

Alumni Journeys

SARAH NOVAK ('18)



PHILOSOPHY, POLITICS, AND ECONOMICS MAJOR,
ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES MINOR

College is for exploring, enjoying, and being challenged. It's for trying new things--it's particularly for going outside of your comfort zone and daring to explore new topics and engage with diverse viewpoints. If you allow yourself to do this, it is my genuine belief that other good things will follow.

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Fun Facts

- **Major/Minor:** PPE/Environmental Studies
- **Residential College:** Cendana College
- **Favorite Common Curriculum Class:** Comparative Social Inquiry (CSI)
- **Favorite Major Class:** Emotions and Politics, Chinese Political Philosophy
- **Favorite Elective(s):** Foundations of the Environmental Humanities
- **Extracurricular Activities in Yale-NUS:** Netball, CIPE Student Advisory Committee, Fox & Hedgehog, Student Government, Cycling Club, Varsity Tennis
- **Favorite Book:** Anything by Ursula Le Guin, and recently I have been reading lots of biographies
- **Favorite Movie:** Can't choose one!
- **Dogs or Cats?:** Dogs!
- **Fun Fact:** I saw more of Singapore on my bike than any other form of transport: there are so many beautiful hidden corners on the island!

Academic Experience in Yale-NUS College

Favorite Common Curriculum Class

It's genuinely very difficult to choose, because I really enjoyed the Common Curriculum. The best one for me has to have been *Comparative Social Inquiry (CSI)*. CSI was my first exposure to the deep and fascinating world of social sciences: critical social theory, anthropology, and sociology completely opened my mind to examining the familiar through an entirely new lens. I had an incredibly dedicated and enthusiastic professor, Michael Maniates, who inspired me deeply in my first year in Singapore and who has ended up playing a core role in my Yale-NUS experience and my educational decisions since.

[Click here to learn more about the Common Curriculum!](#)

Favorite Major Class

It has to be a tie between Christina Tarnopolosky's *Emotions and Politics*, and Elton Chan's *Chinese Political Philosophy*. Both of these courses exemplified the breadth of the intellectual curiosity at the heart of the Philosophy, Politics and Economics (PPE) major. Both courses took strands of history, politics, current affairs, art and literature and wove them all together into a cohesive story of human societies. I found these classes illuminating, and still highly relevant to me today.

[Click here to learn more about the PPE Major!](#)

Favorite Elective Class

In my final semester of my senior year I took Matthew Schneider-Mayerson's *Foundations of the Environmental Humanities*, a colourful and wide-ranging course that crossed the realms of environmental literature, film, ecocriticism, philosophy, and politics. I loved how unconventional and creative this course was in subject matter and approach. Coincidentally, one of the essays I wrote in that class has just been published as part of an anthology called *Eating Chili Crab in the Anthropocene*, published by Ethos Books and containing a number of pieces by Yale-NUS students.

[Click here to learn more about Environmental Studies!](#)

Learning Outside the Classroom

Week 7: Sakaerat

We went to Sakaerat, a conservation centre in a jungle near Bangkok, Thailand. For me it was an entirely unexpected Week 7 trip, but was all the more rewarding for the fact that it was unlike anything I'd ever experienced in my life. We spent much of it observing local wildlife, including the intricacies of butterfly wings and how they refract light. This particular area in Thailand is known to be the world-leading spot for four metre-long giant cobras (as well as many other snakes, spiders, and butterflies). Those cobras have stuck in my mind!

Semester Abroad: University of Oxford

During my Junior year I was able to achieve a dream of mine to attend the *University of Oxford*, a hugely consequential and enjoyable experience that ended up drawing me back a second time to complete my Masters. I attended St. Catherine's College, and was able to study a variety of courses from the Oxford PPE syllabus as well as try my hand at some masters-level content and research at the School of Geography and Environment.

Summer Abroad: CIPE Summer Internship

CIPE generously supported me to complete an internship in Washington, D.C. during my sophomore year summer. The internship was with the World Affairs Councils of America, the largest international affairs and education NGO in the United States. It was a dynamic and exciting time to be in D.C., and I had fantastic experiences attending House and Senate hearings and a wide variety of talks and events happening around the city.

Yale-NUS College Learning Across Boundaries (LAB)

One of my most memorable Yale-NUS experiences was certainly the LAB trip I went on to Israel and Palestine. The focus of the trip was wide-ranging, covering the history, politics and religions of the Middle East. I was bowled over by the complexity and depth of the stories told to us, and by how incredibly ancient the landscape and environment was. Coming from the relatively young country of New Zealand, it was my first connection to deep time and history.

Dear Applicant,

Congratulations! You've finished high school, and now you get to make one of the most exciting decisions of your life--where to study, what to study, and what kind of person you'd like to be. For the first time, this decision is truly yours. When I left high school, I wanted an adventure. I chose Yale-NUS College because it was a bit different, a bit "out of the box", and so much more vibrant and interesting than anywhere else I had considered. I hope that wherever you end up will be equally as thrilling--because the truth is, you only get to pursue college once. I figure you may as well do something that moves you.

It can be easy to emerge from high school and feel compelled to follow the predictable path--the path towards a "good career" or a "prestigious grad school". Can I please urge you to put these things out of your mind. College is for exploring, enjoying, and being challenged. It's for trying new things--it's particularly for going outside of your comfort zone and daring to explore new topics and engage with diverse viewpoints. If you allow yourself to do this, it is my genuine belief that other good things will follow.

So enjoy! If you end up choosing Yale-NUS, I hope you make the most of this incredible place. Yale-NUS opened my eyes to a new way of being, and has been a fantastic platform for everything I have done since, from grad school to jobs. But the best thing about Yale-NUS is that it gives you the intellectual freedom to learn in the deepest and most wide-ranging way possible. I hope you have the most fantastic time.