their passions. We encourage our students to read widely, to think deeply and to meet inspiring people from all walks of lives and with different perspectives. We believe in the freedom of speech and of thought. When the National Arts Council took away the book grant from Sonny Liew, I invited him and his publisher, Edmund Wee, to have dinner with some of our students. When I organised a forum on Korea and the speakers from the US, Japan and South Korea objected to my wish to include a speaker from North Korea, I invited the North Korean Ambassador to have dinner with some students. Our students gave him a hard time. He deserved it! When the government banned

Tan Pin Pin's film, To Singapore With Love, we managed to get permission to show the film at the college and to have a dialogue with Pin Pin.

11. Fourth, Tembusu College is a globally minded college. My ambition was to bring the world to the college and to bring the college to the world. We are the custodians of two sections of the Berlin Wall. Every four years, we hold a mock US Presidential Debate at the college. The students have accurately predicted the outcome of every election except for the freak election of 2016 when Trump was elected. Four times a year, I organize and chair the Tembusu Forum, to discuss important issues of Singapore, the region and the world. We have just held the 41<sup>st</sup> forum. The forum has become a flagship project of the college and I hope my successor will continue with it.

12. In conclusion, I wish to thank Professor Tan Eng Chye and Professor Tan Tai Yong for giving me the opportunity to serve as the founding Rector of this college. The Tembusu College is a great college, and I am confident that my successors will preserve the values and traditions of the college and lead it to an even higher peak.

13. Thank you very much.

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