

The image is a composite graphic. The top left shows a classical marble statue of a bearded man with long curly hair, wearing a brown robe and reading an open book. The background is a sunset over a city. The top right shows a raised fist in a brown sleeve against a bright sky with a sun flare. The bottom left shows a magnifying glass over a colorful financial candlestick chart. A large pink diamond shape is centered over the image, containing the text.

**Insights:
Philosophy, Politics,
and Economics
(PPE) at NUS**



Dexter Lim

On a hike in Rouge National Urban Park, Canada

Your major was the Philosophy, Politics, and Economics (PPE) program. Why did you choose this program and how did you find the combination of these different disciplines?

I've always been interested in taking Economics, but discovering the PPE program made me think twice. If I could study Economics and learn about two additional subject areas at the same time, why not? I ended up

confirming that PPE was the right major for me when I tackled my application question on the trolley problem. The trolley problem is a thought experiment on whether you would sacrifice one life to save five lives. Would you pull a lever to redirect a trolley headed towards five tied-up individuals to the track with only one tied-up individual instead? Researching further on that made me realise that each of the PPE subjects comes together to provide a potential answer to such a question, taking into account ethics, principles of collective decision-making, and cost-benefit analysis. Ultimately, there's no one right answer to questions like these, but what we can do is to justify our thoughts through multiple perspectives.

I must admit that when I first started the program, I was struggling to see the links between each of the disciplines - how do I even begin to find the links between the demand-supply curve and the universality of human rights? Over the next few semesters, however, things started falling into place, especially when we began taking the PE-coded courses [Editor's note: These are courses specifically designed for the PPE program], which were intended to help us find the links between each discipline. My favourite course in NUS ended up being a PE-coded course, PE4101P, on the Ethics and Politics of Nudging, which covered concepts such as Prospect Theory (Economics), paternalism and ethics (Philosophy), and how public policy is informed (Political Science).

PPE students are free to shape the program to their own desires beyond a few compulsory courses, and every experience is going to be different. You'll have to join us to find out more!

Might we ask, which of the three disciplines of the PPE program you found most interesting and why? (We can handle it if it's not economics!)

Definitely a funny question to ask because, as I quote one of my PPE friends, 'bro wants to do 40 econ mods'. Economics has always been the most interesting to me, and taking Philosophy/Political Science on top of that was originally just a way for me to read more widely and learn from multiple perspectives. In Economics, we can combine theoretical concepts with quantitative analysis to explain real-world phenomena. For instance, cost-benefit analysis (taught in the very first lecture of the introductory module, EC1101) is something people and organisations use day to day. Studying Economics formally gives you a trained perspective to assess how and why things happen around us.

Beyond that, Economics courses are typically taught in a structured manner, with foundational components taught at the start before leading up to a big picture at the very end, which I appreciated whilst navigating the more open-ended nature of Philosophy and Political Science courses. I often told my friends that I interspersed essay writing (for my other courses) with Economics tutorial questions to give myself a 'break'. In fact, I enjoyed Economics so much that I used up my UEs [Unrestricted Electives] to take more EC-coded courses.

How did you find studying at NUS? Was it demanding/stressful or more relaxed? Do you have any advice on how students can manage the workload?

Studying in NUS can get really stressful - I've always found myself thinking about dropping a course or two when assignment season gets around, but by managing my own expectations, I was usually able to push through. It's important to recognise that it's quite difficult to score well in every single course that you take, since there are likely

courses that you're going to be stronger in and consequently, some you're not so confident with. Gauge your personal strengths and weaknesses, and take a fair mix of courses every single semester to spread out the stress. Here are some tips that worked for me, but of course, your mileage may vary:

1. Focus on the courses that you're stronger in. If you know you do better with quantitative courses, find out which ones they are, and take them. If you can do well, you'll likely enjoy your experience more too.
2. Be well-organised. At the start of every semester, note every deadline and the weightage for each component of assessment. Strike it out as you clear each one and feel a sense of satisfaction!
3. Find people to work with. Working together allows you to share ideas, resources and complaints about how reading week isn't enough to catch up on the 13 weeks of lectures you've missed.

Most importantly of all, enjoy your time in school beyond academics. Stay on campus (if that's your thing), go for exchange, join new CCAs [Co-Curricular Activities], participate in school events, and find the time to relax and recharge. Remember that school can get really stressful, but at least everyone else is probably just as stressed as you are.

Would you like to share with us your first professional steps after university? Has your degree come in handy?

I'm currently a Management Associate at the Central Provident Fund Board. I believe that the work at CPF is uniquely positioned for PPE students because of how the concept of a secure retirement is closely intertwined with each aspect of PPE. It raises philosophical questions on fairness, responsibility and what it means for one to have a good life. It involves political decisions about policy-making, on trade-offs that our government has to make when designing and maintaining our CPF system. From economics, we draw on savings behaviour and the labour market, and on how scarce resources are allocated over a lifetime.

On a more practical front, the degree has proven helpful with the writing and thinking skills honed through the courses I took at NUS, especially helping me through the tasks I have in my job. You'll likely find that knowing how to express yourself clearly and succinctly will be an important part of your professional journey, so take the time to hone that instead. I think what's important is to find a career that interests you and aligns with your values, and the rest of the pieces will naturally fall into place.

