Donors’ Choice

NTU’s iGave programme is a multi-campaign effort that galvanises all stakeholders including alumni members, faculty, staff, parents as well as businesses and community organisations to support NTU in its mission of becoming a top global university.

The University, in its NTU 2015 Strategic Plan, has identified five key areas of focus. These are in the areas of developing comprehensive approaches in sustainability for our planet, becoming a centre for new media, playing a leading role in future healthcare, developing a knowledge hub to bridge the best of the East and West, and being on the cutting edge of innovation in Asia.

Mrs Marina Tan Harper, the Director of the Development Office which established the iGave programme said: “It is very heartening to note that the number of donors has jumped from 9,631 to 13,475 in the last financial year. Of these, the largest increase came from our alumni which increased by some 3,200 donors.”

Apart from funding bursaries for students in financial difficulty, gifts to the iGave programme support the advancement of our schools, allowing them to tap on emerging opportunities in education, research and innovation to achieve their highest priorities with the greatest flexibility.

iGave also supports a range of broad-based activities such as community service projects and study tours run by student organisations. These provide an added dimension to the NTU experience, enabling students to sample experiential learning beyond the confines of the classroom.

The suite of iGave programmes has indeed provided additional resources to its more than 34,700 students and over 5,000 faculty and staff members.

Said Marina: “NTU is truly touched by the generosity of all donors who contributed. It shows a proud commitment and an enduring partnership in helping our students and in advancing NTU to become a great university. And for this, you have our heartfelt and sincere thanks.”
Raymond Yap is a man on a mission – to persuade his fellow alumni members to give back to their alma mater.

The motivational trainer knows firsthand how a little help can make a life-changing difference. “I was in the second batch of NTI students. Getting a degree helped me support my family so giving back to NTU now is a very personal thing.”

When asked recently if he would like to become an ambassador for the Alumni Giving campaign, Mr Yap, a Mechanical and Production graduate accepted the challenge without hesitation. “I firmly believe in the value of Alumni Giving so I am happy to try and get others on board as well.” He aims to share with them the significant advances NTU has made over the years and how they can continue to support their alma mater.

While the father of two has not seen some of his varsity-mates in years, he is not daunted by the task at hand. “I have an email group so that’s a start, and talking about how we can give back to NTU even after all these years is a good reason to reconnect with old friends.”

And his message to them: “We all benefitted from our days of study in university. Now we are in a position to give something back so it’s just a logical thing to do. With more donations, the university would be able to help more students.”

Phonathon works its magic

The personal touch of NTU’s Phonathon programme is certainly reaping the rewards – encouraging alumni members in particular who have not donated in the past, to give back to the university.

Of the more than 9,000 gifts received from NTU’s alumni members in the last financial year, nearly two-thirds were secured by these handpicked student callers. Their calls to 2011 graduating students to make a Class Gift before they leave were also well received.

Said Phonathon caller Cindy Neo, 21: “People are more willing to give when they are approached through the Phonathon project as it is a great opportunity to talk to donors directly and answer any queries they may have.”

The callers, many of whom are on a work-study scheme, benefit as well, earning some pocket money while doing a good deed for the university and their fellow students.

Sometimes all that a donor needs is just the gentle reminder of a telephone call. As one supporter who penned a note of thanks to the Phonathon callers said: “It didn’t occur to me that my last contribution to NTU has been so long. Rather embarrassing, isn’t it? However, I’m surprised to have received your call and acknowledge the extent of effort that you and your fellow undergrads are undertaking for this fundraising campaign. Just for this spirit of zeal and kindness, I shall respond favourably!”

“It’s encouraging to know that there are students like you who are working even on Sundays to secure such gifts. Thank you for working so hard on behalf of your fellow students.”
Graduation Giving Ambassadors are now playing a bigger role in getting their fellow students to make a Class Gift before they leave the university.

Said Ambassador Wesley Tham: “As final year students, it is much easier for us to talk to our peers and impress upon them why it is important to give something back to the university before we graduate.”

Since March these volunteers have been visiting tutorial rooms and lecture theatres where they are given a few minutes to speak to their fellow students about making a gift.

“These are great opportunities to talk about the Graduation Giving campaign. But the real work for us is still the one-on-one conversations we have with our fellow students over lunch or between lessons. That’s where we can share with them how much this programme helps the university. Student participation is crucial as it reflects how NTU as a whole is perceived by outsiders. If we don’t support our university, it is hard to convince an individual or a company outside to donate towards NTU,” explained Ambassador Ivan Chan.

