

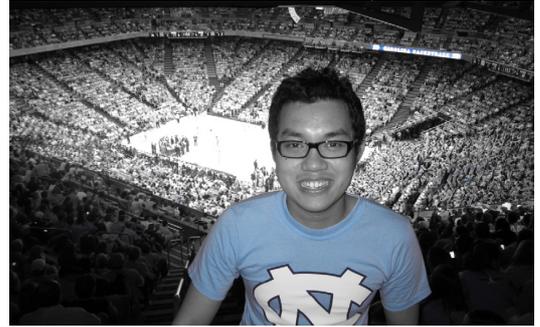
A LIFE- TRANS FORM ING YEAR

The NUS-UNC
Joint Degree
Program (JDP)
has transformed
my life.

APART FROM BEING able to learn and experience different pedagogical practices from two renowned institutions, living independently abroad has been quite a life-changing experience.

Learning and living at UNC has widened my perspective in so many ways. Most notably, the opportunity to interact with students of varied backgrounds, which exposed me to a myriad of different cultures, gave me life-skills that transcend the traditional academic setting. Similarly, the academic requirement of the JDP allowed me to study my major, History, in depth and also have a broad base of knowledge across other disciplines. In my time abroad, classes I have taken include those from Comparative Literature, Geological Sciences, Mathematics, Philosophy and even Religious Studies.

Living independently has also taught me lessons that made me better appreciate the many things I used to take for granted. For one, I have learnt to cook more interesting (and nutritious) dishes apart from instant noodles. I realised that “Downy” does wonders to my clothes, and fabric softeners are an important component in drying my clothes. Shopping for groceries became my monthly affair, and simple things like a reduction in price for toiletries made me extremely happy. Aside from menial details, I have also grown to enjoy this newfound freedom. Being away from familiarity and being outside my comfort zone has challenged me to grow and develop; it has given me a deeper sense of ownership in my life.



Over the course of the semester, I was privileged to experience numerous festivals and seasonal holidays in America. Thanksgiving was one such celebration. Before coming to America, Thanksgiving didn't mean much to me; it was distant and apathetic. Luckily for me, I was fortunate enough to have a friend, Lindsey, invite me over to her home for Thanksgiving last year. In retrospect, I could not have asked for a better way to spend my first ever Thanksgiving in America.

The few days spent with the Luxon family were incredible, and really made Thanksgiving a more tangible and meaningful experience. Preparation was really fun, particularly since I spent a lot of time in the kitchen with Lindsey's mother to prepare food (I made the turkey stuffing and had a hand in stuffing the turkey!). The actual Thanksgiving lunch was the highlight of my stay. The array of dishes on the dining table was everything I had imagined it to be, and more. But it was the familial love and warmth so evident at that moment that formed the very essence of Thanksgiving – a simple tableau that deserves thanksgiving. That moment made me very grateful for my very own parents back home.

Apart from Thanksgiving, I was also able to experience my first ever Halloween in Chapel Hill. Dressed up as a Jedi (or a Friar, depending on the availability of my light-sabre), I found myself parading around Franklin Street together with the other students. It was a very intriguing sight: I saw numerous Angry Birds, a few Mario Brothers and even a couple of Barrack Obamas! I realised Halloween in America meant an occasion for the student population to embark on innovative ideas and creative expression, all in the name of joviality and fun.

Fall Break was spent volunteering at a mentally handicapped facility in Chesterfield, Virginia and Spring Break in Montego Bay, Jamaica, helping out at an orphanage. Together with the Newman Catholic Center, we collected necessities and raised money for this orphanage. Universal values such as humility and empathy were reinforced in me; experiences like these allowed me to give back to

society, exploit the full potential of my JDP and enriched my overall experience. Such activities have allowed me to see that no matter where I am in the world, there will always be occasions in which I can lend help. I can go to places to volunteer my time and energy and opportunities to make a difference and live a life of service for others.

A very special thing about UNC is its school spirit. From the many various school cheers to the huge array of Carolina merchandise at the student store, school spirit here is incredibly infectious. During sport competitions, you'll see masses of students donning Carolina Blue cheering for the college athletes. My first experience of an American football game here reminded me of Singapore's National Day Parade – yes, there were that many people in the stadium. Similarly, Basketball here is like a religion! One cannot help but feel a certain sense of solidarity, camaraderie and affinity for UNC; you feel like you're one with the community.

In sum, my time spent at UNC has been really awesome. The amazing friends that I've made here, coupled with the invaluable life experiences that I've gained have changed my life completely. The NUS-UNC JDP truly allows one to experience the best of both worlds and I am eternally grateful to both institutions for this incredible and wonderful opportunity.

One cannot help but feel a certain sense of solidarity, camaraderie and affinity for UNC; you feel like you're one with the community.