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Pushing the boundaries of learning - SMU School of Computing and Information Systems celebrates its 20th birthday

From a building on the edge of the old Bukit Timah campus, SCIS has grown into a highly sought-after school of computing and software engineering

By the SMU Corporate Communications team

09 Nov 2023

Over 400 people – namely alumni, faculty members and students – gathered to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the School of Computing and Information Systems (SCIS) of the Singapore Management University (SMU) on 20 Oct 2023.

Over the past two decades, the school has grown from strength to strength. Its alumni stand at over 6,000, its undergraduate population at over 2,300 and its postgraduate at close to 700, including about 130 doctoral students. SCIS is ranked #4 globally for Software Engineering based on output in year 2022 on CSRankings, an influential metric on research publication in computing areas. SCIS' postgraduate programme, the Master of IT in Business (MITB), has been recently ranked #2 in Asia, and #24 worldwide for the QS Business Master's Rankings 2024: Business Analytics. This demonstrates SCIS' track record in meeting the industry's demand for computing talent with a business orientation in recent years.

Surging enrolment in SCIS

In recent years, with the rapid pace of technological advancement, the demand for business professionals with a well-rounded expertise in tackling cyberthreats and other issues has increased. The growth of highly sought-after knowledge areas like Machine Learning, Human-Computer Interaction, and Cybersecurity has thus resulted in heightened interest in enrolling at SCIS.

“Computing technology has made impressive advances in recent years, in analytics, followed by Artificial Intelligence,” said SCIS Dean, Professor Pang Hwee Hwa, in a speech marking the anniversary. “These have triggered a wave of digitalisation as companies create new products and services using these technologies and that in turn, spurred a huge demand for computing talents. Our School has been responding to this demand through our research and education.”

In 2016, when Prof Pang was first appointed Dean, the School's cohort size was 276 and it offered only one undergraduate programme – the Bachelor of Science in Information Systems. Thereafter, the School expanded its intake by launching the Computer Science degree in 2019, the Computing and Law degree in 2020, and the Software Engineering degree in 2022. Today, the SCIS enrolls more than 600 undergraduates annually.

At the postgraduate level, enrolment in SCIS' MITB programme has grown from 190 students in the 2016 Academic Year to 280 students currently. “The School is seeing similar growth in our PhD degrees,” Prof Pang added. “In research, we have expanded beyond Information Systems too, and established our core research areas in AI and Data Science, Human Machine collaborative systems, and Information Systems and Technology.”

Key milestones



(L-R) The School at the Bukit Timah campus in 2003, and at the Bras Basah campus since 2005.

From a School on the fringe of the Bukit Timah campus of Singapore Management University (SMU) that began in November 2002, SCIS is now in the heart of Bras Basah, in Singapore's civic district. It was originally called the School of Information Systems (SIS).

The first batch of students enrolled in 2003 and graduated in 2006. It was also in 2006 that the PhD programme began with just four candidates. Thereafter was the launch in 2007 of the MITB programme – a unique programme that trained IT professionals in different areas of the banking industry. It was also in 2007 that the SMU-Carnegie Mellon University (CMU) Fast-Track Programme began, allowing SMU students to graduate within four to four and half years with both a bachelor's degree from SMU and a master's degree in IT from CMU.



Milestones to remember: (Clockwise from top left) Launch of the School of Information Systems at the Bukit Timah Campus led by Founding Dean, Professor Steve Miller (centre, second row); the first Commencement ceremony of the then School of Information Systems; celebrating the 10th anniversary of the school in 2013 at Joyden Hall in Bugis+ and the first batch of students in the SMU Master of IT in Business (MITB) programme.

The next 10 years saw the School expanding its ties with industry through collaborations in education and research. Some notable research efforts include Living Analytics Research Centre (LARC), SMU-Tata

Consultancy Services iCity Lab, Fujitsu-SMU Computing and Engineering Corporation, DBS-SMU Life Analytics Lab.

MITB went on to be recognised as one of the best of its kind, in specialised IT training, in the world. In the QS Masters in Business Analytics Rankings 2019, the School's Master of IT in Business (MITB) programme was ranked 1st in Asia and 11th worldwide out of 75 Masters in Business Analytics programmes from 17 countries around the globe. The new bachelor's degree in Computer Science was launched in 2019, and the Doctor of Engineering was launched in 2020 to transform IT professionals into leaders in the management of complex IT systems.



Dean Pang Hwee Hwa with the pioneer batch of Computer Science students in 2019. The school was renamed the School of Computing and Information Systems in 2021.

In 2021, the school was renamed the “School of Computing and Information Systems” to better reflect its growing aspirations to prepare students for a future where they can harness computing technology for the evolving needs of society. Over the past two years, the school has also made the effort to deepen students’ knowledge and network in cloud computing through close collaboration with KPMG, Google, Accenture and Amazon Web Services.

Alumni networks and ties that bind

Nonetheless, SCIS remains a tight-knit and supportive community where students enjoy close links with alumni.

Since May this year, SCIS has held four other alumni events leading up to the anniversary dinner. The first was an evening with technopreneur and angel investor John Wu, formerly Chief Technology Officer of Alibaba Group and chief architect of Yahoo!'s directory search engine and its software applications. In June, alumni from the pioneer intakes of 2003, 2004, and 2005 gathered at the university lounge for a reunion with old friends and faculty, including SCIS’ Founding Dean Prof Steven Miller and Prof Pang, SCIS’ current Dean.

In August, students and alumni enjoyed an evening of candid sharing by illustrious alumni Mr Aaron Tan, co-founder of Carro; Mr Marcus Wee, co-founder of Aftershock PC; Mr Calixto Tay, co-founder of Originally US; and Mr Alvin Poh, founder of Super Scaling. In September, MITB students, alumni, and industry leaders came together for a panel discussion on the impact of AI and machine learning on the professional landscape.

The distinguished panellists include Mr [Aaron Wong](#) from Paypal Singapore, and MITB alumni Ms [Xuyi Cheng](#) from Lazada, Mr [Gerry Chng](#) from Deloitte, and Mr [Tri Le](#) from GE Digital.



Ms Sarah Chu and her husband, Mr Shamus Ming Mohan (in matching outfits), from the Class of 2014, with their fellow alumni at the anniversary dinner at SMU Hall.

Ms Sarah Chu, who graduated from the Class of 2014 and is now working in the finance and banking industry, was at the anniversary dinner with her husband, Mr Shamus Ming Mohan. They met in their freshmen year at the school, and are now parents to three young children.

She said she was very impressed by how the School has evolved. “It feels so surreal to see all the professors again,” Ms Chu said. “It felt like we just graduated but in fact we’ve already been in the corporate world for almost 10 years! It was also heartening to see how SCIS has matured over the years, notably having more specialised tracks which are more relevant now.”

The dinner was a walk down memory lane, with dance performances by students and faculty members, a birthday cake and many videos shown. One heartwarming video showed Prof Miller, the Professor Emeritus of Information Systems, sharing the evolution of the school as seen through the various designs of its polo tees. He was visibly touched by the black polo tee the school gifted him.

“So much has happened in terms of building the school’s depth, breadth, capability and quality,” he said in the video, his voice starting to break with emotion. “I am so thankful to what Prof Pang Hwee Hwa and all of the Dean’s Office, all the faculty serving the administrative roles, and the entire SCIS community have done to take the school further, to make it better, to keep it progressing and growing. While I can’t be with you here today because, after 23 amazing years in Singapore, I have finally returned to the United States for family reasons. I wish you the best. My heart and my spirit will always be with SCIS.”

More videos at <https://computing.smu.edu.sg/smsmuscis20>