Asked if the ambassadors were daunted by the record participation rate achieved by their predecessors last year which hit almost 71%, Daniel Chow said: “We’ll do our best! Graduating students are all in high spirits now as their big day approaches so this is the right time to remind them to give towards this campaign.”

Final-year student Andy Han was one who decided to make a gift more than a year ago. “I heard of the campaign from one of my friends who was an Ambassador. Looking back at the good experience I had in NTU, making a donation is just a small gesture of thanks on my part. Besides I also want to wear the iGave Graduation Pin on my gown!”

The pin has now become a coveted accessory among senior students. Ambassadors pin it to the gowns of students who support the campaign shortly before the graduation ceremony begins.

Another much sought-after symbol of the Graduation Giving campaign is the online iGave badge (left) that donors can post on their Facebook page or on other social networks.

An animated video (www.ntu.edu.sg/D0/igave/index.html) was released in January at the start of the Graduation Giving 2011 campaign to foster closer ties between soon-to-be graduates and their alma mater. Screened at a special Donut Party which kicked off the campaign, the video shows how earning an NTU degree enriches the life and stature of all graduates. It also highlights the importance of giving back to NTU.
Mr Lim Thian Fatt is looking forward to his reunion organised by NTU later this year as it will be the first time in years that he will be able to reconnect with some of his varsity-mates from the Class of ’89.

Recalling those heady days, the 46-year-old managing director of a construction company said: “As important as studies were, somehow my fondest memories are not in the pursuit of studies itself, but in the friendships that I made especially with my fellow students and faculty members. It will be good to see those familiar faces once again.”

The university will be organising two reunions – one for those who graduated between 1986 and 1990 and another for those who got their degrees between 1991 and 1995. While details of the parties are still being finalised, the organisers promise that these will be nights to remember with a host of fun activities, good food and the music of the day to heighten the nostalgia.

Indeed many will surely have interesting stories to tell of their adventures such as Ms Sophia Pang, a senior IT specialist who has done NTU proud by being the first Singaporean woman to ski to the South Pole in 2009.

Said Sophia: “I remember varsity games were always fun because they were good breaks from the pressures of studies. I do miss seeing the people I studied with the most. Some have just drifted away over time which is a pity but I hope to meet up with as many of them as possible. It’s just been too long,” said Ms Pang who graduated in 1994 with a degree in accountancy.

To add greater significance to the reunion, several volunteers led by Mr M A Akbar (Class of ’86) and Mr Sarjit Singh (Class of ’91) have been linking up to former classmates, encouraging them to contribute to a class gift.

“It’s just the right thing to do,” said Sarjit. “We will be helping many deserving students gain that same quality education and a life-changing experience that has left indelible marks on all of us.”

The response so far has been very encouraging. Said Akbar: “I am very confident that we will be able to make a meaningful class gift. This will be something all of us will be able to look back on with pride ... a little footprint we leave behind in the university as we come together to celebrate a reunion of friends.”
Giving starts at home

Madam Chiu Wei Chin Chi and her husband Mr Chang Cheng Chang taught their boys to think of others from a very early age. Leading by example, they are active volunteers and donors supporting a number of causes close to their hearts.

The couple attended NTU’s Parents’ Day 2010 shortly after their son Yu Cheng started his mechanical engineering studies and soon became fans of the university’s iGive programme as it dovetailed perfectly with their own philanthropic values.

Said the mother of three: “At the Parents’ Day session, we were both very touched listening to the speeches and seeing how faculty members interacted with their students. You can see that the lecturers work very hard and they care a lot for their students.”

This obvious passion left a strong impression on this Taiwanese couple. Soon after their visit, they received an iGive letter inviting parents to play a part in making a gift to NTU.

“When the letter came asking us to give as part of the NTU family, we felt it was a meaningful thing for us to offer our support. As parents we should be part of a team with the university to give the best education to our children,” said Mr Chang who wrote a cheque for $6,000.

The Changs were also inspired to give because they believe the NTU experience is having a strong positive effect on their son. “In some universities, the students tend to play around a lot, but I see my son studying very hard at NTU, so it’s different. I also like the culture of sharing among the students. In their study groups, the students help each other and this collaboration has touched me.”

Supporting worthy causes was nothing new to the couple who migrated to Singapore 10 years ago. They have been devoting much of their free time to a variety of causes including being active volunteers with the Tzu Chi Foundation, a Buddhist organisation that focuses on community service.

