

# Going big on research

Two graduates from the National Institute of Education's PhD programme recall how their experience has enriched them

## Douglas Chew

THE National Institute of Education (NIE), which is part of the Nanyang Technological University (NTU), is known widely as the place where school teachers get their training.

But, it is also big on research, with as many as 300 PhD and 60 master's students currently enrolled in NIE researching a wide range of topics. These students include overseas students from 16 countries including Australia, China and India.

Assistant Professor Eugene Chew was one of those who had enrolled in the NIE to do research. The valedictorian of his graduating cohort of NIE's higher degree students in 2012, Dr Chew currently teaches Sports Science and Management and does research on motivation.

Previously the chief of sports management and development at the Singapore Sports Council, Dr Chew joined NIE initially as a teaching fellow, and later decided to further develop himself professionally through NIE's PhD programme. For his studies, he researched the perceptions of parenting dimensions to motivation, life aspirations and the subjective well-being among adolescent athletes under the supervision of Professor John Wang.

Dr Chew recalls that as a part-time student pursuing the PhD, he had to balance his work, study and family commitments. "The nature of the programme, which demanded independent learning, allowed me to plan my pace of learning as well as the research component of the programme," he says.

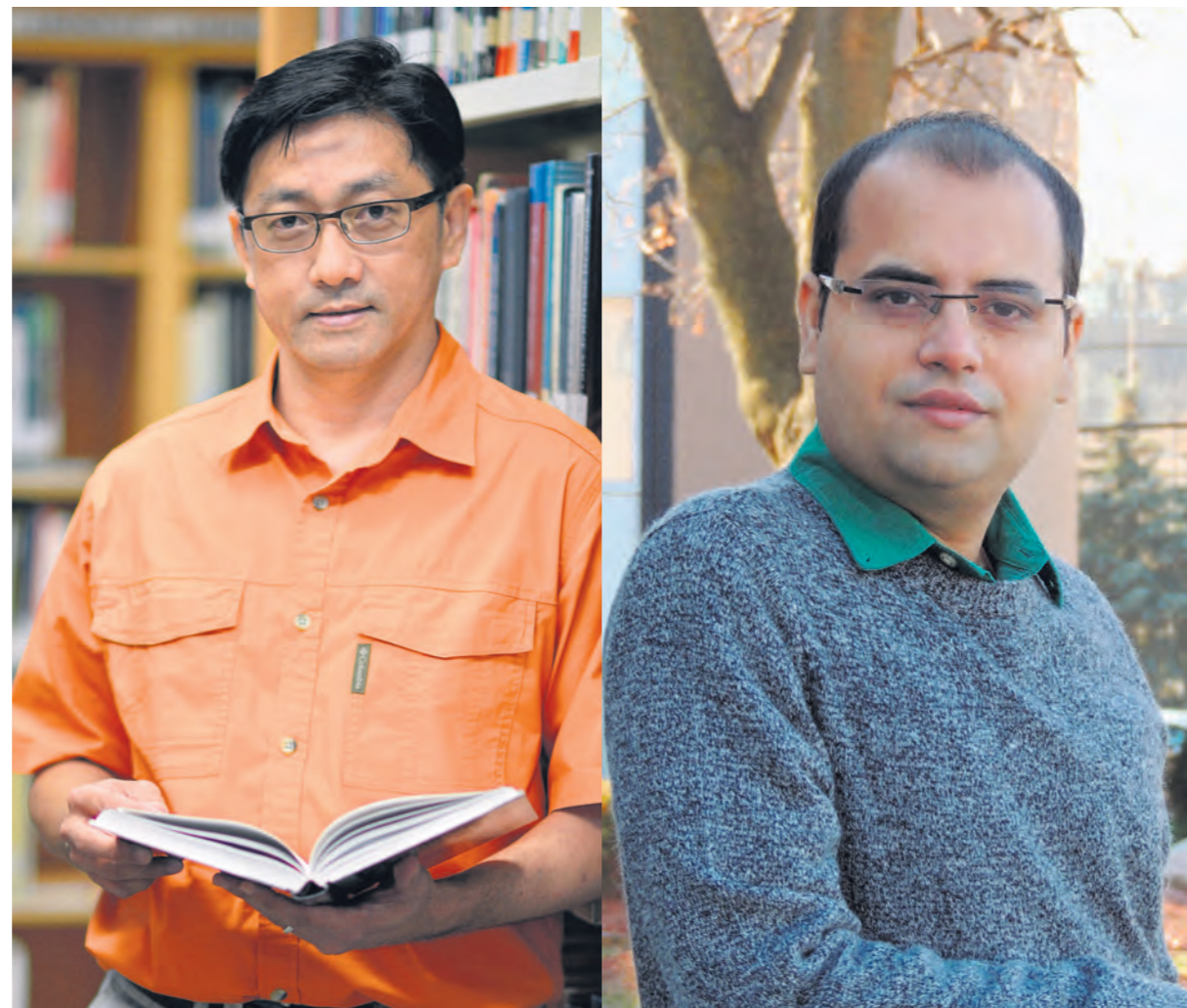
It helped that his boss and colleagues were understanding and supportive of his studies.

