

IPS Mentorship Programme: Development Within and Outside IPS

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At IPS, Research Assistants (RAs) make important contributions to each research cluster's work. Besides providing multi-faceted research support such as reviewing existing research, writing reports and data analysis, they also create impact through their intellectual input at the cluster and institutional levels.

Currently, IPS has 13 full-time RAs working with its [five research clusters](#) and the IPS Social Lab. The RAs have contributed to highly visible projects such as the Young Singaporeans Conference (2014) and Singapore Perspectives (2015).

IPS' diversity in its research interests and expertise is reflected in the wide-ranging training and skill sets the RAs bring with them when they join the Institute. While the majority of IPS RAs are fresh undergraduates, several joined the Institute after gaining some experience in the private, public and academic sectors. From an RA who had worked with a local non-governmental organisation, another who did a stint at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to an RA who had private sector work experience in a financial institution, IPS RAs' beginnings in IPS are as colourful as their portfolios in their respective clusters.

The IPS Mentorship Programme was mooted by IPS Director Janadas Devan who believed that the Institute could and should do its best for the young RAs (and interns too) who are learning more about their strengths and career preferences as they spend their time in IPS. Developed by Research Fellow Dr Carol Soon, Associate Director (Public Affairs) Lynn Lee, and Research Fellow Dr Hoe Su Fern, the aim of the programme is three-pronged:

- To build on the mentorship given by research cluster heads
- Develop knowledge and cultivate skill sets that are useful not just to RAs' work in the Institute but beyond IPS, and
- Help RAs learn more about their career advancement and how they can position themselves for the future.

To achieve these objectives, the Mentorship Programme has three key components. The first component is an Orientation Programme that helps new hires understand the rationale for the Institute's organisational philosophy, unique features and contributions (vis-à-vis other research institutions and sectors), and its evolution over the past 25 years.

Through Special Adviser Arun Mahizhnan and Senior Research Fellow Dr Gillian Koh's candid discussion on the Institute's ethos and transformation over the years during the

orientation talk held in June, the RAs gained insights into IPS' history and unique position as a think tank that focuses on Singapore policy issues.

Skill-set building workshops and "insight-based" talks given by experts form the second component of the Mentorship Programme. From writing and SPSS workshops, to lunchtime talks by former *The Straits Times* News Editor Peh Shing Huei (on news reporting during General Elections) and Research Fellow Christopher Gee (on managing one's finances and planning for the future), the RAs picked up useful tips and skills from experts and industry insiders.

Research and analysis are two key components of IPS RAs' work. Skill-set building sessions such as the two-part SPSS (a software package used for statistical analysis) workshop held by Senior Research Analyst Henry Ho help expand RAs' repertoire and enable them to contribute to their clusters' work more effectively. From copy-editor Leong Wenshan, the RAs learned how to pitch and refine their writing for different types of audiences without compromising on academic rigour.

The third component of the Mentorship Programme comprises a series of career-building talks. The talks are aimed at broadening RAs' exposure to sectors outside IPS and enhancing their understanding of the diversity, uniqueness, opportunities and challenges present in different academic and non-academic sectors so that they can make more informed decisions about the next step they want to take. The first session, held in September, was delivered by the Director of Corporate Development and Research Director of the Ministry of Communications and Information. Moving forward, more speakers from the public sector, private and people sectors will be invited to speak about career opportunities and challenges in various sectors.

Asked for their feedback on the programme recently, RAs said they had a good experience so far, citing the combination of "skills-based" and "insights-based" sessions that benefited them in their current roles and got them thinking about the skills they would need for the future. Since it started in May 2015, there has been on average, one activity a month as part of the Mentorship Programme. The sessions would not have been possible without IPS colleagues and collaborators who so generously gave their time to the organisers and RAs. A review of the programme, taking into account suggestions from the RAs, is underway. We look forward to a more rewarding year ahead in 2016!

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