Would you recommend the PPE program to juniors? Any other advice you would like to give to prospective students with academic interests similar to yours?

Yes, for sure! You get exposed to a wide range of courses, expanding the possibility that you'll find a course/subject that you truly like. Of course, you'll end up having to take some courses that you may not feel so confident in (every PPE student will definitely proudly proclaim that they struggle with at least 1 out of the 3 majors, leading to some very creative ways to get around it), but I would say that's a unique feature of the program. To me, the most fun part of being a PPE Major is really how you get to switch from working on solving tutorial questions on consumer utility maximisation to writing essays on Plato and Socrates. If this sounds like something up your alley, definitely consider taking PPE.

A word of advice would be to carefully consider what you intend to get out of your university degree. Given that

PPE is a degree that's so general, it may be challenging to find a job that truly makes use of the hard skills or knowledge that you've gained from each of the 3 majors. Rather, treat it as a learning experience that exposes you to ideas that you would never have thought of before. I especially enjoyed each of the courses I took in NUS

precisely because I knew that I was there to learn for the sake of learning, and not just to gear up towards a career in the future. On the other hand, please take the time to explore what sorts of careers you might be interested in, and take steps towards achieving that.



Graduation Photoshoot with friends from Tembusu College & FASS



Matriculation day is a big event here! I'm wearing my sub-fusc, which we wear for all exams, dinners, and formal events

Faith Chng

Faith, your major was the Philosophy, Politics, and Economics (PPE) program. Why did you choose this program and what did you gain from the combination of these disciplines?

I felt some desire to do something impactful; tried out law, decided it wasn't for me, and landed on PPE. Growing up surrounded by strong institutions in Singapore, I also believed that policymaking was the most direct path to social impact.

Above all, PPE gave me the freedom to discover and confirm what I really wanted to do. The ultimate freedom with being a generalist (economists like yourselves probably relate) is the ability to 1) make interesting conversation, but also 2) explore options and close doors. Most 17-year-olds don't have a clue what they want to do—I definitely didn't. But my degree simultaneously opened

doors to internships in banks like Goldman Sachs and the Singapore Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which is probably quite rare. I am lucky to make my career decisions with better information.

Over time I also developed a deeper appreciation for each discipline, which gave me a good foundation to read widely. I doubt I'd be as open to engaging with a broad range of texts without early quantitative and qualitative exposure.

Did any of the three disciplines particularly appeal to you and why?

I've definitely had my phases with each. For a long time I was most comfortable with Political Science, but that was probably biased by my interest in current affairs and reading. In my later undergraduate years, I took a very transformative class—PE4102E Institutions and Political Economy—where I was introduced to the elegant and frankly beautiful applications of economics to social phenomena. My preference switched to economics after that. These days I engage more heavily with philosophy; I'm active in a philosophy interest group at school.

That said, I've always considered the three disciplines inextricably linked. Some subfields within each discipline definitely bleed into one another. My master's dissertation is motivated by a strand of philosophy, uses economic evaluation methods, and tackles a problem that is very much political: I'm performing cost-effectiveness analyses on Violence Against Women interventions. I guess I no longer have a strong preference.

More generally, how did you find studying at NUS? Did NUS meet your academic and non-academic expectations?

NUS was the time of my life. I grew a lot smarter, wiser, but more than that it was a comfortable environment to grow into my interests and meet the right people who pushed me to pursue them. I stayed on campus at Tembusu College for four (short) years, and in that time, I made terrific memories and met wonderful mentors that encouraged my moral ambition. Academically I attended some life-changing classes, and I definitely felt challenged at the right level. Non-academically, things were pretty fun. I made amazing friends in my course. People tend to say undergrad is the best time of your life, and yeah, I think I'd agree!

And now, you're studying at Oxford. What are you studying and how do you find the academic experience? How does Oxford compare to NUS? Do they need any help from us?

I'm currently doing the MSc in Global Governance and Diplomacy at the Oxford Department of International Development. Oxford is great in a different way; life is beautiful and historic and syrupy. One thing quite different is that students take academia very seriously here. Pressures like job search, chores, even food, are secondary to the main project of immersing yourself in the study of your discipline. I've really enjoyed the time and space for introspection. Students are also incredibly passionate about what they study; I've learnt so much about other disciplines just because people are so eager to share. People are undaunted by what they don't know and so academically curious, even in conversation. The faculty is excellent, of course, but so was the faculty in NUS.

