

Getting To Know Our Students

Dr Cheryl Tay, PhD graduate



Dr Cheryl Tay is a PhD graduate, recipient of the Nanyang President's Graduate Scholarship, valedictorian for the Class of 2018, and national kayaker in 2009.

What is your research project about?

My research looks at crew boat paddling in sprint kayaking. Specifically, I am interested to find out how crew-specific factors such as stroke synchronisation and seat order affect sprint kayaking performance. I work with the Team Singapore national athletes, as well as paddlers from a diverse range of abilities.

What inspired you to dive into the area of your research?

It started off with wanting to paddle faster. Growing up, I always thought I would study engineering like my parents. Although I did not know it then, my life changed when I first picked up a paddle with the canoeing team during my junior college days. I was always thinking about how I could improve as a paddler, and that naturally led me to the world of sport science. I made it to the national team in 2009 and the nice thing about training competitively for a sport is the perspective and clarity it gives you – I found out that the more I paddled, the more questions I had. Since Google couldn't answer my questions, I figured research was the way to go.

What are the challenges you faced?

The biggest challenge I face is in finding the balance between art and science for a perfect study. On one hand, good research calls for a high level of control and design in the experiment/investigation. On the other, athletic performance is best examined in as realistic a setting to the actual competition as possible. The struggle between control and ecological validity is real.

What is your greatest accomplishment as a researcher?

To date, my greatest accomplishment was having contributed my research expertise to the Singapore Canoe-Kayak Sprint Team en route to their record-breaking medal haul of 7 gold and 5 silver medals at the 2015 SEA Games. I had been working actively with the team for 3 months before the Games, performing video analysis of their paddling technique in both individual and crew boats. As a sport scientist, the translation of research into actual performance results for the athletes was fulfilling, and what made it even sweeter was that these were the people I have known for almost ten years.

What do you feel most grateful about in your research?

Every day I am grateful that my research allows me to contribute to the sport of Canoe-Kayak Sprint, especially in Singapore where most athletes leave their sport once they finish school. To be able to stay connected with my sport is indeed a blessing.

What is your most treasured memory in NIE?

Eight years of memories make it difficult to choose from; I would be hard-pressed to pick one. Perhaps I will share my first impression of NIE. The first time I arrived at the NIE campus, I came by the back gate of Block 4. As any NIE student would know, this is not the most welcoming sight; and what greeted me was a never-ending flight of stairs. On a more auspicious note, I came in by the main lobby on my first day of school, and I remembered being filled with awe and a great sense of purpose.

If you could change anything, would you still want to be part of NIE? If so, why?

Absolutely. Coming to NIE and NTU to pursue my undergraduate studies in Sport Science, and continuing on to a PhD are the best decisions I have made. Over the past eight years, I have benefited tremendously from the exposure and camaraderie of the community here. On top of these, there were many opportunities to further develop my research and sporting interests.

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