

## Awardees' Acceptance Speech

### SENtastic Staff Award 2023

(in an alphabetic order of awardees' surname)



#### **Prof. Kin Hang CHAN**

Adjunct Associate Professor

Department of Management,  
School of Business and Management

*(Prof. Yaping GONG, Head of Department of Management, received the award on behalf of Prof. Chan)*

It is indeed a great honour and pleasure for me to become a recipient of SENtastic Staff Award 2023. It represents the collaborative efforts of HKUST, faculty and all the staff in our university to embrace inclusiveness and diversity as well as fostering a positive learning environment for all.

*“Everyone may be different in how they acquire knowledge”, as an educator my job, in my opinion, is to facilitate the learners and students so that they are:*

- Confident
- Passionate
- Inquisitive

**Affording and maintaining confidence of the learners is the most important aspect of their learning journey.** I would tell them that it is perfectly OK to be different in how we learn and there is nothing wrong with that! If styles are different, and special arrangements are needed, they are only *logistics*!

Do not allow logistic challenges to dampen or to blur the fun of learning and discovery of knowledge. Being passionate in a subject matter or an academic discipline would ultimately bring you good grades. That has always been the case in higher education. Overcoming logistical challenges can sometimes be demanding and time consuming. Maintaining an inquisitive mind requires the teacher and students working together with emotional connection, understanding and a high level of trust.

Do not allow logistic challenges to take over the priority of working with the learners of special styles or requirements. They are merely procedural or logistical matters. Concentrate on building trust with passion and enthusiasm is the way forward. A little smile and warm-hearted approach would certainly help in getting great feedbacks from the learners.



**Ms. Sandy Wai-ching CHAN**

Lecturer

Center for Language Education,  
School of Humanities and Social Science

I have never ceased to be amazed by how talented my students with SEN are. The resilience they demonstrate when overcoming yet another hurdle and the sheer determination they show to achieve their goals are truly inspiring. To me, students at HKUST are already highly successful learners as they have developed and mastered effective learning approaches that accommodate their needs and allow them to use their unique talents. However, being in a new and intensely competitive environment, they may encounter internal and external voices telling them they are not adequate. This is when teachers can and should step up to support and empower SEN students.

With genuine empathy, understanding, and patience, teachers can provide personalized and individualized support to help their students explore different solutions. **Sometimes, all they need is someone who listens, understands, and supports them in their learning journey.** It does not take much for teachers to create a safe and inclusive learning environment for SEN students, and this space is where the most rewarding growth for both students and teachers can be witnessed.



**Ms. Tina Ngan-nei KO**

Senior Manager

(Student Advising and Development),  
School of Science

I am incredibly grateful and humbled to receive this award for my work in supporting SEN students. As I reflect on my ten years of advising, I realize that **these students have taught me just as much as I have taught them.** Through their struggles and triumphs, they have shown me the power of resilience, the importance of empathy, and the beauty of human connection. It has been an honor to walk alongside them on their journeys, and I have been constantly inspired by their courage and determination. This award is not just a recognition of my efforts, but it also affirms the importance of supporting and advocating for SEN students. I am truly thankful for this recognition and will continue to strive to make a positive impact in the lives of those I work with.



**Dr. Cindy Xin Li**

Senior Lecturer

UG Programs Coordinator

Department of Computer Science and  
Engineering,

School of Engineering

I am overwhelmed with gratitude to have been selected to receive the SENTastic Staff Award. Really appreciate SEN Support, Counseling and Wellness Center, and Dean of Students' Office to set up the award as a recognition of my effort in student advising and counseling.

I truly believe university is a place where we inspire the young minds, support diverse needs and embrace the differences. Getting close to students, building up personal bonding, understanding their needs and offering genuine help takes time. It won't be a meeting or two, it's usually in years. I find that **being a good listener with an empathetic mind and warm smile really helps.**

We can start out small to make UST a more inclusive and supportive place: enlarge the fonts of the lecture notes for visual impaired student; provide lecture video to hearing impaired student; arrange a corner seat in the exam venue for a student who might feel stressed with crowd; promptly arrange a meeting with a student who emails and seeks for help. There are many more to do every day with caring minds.

You won't quantify the time and effort spent in the merit review. This is just what we should do. In fact, it is really an incredible journey to be with students. You walk with them in ups and downs, you share their happiness and worries. You really feel rewarded to witness their growth. That is the true reason why we choose to be a teacher.