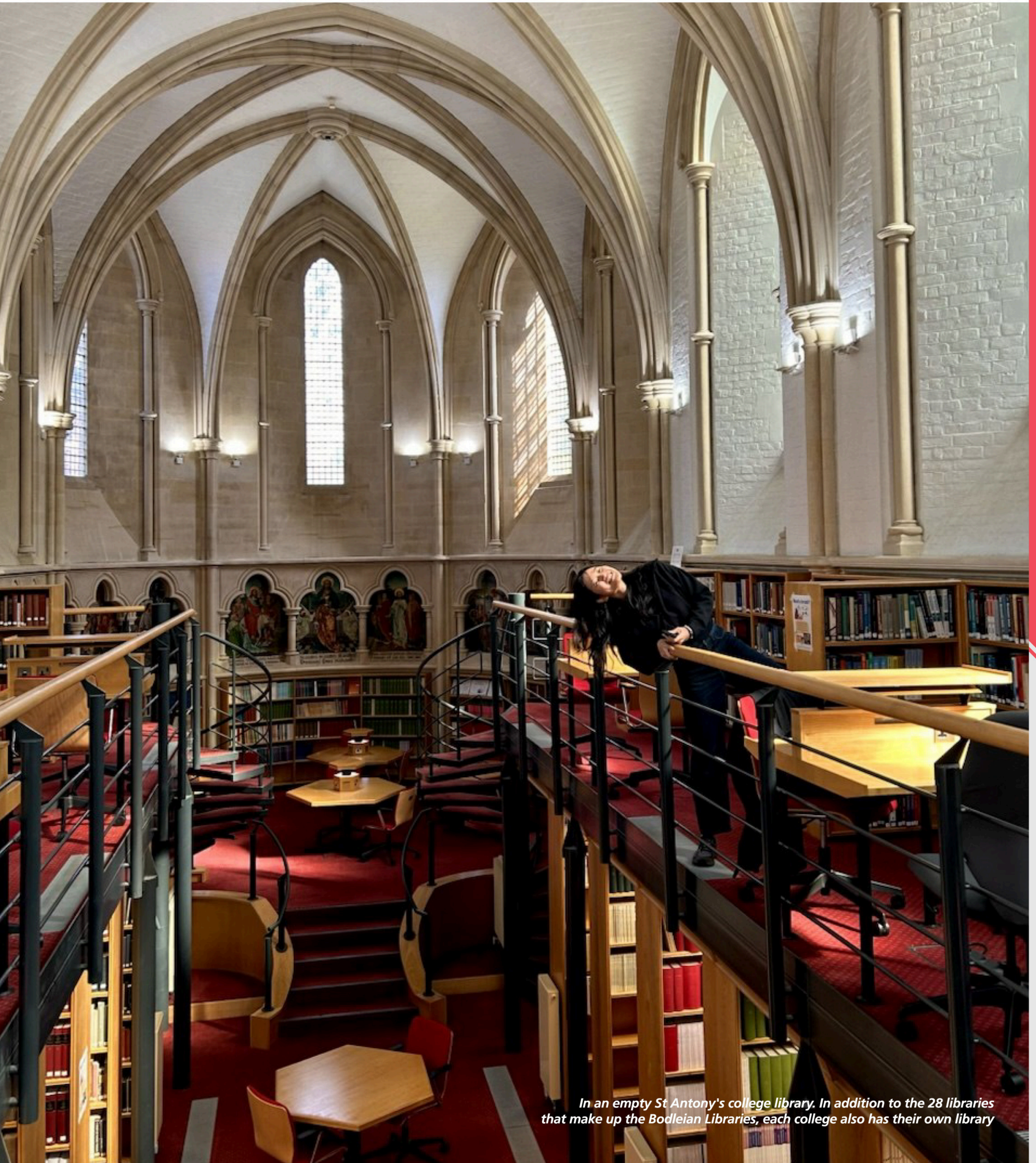
The two things Oxford needs from NUS are the UTown Yong Tau Foo and covered walkways. Yong Tau Foo because it's all I crave when I'm away. Covered walkways because it rains all the time here, and without covered walkways

everything is always just slightly damp. PPE has a very different reputation in Oxford as well, while it was quite niche in NUS, I quickly realised I wasn't special at all here.

And after Oxford, how do you foresee your academic/professional future? After a PPE degree, would you like to find a PPE job?

I would love to work in international development, philanthropy, or an area similarly impactful. I will likely join

the Political and Economic track of the Singaporean foreign service post-graduation, which is a role where I could deliver high impact as well. Sometime in the future, I would love to continue my studies, maybe get a PhD or a second master's in development economics, if anyone will have me. I'd love to find a PPE job; I see international development as a nice marriage of the three: a cosmopolitan philosophy, the soft power politics of international aid, and economic growth at the center of it all.



In an empty St Antony's college library. In addition to the 28 libraries that make up the Bodleian Libraries, each college also has their own library

Would you recommend the PPE program to juniors? Any other advice you would like to give to prospective students with academic interests similar to yours?

Absolutely! I would recommend it to prospective students who are ambitious, ready to be challenged, and who have big opinions on current affairs. If you want to understand power, this is the course for you. If you find yourself unshakably concerned about injustice, this is the course for

you. If you're all that AND willing to work hard to catch up with your peers in P/P/E, this is the course for you.

Advice I'd give is never pursue your goals in silence—keep talking about them, or better, find a community. I've benefitted incredibly from the opportunities people around me have shared generously. I would love to pay it forward—I'm always available for a chat. You can find me on LinkedIn under the same name.

Thanks for having me, NUS Economics!



Christmas dinner in Lincoln College, my college. Our festive celebration ended with carolling on the dinner tables. Spot me!