

January 1, 2009

Letter from Paul Matsudaira

To the DBS faculty, staff, and students

Best wishes for the New Year. This year will mark the 60th anniversary of the department ([DBS history](#)). Consequently, I feel privileged and honored to take up the position as your Head of Department. DBS is the premier Life Sciences department at NUS, a position well earned from the your strong research and education programs. It will be a challenge to improve on this record but I hope to lead the department into new areas. As you know, I feel strongly that the department moves into more quantitative areas of biology. Next month we will be able to discuss these new areas at the faculty retreat in February.

There is so much to discuss in the coming year. The Life Sciences Task Force identified several areas that need attention in our undergraduate Life Sciences curriculum. We should take advantage of this opportunity to put together a coherent and exciting program for our undergraduates. Also, our graduate curriculum is severely strained by increased enrollments. We welcome students from other departments and schools in our courses but have to find a solution how to offer outstanding courses without affecting the quality. One goal will be to reduce significantly the teaching load of the faculty

What will I be doing? My lab will study the migration of epithelial cells in the intestine as well as the basic biology of embryonic stem cells with a variety of biochemical, biophysical, and molecular cell biology approaches. Dennis Heng is the lab officer for my group. I'm joined by Dipan Bhattacharya, a SMART postdoc, and Nikhil Jain, a first year DBS graduate student. I co-mentor several SMA grad students including Shek Yoon Wong and Ai Kia Yip (joint with Chiam Keng Hwee, IHPC), Alvin Ng and Shiwen Zhu (joint with Prof. Rajapaske, NTU FoC) and Wang Zhengyuan (joint with Prof. Gong, DBS). In addition, I am in the midst of establishing the NUS Centre for BioImaging Sciences. Located in soon-to-be renovated labs and offices in S1A levels 1 and 2 and S2 basement, the CBIS will develop state-of-art imaging and computational approaches to important problems in biology. Mr. Al Davis and Mr. Victor Horodincu will be migrating to Singapore from Boston. A die-hard Red Sox fan, Al and his partner Dee will come in the spring or summer and take care of the high end computing. Victor will join soon and set up the biological imaging projects. I will be joined in the center by Asst. Prof. He Cynthia, Asst. Prof. He Wanzhong, Assoc. Prof. Winkler, and Assoc. Prof. Thorsten Wohland. A particular strength will be in cryoelectron microscopy and cell structure. I know Prof. He Wanzhong is particularly eager for the delivery of the 300 keV FEI Titan Krios cryoEM in September 09. Others will join the center as we build up imaging resources and training programs.

As we start the year 2009, several thanks are in order for service during 2008. First and foremost, I would like to thank Prof. Prakash Kumar for his excellent leadership of the department as Acting Head. The last year was eventful and he firmly led the department with dignity and compassion. We should all congratulate him on his recent promotion to full professor. The recognition is well deserved.

In addition to Prof. Kumar, I would also acknowledge the dedication and professionalism of the Deputy Heads, Prof Ge and Prof. Pan. Both have maintained the high standard of excellence set during Prof. Hew's tenure as HoD. The chairs of departmental committees showed a firm and steady hand in managing the work of the department. An important departmental activity is the workshop, conferences, and symposia that it organizes. Thanks go to the Structural and Computational Biology groups for their outstanding job in supporting the 5th Structural Biology and Functional Genomics Symposium. One other unique aspect of the department is the strong leadership of the graduate students as seen in the 13th Biological Sciences Graduate Congress. It is organized and run by the grad students for the grad students. Finally, everyone knows that it is the staff who are the backbone of the department. Good job!

With the New Year, three faculty have joined the department besides myself.

We should welcome Asst. Prof. Xu Jian, our newest member of department. He comes to us from Brad Sheares lab where he studied auxin transport. Like many of the faculty, including me, Asst. Prof. Xu will set up temporary labs until the S1A level 5 and 6 renovations are completed.

Prof. Leo Tan has returned to DBS after serving as the Director of the Singapore Science Centre and the Founding Director of the National Institute of Education. He will take on special duties in the Dean of Science office.

Finally, our prodigal father, Prof. Hew has returned from his sabbatical, full of vim and vigor. He will take up some teaching, leading important strategic initiatives for the department. A few of us know that while on his sabbatical Prof Hew has energetically recruited students from key Chinese universities into our graduate program. Thank you Prof. Hew.

For the time being, I will maintain a status quo on departmental positions. "If it isn't broken ...".