

## Statement of Concern on Recent Events on Academic Policies at NUS

### 04 February 2019

1. As a community of students based at the National University of Singapore (NUS), CAPE is concerned with recent events relating to the state of academic policies at NUS. In particular, we are concerned with (1) the criticisms of “opaque tenure and promotion policies, resistance to innovation and a ‘warped’ notion of institutional excellence” by former academics in a now-retracted [TODAY article](#), and (2) the troubling manner in which NUS has responded to TODAY’s reporting.

#### Concern on alleged criticisms on university policies

2. CAPE welcomes NUS’ reassurance in its [response](#) that “ranking is not a performance indicator for the university nor a driver of change at NUS”, and that it continues to seek to fulfil its public mission through its quality of teaching and research excellence.
3. We note, however, that despite the retraction of the TODAY article, the former academics interviewed have collectively [stood by](#) their statements. CAPE also remains concerned about the alleged implications of university policies on academic and research freedom, particularly the freedom for academics to conduct research in politically uncomfortable but socially important fields.
4. We therefore call upon NUS to engage in an open and transparent inquiry into these allegations.

#### Concern on NUS’ response to the TODAY’s article

5. While we acknowledge NUS’ concerns that their position was not adequately represented in TODAY’s reporting, CAPE is nevertheless troubled by NUS’s heavy-handed response of legal action. Such a combative response to criticism may have a chilling effect on meaningful public discourse on these issues of public interest, which we believe should be encouraged rather than stifled by a public institution of higher education like NUS.
6. CAPE is also concerned about the lack of representation of and consultation with NUS students in [NUS’ response](#) to the allegations. Just as NUS Vice Provost (Academic Personnel) Professor Phoon Kok Kwang has noted that the TODAY report “did not adequately represent NUS’ position on the matter”, we are troubled that the views and concerns of NUS students were not adequately considered during this process.

7. CAPE thus commends NUS Students' Union (NUSSU) for setting up a [taskforce](#) to “put students’ voices front and centre in this debate” in order to present a more transparent account of the multiplicity of experiences of academic freedoms at NUS. This is in line with NUS President Professor Tan Eng Chye’s comment at the [recent launch](#) of the university’s new vision, mission and values that “the people of NUS form the bedrock of this University — a very special institution founded by the community, for the community.”
8. We encourage our peers and alumni to participate actively in the NUSSU task force and, in the spirit of collaborative governance, call upon the NUS leadership to engage students with transparency and in good faith, as well as to take seriously the feedback of students, alumni, faculty and staff. The Chairperson of the task force, Bryan Kwa, can be contacted at [depwelfare.bryan@nussu.org.sg](mailto:depwelfare.bryan@nussu.org.sg).
9. We look forward to working together with all members of the NUS community to realise the university’s aspiration to be a “community of academics, researchers, staff, students and alumni... dedicated to quality education, influential research and visionary enterprise, in service of country and society”.

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## About CAPE

The Community for Advocacy & Political Education (CAPE) is a student organisation founded by students from Yale-NUS College and the NUS Faculty of Law. We aim to build political literacy among young Singaporeans in order to make civic participation more accessible.

Website: [cape.common.yale-nus.edu.sg](http://cape.common.yale-nus.edu.sg)

Facebook: [facebook.com/cape.sg](https://facebook.com/cape.sg)

Email: [capesingapore@gmail.com](mailto:capesingapore@gmail.com)