

Government Reforms in Social
Sciences and Humanities
Research in Singapore:
A Case Study 🔍

Hot off the press: What's cookin' and brewin'?

- On 07 November 2016, DPM Shanmugaratnam announced that the Ministry of Education will spend SGD\$350 million (USD\$250 million) to boost research in the social sciences and humanities over the next five years
- The government will also establish the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) in 2017
- SSRC partnerships with US institutes



(DPM Tharman Shanmugaratnam spoke at the launch of the Singapore Management University's Institute for Societal Leadership in 2016)

Flow of Presentation



Case study: **45%** increase in government funding for social science and humanities research

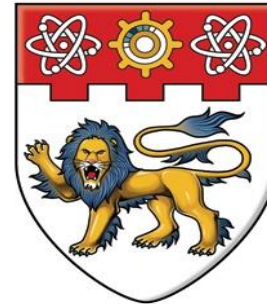
Factors

1. Key social and political events in recent years

Consequence

2. Social Science Research Council

Consequence



3. Education reform in NTU

1. Key political and social changes in Singapore in recent years

- Ageing population and low fertility rate continued...
 - As of 2016, the country has an ultra-low fertility rate of >1.4
- Increased number of immigrants in Singapore
 - In 2010, the non-resident population (those born outside of Singapore) was 1,305,011 out of a total population of 5,076,732
- More pronounced presence of political activism
 - Surge of alternative media such as community blogging platforms and social media

2a. Aims of the SSRC

Preserving
social
mobility 👍

Ageing
population



Improving
non-material
QOL ❤️

Building a
common
Singaporean
identity/-ies



Sustaining
economic
dynamism



**Social
Science
Research
Council**



Developing a
sense of
belonging in
a globalised
world 🌐

2b. Composition of the SSRC

Local Social Science and Humanities Academics	Members with Rich Experience in Public Policy	Public Intellectuals
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Deputy Chairman: Prof Chan Heng Chee (Chairman at LKY Centre for Innovative Cities at SUTD)• Advisor: Prof Wang Gungwu (University Professor at the National University of Singapore)• Distinguished Professors/ Provosts/ Deans from NUS, NTU, SMU, SUTD	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mr Peter Ho (Senior Advisor at Centre for Strategic Futures)• Dr Beh Swan Gin (Chairman at the Singapore Economic Development Board)• Mrs Tan Ching Yee (Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Health)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prof Kishore Mahbubani (Dean at LKY School of Public Policy at the National University of Singapore)• Mr Ravi Menon (Managing Director at the Monetary Authority of Singapore)
Total: 10	3	2

2c. My evaluation of the SSRC

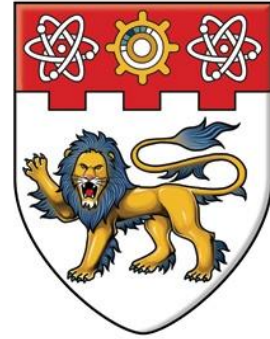
! Potential winners and losers of this government reform:

- **PW:** The academia and government service
- **PL:** Non-governmental organisations, independent social welfare groups and public figures that are equally invested to achieve key aims set out by the SSRC
- **PO:** Risk of being a coterie of technocrats or social elites, may not effectively address the practical needs of the people as a result

? Strategic differences between the SSRC and existing think-tanks in Singapore (e.g. the Institute of Policy Studies) have yet to be articulated

3a. Effects of policy reform on higher education institutions in Singapore

- Nanyang Technological University will 'expand' and 'restructure' its programmes in the Humanities and Social Sciences, starting from August 2017
- Rationales for this education reform:
 - Enhance opportunities for interdisciplinary academic research
 - Introduction of new programmes such as Science, Technology and Society; Health and Society



3b. My evaluation of the education reform in NTU

- ✓ Innovative cross-disciplinary programmes: marrying STEM with the Social Sciences and Humanities
- ✓ Possibly part of a larger goal to distinguish NTU from top global universities with niche R&D in science and technology
 - ! Risk of de-prioritising Humanities disciplines that do not fit in well with the STEM-SSH combination

Who are the other potential winners and losers of these government reforms?

How would you resolve the power struggle between the existing vs. absent players of these government reforms?

Thank you for your time and
kind attention 😊

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