NIE's staff development scheme helped pay for the programme fees.

## Right direction

For Dr Ashootosh Tripathi, currently a postdoctoral research fellow at the University of Michigan, his PhD research at NIE involved working on marine drug discovery. His previous experience at India's National Institute of Oceanography helped shaped the direction of his scientific career.

"It was clear to me at that time that I would like to explore the beauty of science and the first imminent step towards that goal was to pursue a PhD," he says.



Dr Chew and Dr Tripathi were attracted to pursue PhD studies at NIE because of the strength of its research programmes.

PHOTOS: CHONG JUN LIANG,  
ASHOOTOSH TRIPATHI

During his application, he met with his future supervisor, Assistant Professor Tan Lik Tong of the Natural Sciences and Science Education Academic Group (NSSE) and was heartened by the professor's "crystal clear vision" on how research was conducted in his laboratory and his expectations of graduate students.

NIE has 12 academic groups which includes the

NSSE, Asian Languages and Cultures, Humanities and Social Studies Education, Curriculum Teaching and Learning, Physical Education and Sports Science, and Visual and Performing Arts, and six research centres.

"NIE appealed to me the most from all other options I had at that time as it lies at an exemplary edge of classical research with a cutting edge educa-

tion theme which sets it apart from others," says Dr Tripathi.

In the course of his research at NIE, his team discovered six new molecules which might help in the fight against cancer. He has published seven papers in high impact international journals and received several Dean's Commendation for Research awards, for his published work.

"The research work which I embarked on under the motivational and exceptional guidance of Dr Tan Lik Tong is the most precious phase of my yet small scientific career," says Dr Tripathi.

Dr Tripathi believes that his sound training and solid performance at NIE laid the foundation for him to become a uniquely qualified researcher. His PhD training at NIE enhanced his research capability and enabled him to secure a postdoctoral position at the University of Michigan, one of the world's leading universities.

"The intellectual benefits which I have acquired during my course has enabled me to be an independent researcher with critical observation and an immense, almost insatiable appetite to learn and contribute," he says.

"It was a pleasure being a member of a close-knit NSSE ecosystem at NIE and I am grateful for the guidance bestowed on me from all the faculty members with whom I interacted and worked. The administrative and technical staff at NSSE was super efficient, helpful and informed about the needs of foreign students."

While funding can be a cause of concern for postgraduate students, PhD students with excellent academic records are eligible to apply for the Nanyang President's Graduate Scholarship and the NTU research scholarship. NTU has been enhancing its PhD programme, where every PhD student will now have a thesis advisory committee to guide their work.

This year, NIE also held its inaugural Graduate Student Day where its higher degree students presented their research in three categories of competitions — the three-minute thesis, poster and oral presentations — and interacted with faculty and their fellow students.

**Come to the Research Open House at NTU on Jan 31 to find out more about the research programmes available.**