

## **CBLC Farewell Speech, 1 August 01, 6 pm, LT23.**

Good evening Professor Lai Choy Heng, Dean of Science Faculty, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

First, I want to thank all of you for taking your time off and the interests to attend our CBLC Interactive Welcome Tea 2001,

Standing before you, today I have a mixed feeling.

The 1st Computer Based Learning Center, or CBLC, was formed in late 1988 by Professor Bernard Tan, now the Dean of Students. At that time our CBLC focused on conducting computer classes for staff and students. It was also the first CBLC in the whole campus, and later the Science CBLC has become the role model for setting up additional CBLCs in other faculties - this is something we can be proud of.

After 13 years of operations, the Science CBLC, I can say, is the most active computer based learning centre among all the CBLCs in the campus. How can we achieve this? I can attribute our success to 2 factors.

First, our CBLC has received excellent support from the Dean's Office. Currently, CBLC is under the purview of Centre for Information Technology and Applications, or CITA. As far as financial support is concerned, CITA and Dean's office have always ensured that we have sufficient budget to operate. For example, just at the beginning of this year, Vice Dean Professor Tan Eng Chye has allocated close to 120 thousand dollars (\$117,905) to replace 63 units of computer in CBLC. So now if you go to the computer lab in the Science Library, you will be using all the new and the fastest PCs; thanks to Professor Tan Eng Chye.

Next, I can testify that the students in the management committee are totally devoted. Look at what they have done. The Science CBLC currently conducts ICT courses not only for students, but they have also reached out to JC teachers. While their first external web design and programming course attracted only 4 JC teachers, the committee members were not discouraged at all. What is important to them is the quality they have delivered and they believe that a good product will sell itself. In fact they have been proven correct. Their second external web design and programming course, which was conducted last year, attracted 62 JC teachers. Well done!!

So for this year we might have to make use of 3 SCMC labs to conduct the external courses. I believe you will agree with me that this is not a trivial effort to achieve such a super-linear increase of participants, especially during December when school teachers prefer to go sight seeing instead of attending courses.

Sometime I also received phone call saying, "Your student asked me to call you. I am a visiting staff in NUS, and my wife wants to attend your computer course." So I asked, "Is your wife also working in NUS?" And the reply was, "No, she is a housewife, but computer is so important that she must attend." This has clearly testified the contributions of our CBLC.

There are many other activities our CBLC has organized, including ICT Fair, and seminar for the public. Within the faculty, CBLC has also provided excellent support to the routine On-line Registration and Teaching Evaluation, and File for Graduation.

Recently, CBLC has given up 75% of its lab space. I can understand the feeling of the Management Committee headed by Mr Lo Wai Ka. For the past months, a few

questions have been floating around and I should not pretend that I have not heard anything. The common doubt is whether CBLC is going to close down soon? I have answered to some students but please allow me to repeat the same answer although I am going to relinquish my duties to your new advisor in a few minutes time. CBLC is not going to close. I am also certain that CBLC will grow from strength to strength in the future, and sky is the only limit. However, CBLC will have to move with time, and more importantly, CBLC must adjust itself to meet the needs of the faculty. With the notebook ownership scheme and the plug and play points around the campus, CBLC must know how to capitalize from all these changes. Nowadays, ICT has been commonly used in teaching and learning. Students are expected to be more than a computer literate regardless of what subject they study, and which faculty they come from.

You have to be connected by Internet. You should have the ability to navigate around the cyber-world or you will definitely be dropped out. The ways we teach and learn are being changed. Students are expected to retrieve and research for on-line reading materials, participate in discussion groups and chat rooms, attempt the on-line quizzes, and even to deliver a multi-media presentation.

However, I want to stress that ICT cannot totally replace a human touch, and more importantly as what I have observed, I want to remind you that ICT should not be used as a cosmetics. ICT knowledge is changing rapidly and its skills get out-dated very soon. What is taught today may be Stone Age by the time you graduate. And this is where CBLC can play a role. CBLC can help the faculty to convince their peers the importance of continual learning in ICT, and to support them.

I hope CBLC can establish a mechanism that helps the faculty to achieve 100% ICT competency in a few years time. I know this is not easy since our students come from many countries with different culture and different level of skill when ICT is concerned.

For the past 2 years, Professor Feng Yuan Ping, the previous Director of Science CITA, and I, oversee the needs and operations of Science CBLC. Professor Feng has already relinquished his directorship a few weeks ago. As for myself, I started to work in CRISP, the Centre for Remote Imaging, Sensing and Processing since the beginning of this year.

Due to my frequent oversea assignments, I apologize that I am not able to look after CBLC at this moment. As such, I will relinquish my duties to a young and energetic professor, Dr Sow Chorng Haur. I have known Chorng Haur for close to 10 years. Many of you here may have already attended his lectures for the Science Foundation module, so you can back up what I am going to say. Professor Sow Chorng Haur is not only an excellent lecturer but he also takes the welfare of his students deep inside his heart. So I wish to inform Prof Lai that we have found the right person.

Professor Sow Chorng Haur has been the co-advisor of Science CBLC for more than 3 months, and whenever I was not in Singapore he was the main person looking after the students and solving their problems. I have to confess that this is actually not a fair statement because even when I was in Singapore I also pushed all the work to him. I have full confidence that he will bring our CBLC to the next height in the near future. And to my best friend Chorng Huar, congratulation on your new appointment.

With that, let me end by wishing all of you a good start of academic year. Thank you.