

# BA Grads bag top NUS Scholarships

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**NOT FROM TOP SCHOOLS, BUT THEY MADE GOOD**

One's a JC failure, the other used to play truant. But now they're the...

## First poly students to bag top NUS scholarship

By Frana Liew  
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**T**HE neighbourhood school student failed his first test in junior college, and his teacher's comment stung.

He said, "Are you sure you are a seven-pointer?"

The teacher knew the boy had scored seven points at his O levels, which is a good score. Top students score six points.

After the first three months, the student, Quek Siu Rui, ended up leaving junior college, opting for the polytechnic route.

But those painful words spurred him to work harder.

Now the 20-year-old is setting a record.

He is one of two polytechnic students to receive the Global Merit Scholarship from the National University of Singapore (NUS).

**FIRST TIME**

It is the first time the university has picked polytechnic students for this scholarship.



From left, Alvin Lim and Quek Siu Rui, who both won the Global Merit Scholarship, and Soong Jun Kit, who will study medicine at NUS.

From a total of 1,589 applicants, 400 were shortlisted for interviews, and a final 15 offered the prestigious scholarship.

Of these 15 are Siu Rui, and Alvin Lim, both from Ngee Ann Polytechnic.

Siu Rui has a Diploma in Business Studies, while Alvin has a Diploma in Banking and Finance - both of these were top students in their respective courses.

After serving their national service, they will be furthering their studies at NUS' School of Business.

Introduced in 2005, the Global Merit Scholarship is awarded to those with strong academic results and co-curricular activities achievements.

The scholarship covers a student's subsidised tuition fee of about \$6,000, provides an annual living allowance of \$5,000 and an annual accommodation allowance of \$2,000.

**I used to play truant in secondary school and disrupt class a lot.**

- Alvin Lim, who had to move from Ngee Ann to NUS' School of Business.

The award winners can enrol in a double- or joint-degree course with a top overseas partner university.

And they can also take part in the prestigious University Scholars' Programme, as well as go on overseas student exchange programmes.

Siu Rui credits his alma mater, Glenside Secondary School (now Clementi

Woodly), for helping him break out of his shell.

"Glenside gave me a chance, sending me for OES (Overseas Board School), for instance."

Siu Rui was also head prefect and leading captain there, but he was restless about his leadership skills.

When he entered polytechnic, he joined the SIFE (Students in Free Enterprise) Club to pick up other skills.

Together with Alvin, who also joined the club, they embarked on various projects, one of which involved creating three booklets on financial literacy.

Two booklets, for young readers like themselves, were on investment and business plans. The last was for younger children, on how to manage their pocket money.

For Alvin, who was from St Patrick's School, doing the project was refreshing.

"I used to play truant in secondary

## They took unconventional route to medical school

By Yeh Wei Xuan  
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SOME people say coming from a neighbourhood school and not going to a junior college would raise the chances of becoming a doctor as slim.

But Soong Jun Kit, 25, proved them wrong.

He made history by becoming one of the first two polytechnic students accepted into the National University of Singapore's (NUS) medicine faculty.

Both Jun Wei and Rui Ng, also 25, were accepted into the faculty through the Exceptional Holistic Scheme (EHS) - the discretionary admission route for the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine.

They studied biotechnology at Ngee Ann Polytechnic.

Being from neighbourhood schools seemed their merit. They had to motivate themselves to do better.

Both Jun Wei and Rui were under Ngee Ann Polytechnic's Talent Development Programme, which encourages student leadership and holistic development. Students under this programme get to take part in seminars and workshops.

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He said, "I feel very honoured (being accepted into NUS). It proves to others that polytechnics are not second-grade institutions."

On the competition he will have to face at NUS against top junior college students, Jun Wei said, "In junior colleges, when they learn more theory-based, I believe you and I all stand out with our practical knowledge and skills."

Mr Chua Chin Lin, vice principal at Ngee Ann Polytechnic, said he was glad to see that the school and its students were getting to the next level.

school and disrupt class a lot," he said. "The teachers would call my parents countless times."

### 'CONDEMNED'

It was so bad that he was dropped from the express stream to normal academic in Secondary 3. Alvin said he felt "condemned".

"I was very depressed for about a year," he added.

It was his old primary school friends who pushed him into studying for his N levels and later his O levels.

Without their help, he said he might not have qualified for a polytechnic.

Apart from the financial project with Siu Rui, Alvin credited his mentor in polytechnic for giving him much needed confidence.

Mrs Choo Joo-Ei, 52, was his academic manager in polytechnic.

She encouraged him to apply for an EHS, financial literacy grant and Alvin got the US\$800 (S\$1,200) grant, much to his surprise.

With the grant, he developed a board game called Money Sense, aimed at educating secondary school children on how to manage their money.

His project was selected for the SIFE World Cup, held in conjunction with the HSBC Financial Literacy Forum in 2005 in Toronto, Canada.

"It taught me to believe in myself," Alvin said.

**Alvin Lim**  
NUS Global Merit Scholarship  
Lien Ying Chow Gold Medal  
Diploma with Merit in Banking & Financial Services  
(Class of 2007)

**Quek Siu Rui**  
NUS Global Merit Scholarship  
Lee Wee Nam Gold Medal  
Diploma with Merit in Business Studies  
(Class of 2007)