This commendable spirit has certainly rubbed off on their three children. The boys aged 24, 21 and 19 are all passionate about volunteering, especially for environmental causes. Yu Cheng chose to study mechanical engineering at NTU because he wants to design environmentally-friendly machines.

The Chang family – caring and sharing as one. [Yu Cheng is on the extreme right]
More than 2,000 faculty and staff gathered at the Nanyang Auditorium on February 9 to witness the kick-off to this year’s Faculty & Staff Giving campaign which aims to support the university and its students achieve greater heights of excellence.

As the party was held during the Lunar New Year season, it had a traditional Chinese theme which included lion dancers, stalls offering festive goodies, fortune telling and calligraphy.

Speaking to his colleagues at the event, NTU’s President-Designate Professor Bertil Andersson said: “As faculty and staff members, we give because we believe in our cause. We believe in our students who need help. We believe in taking this university to greater heights of achievement. But most of all, we need to believe in ourselves – that in giving what we can, each one of us is making a big difference.”

For the first time, this campaign has two co-chairs to foster a cohesive spirit of generosity among the faculty and staff. Assoc Prof Yow Kin Choong and Assoc Prof Lok Tat Seng, helped by 60 ambassadors, have been doing their part in encouraging their colleagues to render their support.

Assoc Prof Lok said the wholehearted commitment of the NTU community in this campaign will inspire others outside the university to follow their example in funding and supporting NTU and its many programmes.

Miss Julinah Sabria Binte Abu Bakar who works in the library explains why she a supporter of the campaign: “Faculty & Staff Giving to me is a very important initiative and should be taken seriously by all. I know my contribution will go a long way to help students in their academic journey.”

This view was echoed by Research Fellow Yi Shouliang of The Singapore Membrane Technology Centre who said: “As staff and faculty of NTU, we all have a part to play in the future of NTU and its students. Events like this highlight how meaningful and important our roles are in giving towards the betterment of our students and the university. NTU can definitely count on my full support!”

Faculty & Staff Giving ambassador Mrs Koh-Tang Lai Sim of the School of Civil and Environmental Engineering who has been with the University about 20 years said she too is happy to do her part: “I use every opportunity I get to talk to my colleagues about the importance of taking part and showing our support in making this a great global university.”
Seeking businesses with a heart

Beauty queen turned businesswoman Teo Ser Lee is looking for dedicated business partners to join her in supporting NTU.

Being the inaugural chair of the recently-revamped Business and Community Partners (BCP) programme, Ser Lee, the founder and director of Protocol Academy Private Limited was one of the first to make a donation. Through her example and network of contacts, she aims to persuade senior corporate representatives and community leaders to support the programme which raises funds for undergraduates in need of financial help.

As a former graduate of the Nanyang Business School, she knows the struggle many students go through. “While I was not disadvantaged, I did not come from a rich household and had to work part-time giving tuition, waitressing and modelling. I was awarded a scholarship and that really helped. So I know firsthand how difficult it is for some students who have to work and study at the same time. Our message to the business community is simply that they can play a direct role in helping the university and its students.”

A key advantage of the BCP programme which kicked off in January is that it allows companies, even those with modest philanthropic budgets, to have a stake in the growth and development of the university and its students. Supporters can participate at gift levels ranging from a bronze partner at $5,000 to a platinum partner at $50,000. Indeed gifts of any amounts are welcome.

Within the first four months, BCP has already garnered more than 100 partners, most of whom are first-time donors to the university.

Platinum partner Mr Lim Siah Mong, managing director of Lubritrade Trading Private Limited said: “The continued progress of our nation depends on our young people being well-educated and attaining their fullest potential. Financial constraints should not be an obstacle to their desire to complete their tertiary studies and become useful citizens. We are happy to join hands with NTU to help them achieve their academic dreams.”

Besides giving corporations and community organisations opportunities to become strategic partners, NTU also organises various social events for its supporters as a measure of its thanks. These gatherings allow business and community leaders to network and widen their pool of contacts with their like-minded peers and with NTU’s faculty, staff and students.

“We hope businesses will see their involvement in this campaign as a win-win situation. They play a crucial role in contributing to NTU, its programmes and the development of its students who may one day end up working for their companies,” said Ser Lee.

For more information on the BCP programme and how you too can play your part, logon to www.ntu.edu.sg/DO/bcp

Business graduate Teo Ser Lee hopes to encourage more companies to support student bursaries.

(Photograph source: Lianhe Zaobao © Singapore Press Holdings Limited. Reprinted with permission)