

Valedictorian Speech for Ceremony C13 - 13 July 2026 Monday (2:30pm)

Sim Zhi Kang

Bachelor of Engineering (Mechanical Engineering) with Honours

Professor Aaron Thean, Deputy President (Academic Affairs) and Provost;
Professor Teo Kie Leong, Dean, College of Design and Engineering;
Mr Sua Chen Shiua, Executive Director, Wee Hur Construction Pte Ltd;
Distinguished Guests, Fellow Graduates, Parents and Friends;
Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is my greatest honour to represent the Class of 2026 graduating from the Department of Mechanical Engineering and the Built Environment.

My fellow graduates, today we celebrate far more than the end of our studies. Today stands as definitive proof of your grit, your drive, and your stubborn perseverance. "Day one" at NUS has officially become "the one day" we graduate together. So, please turn to the person next to you right now and give them a well-deserved pat on the back. And do not for a single second belittle what you have achieved today—this was truly no easy feat, not without struggle.

Our education here at NUS has trained us to see a deeper purpose in our struggles. For us mechanical engineers, material mechanics teaches us a fundamental truth: when you apply extreme stress to a system, it does not just deform. Instead, the material strain-hardens, leaving it fundamentally stronger than before. Likewise, throughout our time here at university, we have been tested under immense pressure, but we have always, without fail, emerged stronger from it.

This resilience was not born from raw talent—it was forged through pure discipline. Let us be honest: we were not born geniuses. We did not start off with perfectly balanced equations, polished Gantt Charts or flawless blueprints. We earned our understanding the hard way. We outworked our confusion. We refused to quit—even if that meant frantically cramming information ten minutes before an exam.

Our training in overcoming chaos started on day one. Think back to our first days: clueless, eager-eyed, picking modules based on titles we didn't even understand. Then came CourseReg, where we unknowingly bid in the wrong order, missed windows entirely, and watched our idealised schedules instantly dissolve into chaos. Yet, we adapted and problem-solved—emailing departments and swapping tutorials until we finally made it to this stage anyway.

Our determination only multiplied as things got harder. We went from building simple robot cars in EG1311, thinking university was on easy mode, to getting completely humbled by the CS1010E practical exams. Next thing we knew, we, mechanical engineers, were staring blankly at Prof Teo's impossible fluid mechanics questions, while our built environment peers were losing sleep over collapsing timelines and complex simulations. Yet, we all survived by compressing an entire semester's syllabus into a single cheatsheet. Which by the way, I officially tested: font size 3.5 is the absolute smallest the Raffles Hall printer can handle while remaining readable—with or without a magnifying glass!

So, while we mastered the art of surviving these trials, none of us crossed this finish line alone. We may be the ones wearing the gowns today, but this milestone truly belongs to the incredible community behind us.

To our professors: thank you for your endless patience, your unwavering dedication, and for never giving up on us.

To the university administration: thank you for creating an environment where our intense struggles could reliably yield such profound growth.

And most importantly, to our families—our absolute anchors: thank you for your unseen sacrifices and for steadying us when the pressure was highest. Please know that this success belongs just as much to you as it does to us.

Now, as we leave this hall, we step into a world where rapid disruptions like artificial intelligence rewrite the rules overnight. But we should not look ahead with apprehension; instead, we face the future with absolute confidence. Our education gave us something far more durable than static tools—it taught us how to think from first principles and dismantle any complex crisis down to its fundamentals. Be it smart infrastructure or advanced automation, we can do far more than just adapt to this changing landscape. We will master these technologies, and build the future from the ground up.

And that's because our time at NUS has proven a fundamental law of fluid mechanics: you cannot generate lift without first pushing through the drag. Every chaotic schedule, every gruelling exam, and every collapsing timeline was just the friction we needed to get off the ground.

The hard part is done. The momentum is ours. And the world is waiting for what we can build.

Class of 2026, let's get to work.

Thank you.