

## Alumni Journeys

### ZHONGXUAN KHWA ('20)



MATHEMATICAL, COMPUTATIONAL, AND  
STATISTICAL SCIENCES

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### Fun Facts

- **Major:** Mathematical, Computational, and Statistical Sciences
- **Residential College:** Elm College
- **Favorite Common Curriculum Class:** Quantitative Reasoning
- **Favorite Major Class:** Discrete Mathematics
- **Favorite Elective(s):** Asian Theatre, Introduction to Vocal Technique and Performance
- **Extracurricular Activities in Yale-NUS:** Ballroom Society, Brewhouse, Admissions (Tour Guide), Legally Blonde (Musical), Intercultural Peer Advisor, RC<sup>3</sup>, Peer Tutor, Student Government Senate, Residential College Advisor
- **Favorite Book:** Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind
- **Favorite Movie:** The Prestige
- **Dogs or Cats?:** Cats! But dogs are great as well!
- **Fun Fact:** I was an extra on Crazy Rich Asians!

## Academic Experience in Yale-NUS College

### *Favorite Common Curriculum Class*

One of the classes that had a big impact on my Yale-NUS journey early on was *Quantitative Reasoning (QR)*, a course that we take in our first year as part of the Common Curriculum. The class is an introduction to quantitative methods and some basic statistics, and we also learn how to code in the R language. This class rekindled my interest in coding and in mathematics, which were topics that I had done well in in high school, but had not considered as an option for my major. QR reminded me why I enjoyed these topics so much, and it nudged me towards trying out some MCS classes. Once I started, I spiraled very deep into the MCS major!

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

### *Favorite Major Class*

*Discrete Mathematics* opened my eyes to the field of combinatorics and graph theory, and the class was taught with a strong hands-on problem-solving methodology, which really helped to spark my interest in the topics. In fact, almost all the undergraduate research I have done was on something related to combinatorics or graph theory!

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

### *Favorite Elective Class*

I took *Asian Theatre* as my first ever elective module, and I decided to try it out because I was curious about theatre and it seemed like an interesting course. As a complete beginner, it was definitely a step out of my comfort zone, but I really enjoyed the physicality of the course, and I also found the theory very interesting. It was far from an easy course for me, but it was precisely the type of experience I hoped to get in Yale-NUS!

[Click here to learn more about the Arts & Humanities Major!](#)

## Learning Outside the Classroom

### *Week 7: “Stories of Ourselves”*

For week 7, I stayed in Singapore for a course titled “*Stories of Ourselves*”. It explored the various narratives that exists in Singapore about the lives we lead – we spent a good time looking at the narrative provided by the state, and then explored some alternate narratives by speaking with individuals who shared their lived experiences. As a Singaporean, the course really made me seriously explore my relationship with my country, and broadened my understanding of the civic society discourse in Singapore. It convinced me to look deeper into these issues, and pushed me to be a more active citizen!

### *Semester Abroad: The University of Copenhagen*

The University of Copenhagen is well known in the region for the science research conducted, and I had the chance to take a number of MSc level courses with the Computer Science department there. I was also lucky enough to work with researchers in CopeNLU on an independent research project on Natural Language Understanding and Graph Theory! My semester in Copenhagen was the longest time that I’ve spent outside of Singapore, and I really embraced the challenge of learning to live in a new city, finding a routine, and making new connections. Some of my favorite memories revolved around discovering a new interest in social dancing, and the number of friends that I’ve made through that experience!

### *Summer Abroad: Self-Sourced Internship Funding*

My Year 3 summer was also spent in Copenhagen, with the support of the [self-sourced internship fund](#) offered by [CIPE](#). This allowed me to spend the summer working full time with a research lab in Copenhagen. Many of the fond memories involve casual conversations with the other researchers in the lab over common interests, and learning about all the cool research topics that people were working on! The researchers were very welcoming and I really connected with them, and that was a very nice way to begin my journey into research. It was a truly eye-opening experience as I was treated just like a PhD student, allowing me to work independently while benefiting from the supervision of other experienced researchers. It was this experience that made me decide to pursue a PhD in Machine Learning in the future, as I found the research experience to be incredibly rewarding!

*Dear Applicant,*

Before I go, a piece of advice for the high school students who are in the process of applying to university, waiting to begin their next chapter in life. It is completely normal to be anxious about what lies ahead in the future - many people don't know what they're doing at this point in their lives, and the decisions you're making will probably have some impact on your life down the road. I wouldn't tell you to just dive in and try - I understand that the freedom to fail is not one that everyone has, and that there are many factors that contribute to how your journey will be shaped over the next few years. My advice for anyone is to be kind to yourself and lean onto those around you. Try to make time for things like self care or for activities that bring you happiness. A large part of my time in Yale-NUS was spent on my extracurricular activities, but doing the things that I loved gave me the energy to keep working when I needed to! Making time for the people around you is also very important - one of my biggest regrets in Yale-NUS was not dedicating enough time to my friends, many of whom had contributed greatly to my personal growth. Lastly, university, and especially Yale-NUS, can very often be a stressful place, but try to make decisions based on what you think is best for you, rather than the external pressure from what you see around you.