**Ms. May Yu-chun LIAO**

Lecturer

Center for Language Education,  
School of Humanities and Social Science

Every single day, I am constantly learning (and re-learning) new things. Being in classrooms and interacting with students and teachers is an ongoing learning process that helps me improve myself. Through the mistakes I make, as well as those of others, I expand my knowledge base about people and how to best support and challenge them. I try my best to keep up with the current educational trends and research and learn about successful practices in other people's classrooms. I thrive in the unpredictability that comes with the job. Every week and every semester can bring in something new and unexpected, whether it's a minor crisis, a student achievement, or an unanticipated idea. This constant state of flux keeps me on my toes and makes being a teacher all the more fulfilling. And throughout all the unexpected situations, **I've learned how important it is to stay humble, honest, and just be a good listener. It's truly remarkable how much you can learn from the people around you if you just open yourself up to it.**



**Dr. Philip Yeung LAM**

Lecturer

Division of Life Science,  
School of Science

It is my great honor to be selected for the SENtastic Staff Award and I would like to express my sincere appreciation to everyone who supported me in achieving this recognition. **Creating a caring and inclusive learning environment requires a concerted effort from everyone involved.**

At the Division of Life Science (LIFS), I am truly grateful to be able to work in an environment where all members share a culture of caring toward students. The experiences gained from serving as a pre-major advisor for the School of Science and the deputy coordinator for the LIFS Undergraduate Advising Team have helped me to be more confident in working closely with relevant colleagues to better understand and address the unique needs as well as challenges faced by students. My belief that empathy and compassion are essential to the well-being of our students has been further strengthened by working with colleagues from the Counseling and Wellness Center to handle SEN cases. By embracing these values and taking action to support our students, I believe we can all contribute to a more welcoming and inclusive university community.



**Prof. Arthur LAU**

Associate Professor

Interdisciplinary Education,

Division of Environment and Sustainability

To be honest, I was surprised with mixed feelings when I received the call from the Counseling and Wellness Center. I am honored and happy to receive the recognition from the nominator(s)/students. **I would applaud this as a co-create journey with the students – upon the caring and support I shared, I also learn from my dear students!**

Thank you for the trust that we can share frankly in words, laughter, sighs, tears and even wordless in silence.....

Thank you for teaching me patience to listen carefully to understand you better, to be aware of your struggles closer, to appreciate more your efforts in downs, and learn better to feel your despairs ...

Thank you for improving my sensitivity to your needs, and not mine, of airing through your words, moods, emotions, worries, fears ...

Thank you for letting me to pace with you in your excitement, grievances, achievements, disappointments, ups and downs...

I am sure that each of you is a UNIQUE ONE, having your own path of advancement and development. I do wish to accompany you, even just a few steps, along your path!



**Ms. Melissa MEGAN**

Senior Lecturer

Center for Language Education,

School of Humanities and Social Science

I have always been concerned about my students' well-being. Recently, however, I have begun to think more about how my students' social-emotional competence (SEC) impacts their performance in the language classroom. How, for example, does SEC affect collaborative competence? Since many of our courses require collaboration and assess students' ability to work with others, I feel that it is important to ask this kind of question. This might be especially important when considering accommodations for SEN students.

I have started doing 'check-ins' with my students – not every week, but for example, before a main assignment is due. I ask students two questions: What are some of your feelings right now? Where are these feelings coming from? To help them respond to these questions, I introduce a feelings chart (see example at <http://mysteriofemotions.com/emotional-intelligence/>). I also introduce two simple structures that could be used to answer the questions: 'I feel X about Y' and 'I feel X when Y happens'. These check-ins normalise talking about feelings. There is research that shows that just acknowledging our feelings calms the amygdala and reduces the intensity of our emotions. By naming our feelings, we feel more in control. As a language teacher, it's good to be able to tell students that the more precisely they can name their feelings, the better they will feel. So instead of simply saying 'I feel bad', I encourage students to find more specific words like upset, frustrated, anxious...

It's easy to decide that we don't have time for activities like this one, or it's not our job to develop students' SEC. But **social-emotional learning is essential for students' academic and life success**, and I am pleased that students see its value. The following are comments from students about the social-emotional learning that they did on my course: 'It was surely needed for our whole person development, as that should be considered apart from English proficiency' and 'I believe through the learning, I could also improve my academic performance in the university.'



**Mr. Bill Hing-faat YIP**

Executive Officer

Student Housing & Residential Life Office,  
Dean of Students' Office

Students and staff alike at HKUST are constantly occupied with their responsibilities. Despite this, we may not always be indifferent to the needs of SEN students, but rather lack the time to fully comprehend and address them. I would like to express my gratitude to the SEN team for organizing various programs that have fostered my empathy and inclusivity towards SEN students.

It is important to recognize that everyone has their own weaknesses, and that no two individuals are exactly alike. Therefore, we must strive to treat everyone fairly and attend to their individual needs. **By putting ourselves in others' shoes, we gain a deeper understanding of their needs.**

Enhancing care for others can be achieved through simple actions, such as taking a break from our phones and observing our surroundings. By doing so, we may notice individuals who require assistance, and even a small gesture like offering a ride or a helping hand can have a significant impact.