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# RESEARCH PULSE

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# WELCOME TO RESEARCH PULSE

Hello everyone from Curtin Singapore.

In this issue of Research Pulse, we take the opportunity to highlight our research external engagements. In August, we hosted the Global Campuses Brown Bag Seminar with Dr Mark Westcott (University of Sydney) who has a research collaboration with Dr Tien Nguyen who is the Co-lead for Gender Research Network in Curtin Singapore.

We also wish to highlight external engagement projects driven by Dr Carolyn Koh. These projects include the Friends of Ubin Network (FUN), and hosting of a urban and regional planning study trip for students from the Perth campus.

Lastly, I would like to acknowledge the contributions of Tien and Carolyn for their contributions to the contents of this newsletter.

Enjoy the updates!

Best Wishes,  
Dr Adrian Tan  
Research Director  
Curtin Singapore

# PULAU UBIN INDUSTRY PROJECT – NATURE-BASED OUTDOOR RECREATION (NABOR)

In October 2021, Curtin Singapore, Friends of Ubin Network (FUN) and Republic Polytechnic (RP) proposed to collaborate on a research project on Pulau Ubin. The objective is to enhance the socio-economic development of Pulau Ubin and support businesses, residents, and the environment.

The plan was to include the NABOR Project in Curtin Singapore's master level programs as an industry-based project. This would include the Master of International Business and possibly the Master of Business Administration when it commences. The collaboration is expected to become an on-going project that scaffolds research data, proposals, and outcomes from one cohort to the next.

To test the feasibility of the proposal, a pilot study involving students from the Master of International Business program in Trimester 3A 2021 (November 2021 to February 2022) were asked to identify the main issues with the current infrastructure and recreational activities available on Pulau Ubin. The pilot study allowed Curtin Singapore to establish benchmarks for the programme as well as set up a working model for the collaboration with Republic Polytechnic.

In Trimester 1A (March to June 2022), a second group from the Master of International Business program received a specific brief based on the requirements of the FUN Team, which is helmed by the Minister of National Development, Mr Desmond Lee. The research aim was to establish if wearing helmets while cycling should be enforced on Pulau Ubin. Under the mentorship of FUN committee senior member, Mr Colin Koh, and their lecturer, Dr Nik Chong, the students conducted research on Pulau Ubin and the Singapore mainland and worked closely with students from RP's Outdoor and Adventure Learning faculty headed by Ms Tan Ai Chin.

# PULAU UBIN INDUSTRY PROJECT – NATURE-BASED OUTDOOR RECREATION (NABOR)



The findings, which were a synthesis of the results from data collected by both Curtin Singapore and RP's students, were presented to Minister Lee and the FUN members in two separate presentations. The RP students presented their work at an informal exhibition during Ubin Day on 25 June 2022. Both Minister Lee and Minister Edwin Tong, Minister for Culture, Community and Youth were present at the event. Curtin Singapore, represented by Dr Nik Chong and Dr Carolyn Koh, presented the students' findings to Minister Lee, senior members of the National Parks Board, including CEO Mr Kenneth Er, and members of FUN during a meeting held at Botany Centre, Singapore Botanic Gardens on 19 August 2022.

Minister Lee expressed his gratitude for the work that Curtin Singapore's students have invested in the project and was impressed with their findings. He was particularly happy that our students have developed close bonds with the RP students. Carolyn also met National Parks Board Group Director, Dr Adrian Loo who is keen to support Curtin Singapore's teaching and research on sustainable development.

# URBAN AND REGIONAL PLANNING STUDENTS' VISIT TO CURTIN SINGAPORE



From 19 to 25 June 2002, Curtin Singapore was host to a group of 29 Urban and Regional Planning students from Curtin University's Perth campus. The students and their lecturers, Mr. Jake Schapper and Mr. Greg Davis, were given rare insights into the "real" Singapore that took them beyond the skyscrapers, efficient transport system, and perceived prosperity of the city state.

The students who visited Curtin Singapore's new campus at The Alpha in Science Park 2, were also invited to tour the rooftop farming to experience an operational vertical vegetable farm operated by Liteleaf who is one of the tenants of the building.

During their week in Singapore, the students had the privilege of visiting the Australian High Commission where they met with the Hon William Hodgman. They also toured the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) Centre where they visited the exhibition featuring Singapore's long-term development plans.

The students also visited the rural island of Pulau Ubin as well as Bishan-Ang Mo Kio Park, an eco-park in the city state. On Pulau Ubin students were hosted by Mr. Colin Koh, senior member of the Friends of Ubin Network (FUN) who answered their questions about the island. They then kayaked to Pulau Ketam. Ubin was an unusual experience for the students as it was a stark contrast to the perfectly manicured main island. One student commented that it "pushed her out of her comfort zone" but that it was the favourite part of the trip for her. The students were very enthusiastic during their Bishan-Ang Mo Kio park visit. They were hosted by Dr Carolyn Koh, who was part of the team that had worked on the planning stages of the redevelopment of the park. The students could see remnants of the concrete canal that had been converted into a sustainable river that ran through the park, and expressed interest in the biodiversity of the park. The park is also frequented by a family of otters popularly known in Singapore as the Bishan Otter Family. Unfortunately the otters did not make their appearance that morning of the students' visit. The students also visited a community vegetable farm within the park.

