

Learning both ways - the IPS Internship Programme

By Andrew Yeo
IPS Research Assistant

Each year between the months of April and September, a flurry of excited interns arrive at the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS), eager to begin a stint at the different research clusters in the think-tank. This is a tradition that has gone on for more than 20 years, says Ms Irene Lim, Senior Associate Director at IPS. She observes that in recent years, application numbers have picked up, with more Singaporean students from both local and foreign universities seeking an internship at IPS.

IPS interns are involved in the latest research conducted by their respective research clusters. Their daily tasks range from compiling data to doing literature reviews, writing reports and contributing to the [IPS Commons](#) website. Over the course of their internship, they can expect to gain a deeper understanding of the issues that impact policymaking across different areas. Interns are paid an hourly rate of \$8 or more.

Muhammad Syakir Kamal, a second-year Aeronautical Engineering student at Imperial College London, interned at the Demography and Family research cluster in July and August. He said: “My time in IPS allowed me to understand Singapore’s ageing population in depth. I also looked at how technology could help in assisting elderly caregiving in the future. Of course, it was also very personally satisfying to see my opinion piece published in the press.”

This year, interns benefited from the newly started IPS Research Assistants (RAs) Orientation and Mentorship Programme. The programme aims to hone the skills of RAs and help them make informed decisions about their career path. It is led by Research Fellow Dr Carol Soon, with support from Associate Director (Public Affairs) Lynn Lee and Research Fellow Dr Hoe Sufern.

As part of the programme, RAs and interns attend activities to build knowledge and skill sets that will benefit their work within IPS. For instance, they were trained in fundamental and often used statistical concepts and measurements in quantitative research, during a two-day workshop on the SPSS statistical analysis system conducted by IPS Social Lab Senior Research Analyst Henry Ho. On 23 September, health and social policy expert Dr Phua Kai Hong from the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy will conduct a workshop on policy analysis and implementation for them.



(Back row, L-R): Tiffany Lau, Eugene Teng, Natalie Chia, Syakir Kamal, Nicholas Koh, Eugene Lee,
(Front row, L-R): Valerie Yeo, Alethea Tan, Lee Xian Min, Tan Jia Ning

This year, IPS interns also received hands-on event organisation experience during the [SG50+ conference](#) held in July to celebrate Singapore's Golden Jubilee. They served as media liaisons, ushered VIP guests to their seats and updated social media with their takeaways from the conference proceedings.

Fourth-year political science undergraduate Natalie Chia, who is pursuing a joint-degree at the Australian National University and NUS described the SG50+ conference as a “memorable” experience. She said: “I was privileged to assist during the conference's preparations, where I saw the whole organisation come together to deliver two days of engaging debate.” Natalie interned at the Arts, Culture and Media cluster, helping to put together its Year-in-Review Report and a paper for Senior Research Fellow Tan Tarn How's Flourishing Life project. “My time at IPS showed me that quality research must be well-contextualised in socio-political realities to be of relevance and service to society,” she added.

The recently concluded General Election 2015 meant that Brendon Wong, a final-year politics and international relations student at the University of Bristol and intern at the Politics and Governance cluster was involved in the thick of the goings-on during the hustings. Working with Senior Research Fellow Dr Gillian Koh, he was exposed to what he described as a “multitude of educational opportunities”.

“Examples included participating as an active audience in an [Inconvenient Questions live debate](#) as well as being able to speak personally to experts in Singapore politics and opposition members. These opportunities not only helped to augment my knowledge of the political arena but also enlightened me to the intricacies of Singapore politics,” he said.

Nicholas Koh, an economics undergraduate at NUS and intern at the Economics and Business cluster, stressed that his time at IPS was not all about work and no play. “It wasn’t the substance of the work that necessarily inspired learning, but the soft currency of being in the company of intelligentsia from all disciplines — from economists to playwrights — that encouraged collegial discourse and active reasoning,” he said.

Asked to weigh in on what interns bring to IPS, Politics and Governance cluster Research Fellow Dr Johannis Aziz said: “As in any other field, policy research comes with the common pitfalls of expertise and status quo bias. IPS interns have brought and continue to bring fresh perspectives, insights and questions.”

Added Economics and Business cluster Research Assistant Chang Zhi Yang: “These interns have really offered the researchers a perspective of young Singaporeans and their opinions on various issues like productivity and socio-economic aspirations.”

He went on to quip: “More importantly, my intern also shared to-die-for information on where to tailor cheap but high quality customised, bespoke shirts and pants in Singapore.”

Dr Gillian Koh, who heads the Politics and Governance research cluster said: “It is in IPS’ interest to develop young Singaporeans’ understanding of public policy in Singapore.” She noted that invariably, those who spend time at IPS either go on to post-graduate studies relating to Singapore, or take on jobs in the public service.

She added: “It turns out that we learn quite a lot from our interns as well. They provide us insights into young Singaporeans’ concerns and keep us excited about our own work that we hope contributes in some way to building a better future here.”

IPS looks forward to welcoming its 2016 batch of interns. Those who are interested in an internship should contact Ms Celestine Koh, Manager (Human Resources) at ips.careers@nus.edu.sg.

Andrew Yeo is Research Assistant (Special Projects) at IPS.

Read the work of our 2015 interns:

Valerie Yeo:

[*The value of diverse views in “political listening”*](#)

Muhammad Syakir Bin Kamal:

[*When it comes to role models, race is irrelevant*](#)
[*Helping our seniors age confidently, and happily*](#)

Nicholas Koh:

[Higher productivity, the only option left for Singapore](#)

[Helping Singapore's SMEs to make their mark on the global stage](#)

Lee Xian Min:

[Investing in bold experiments to tackle social challenges](#)

Brendon Wong:

[The 2015 NDR – what it meant to me](#)

Eugene Teng:

[Singapore's History: What we omit matters as much as what we immortalise](#)

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