In all, the visit was a fabulous opportunity for Curtin Singapore to connect with students from the Perth campus.

# GLOBAL CAMPUSES BROWN BAG SEMINAR SERIES IN COLLABORATION WITH CURTIN UNIVERSITY GENDER RESEARCH NETWORK

On Thursday 18 August, Curtin Singapore was proud to host a virtual research seminar titled “Superannuation Governance in Australia – Diversity and Independence on Profit-to-member Funds” presented by Dr Mark Westcott from The University of Sydney. It was a joint event between the Global Brown Bag Research Seminar Series and the Gender Research Network. The seminar featured the research collaboration between Dr Mark Westcott and Dr Tien Nguyen – Associate Lecturer at Curtin Singapore.

Superannuation in Australia is a complex system regulated by the Australian Prudential Regulatory Authority (APRA). Under APRA, there are funds that are run for profit (generally retail funds) and funds where profits are retained and distributed only to members, or profit-to-member funds (generally corporate, industry and public sector funds)[1].

The governance of superannuation is an important public policy issue in Australia, due in part to the compulsory nature of superannuation. Most of the regulatory measures over the last decade aimed specifically at superannuation governance have focussed on enshrining independence on trustee boards[2]. More recently, government agencies have equated good fund governance with having (1) independent directors and (2) an appropriate mix of skill and experience across the board[3]. Seldom has board gender diversity been pinpointed as an important element of good governance in government-initiated reforms of superannuation governance. The lack of explicit reference to gender diversity in superannuation governance appears dissonant with corporate governance best practices[4]. As it stands, little is known about gender diversity on superannuation trustee boards and how this might impact superannuation governance. Indeed, within the complex Australian superannuation system board gender diversity may have a different impact on different types of funds.

# GLOBAL CAMPUSES BROWN BAG SEMINAR SERIES IN COLLABORATION WITH CURTIN UNIVERSITY GENDER RESEARCH NETWORK

Through their research on 59 profit-to-member super funds in Australia between 2010 and 2019, Dr Westcott and Dr Nguyen provided a comprehensive overview of the profit-to-member super governance in Australia within the last decade. Particularly, they observed that:

1. The overall size of trustee boards in the sample has not changed significantly over the last decade.
2. The governance structure of these boards varied between three models: (i) equal representation, (ii) equal representation with the presence of independents, and (iii) one-third member, one-third employee, and one-third independent, with the decline of the pure equal representation model.
3. The proportion of women on trustee boards has increased steadily over the course of the decade.
4. Trustee board places have by and large been filled by a continually renewing pool of board members rather than a small pool of repeat directors.
5. Female directors on trustee boards, on average, have shorter tenure compared to their male counterparts.

Dr Westcott's presentation opened the floor for an interesting Q&A session around (1) the underlying reasons for the above-mentioned findings; (2) the profiles of those female directors who sit on the trustee boards; (3) the enablers or antecedents of gender diversity on trustee boards, and (4) the movement of female trustee directors given their shorter tenure compared to the male directors on trustee boards.

Though descriptive in nature, Dr Westcott and Dr Nguyen's research is the first of its kind to examine the governance of profit-to-member super funds in Australia regarding gender diversity practices. As this is only the first step of their ongoing project, we are excited for what comes next and look forward to further findings in this domain.

# GLOBAL CAMPUSES BROWN BAG SEMINAR SERIES IN COLLABORATION WITH CURTIN UNIVERSITY GENDER RESEARCH NETWORK

[1] Australian Prudential Regulation Authority (APRA), 2022. Annual superannuation bulletin June 2015 to June 2021 – superannuation entities. Available from: <https://www.apra.gov.au/annual-superannuation-bulletin> [Accessed 15 July 2022].

[2] Donald, M.S., and Le Mire, S., 2019. Independence in practice: Superannuation fund governance through the eyes of fund directors. *UNSW Law Journal* Volume, 42(1), 300-334.

[3] Australian Prudential Regulation Authority (APRA), 2020. Superannuation: How a skills matrix can help transform board capability. Available from <https://prod.apra.shared.skpr.live/superannuation-how-a-skills-matrix-can-help-transform-board-capability#:~:text=A%20skills%20matrix%20is%20a,to%20be%20%E2%80%93%20fit%20for%20purpose>. [Accessed 15 July 2022].

[4] ASX Corporate Governance Council 2019, Corporate Governance Principles and Recommendations. Australia: Australian Securities Exchange. Available from: <http://www.asx.com.au/documents/asx-compliance/cgc-principles-and-recommendations-3rd-edn.pdf> [Accessed 17 February 2022]



## **SAVE THE DATE**

Make a date with us! Full details of the events will be made known through email nearer the time.

**29 November 2022**

SDG Symposium 2022