

The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology
SEN Support c/o Counseling and Wellness Center

SENTastic Staff Award 2025
Awardees' Sharing and Acceptance Speech



Dr. Aftab AMIN
Lecturer II
Division of Life Science

Receiving this award is an honor and reflects my commitment to fostering a caring and inclusive university environment. I believe education thrives when every individual feels valued and supported. To further this vision, I have engaged in initiatives promoting diversity and inclusion, such as organizing workshops and focus groups that celebrate cultural differences and encourage open dialogue among students. I strive to create a safe space where students feel comfortable seeking help, whether through mentorship for those struggling academically or offering a listening ear to those facing personal challenges.

My work with virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), and artificial intelligence (AI) has significantly impacted students with special educational needs. By creating immersive learning experiences tailored to their unique challenges, I have helped students engage with the curriculum in ways that enhance their understanding and retention of complex concepts. Additionally, my Student as Partners initiatives have empowered learners to actively shape their educational experiences, fostering a sense of ownership and belonging.

My personal philosophy centers on empathy and understanding, prioritizing compassion and inclusivity to empower students to reach their full potential. This award serves as a reminder of the positive impact we can make by working together to create a supportive community.



Prof. Joon Nak CHOI

Adjunct Associate Professor
Department of Information Systems, Business
Statistics & Operations Management; Department
of Management

I have been surprised to discover that many of our best students have special educational needs. It is possible that their ability to think outside the box also makes it difficult for them to fit into traditional lecture-based classrooms. Regardless, many SEN students seem to do quite well in active learning environments, which is something we should consider.

I would like to thank the actual heroes who did the real work in accommodating the SEN students in my courses — my teaching assistants Rahul Mukhi and Zack Lu — and of course, my co-instructor Sean McMinn. It is my pleasure to accept the award on their behalf.



Mr. Peter Kai Lun CHUNG

Teaching Associate
Department of Computer Science & Engineering

During my time at HKUST, I earned a mental health first aid training certificate from the HKUST counselling team and currently serve as an academic advisor in the undergraduate advising team in the Department of Computer Science and Engineering. This formal training, along with my advising responsibilities, has heightened my awareness of students in need.

One specific instance where I went beyond my regular duties to support a student involved a situation where a student wrote negative and emotional statements on the front page of the exam booklet. This student had previously sent me a lengthy email expressing concerns about getting a passing grade. Recognizing the need for special attention, I initiated a discussion with the course instructor, and we successfully referred the case to the appropriate department that provides support for students.

In recent years, I have noticed a troubling decline in students' mental health. Studies indicate that over 50% of university students at local institutions experience some level of depression. Unfortunately, many depressed students do not actively seek help. Therefore, it is crucial for trained faculty and teaching staff to identify early signs of distress and provide appropriate guidance or referrals.



Dr. Vivian Ka Mun HO

Instructional Assistant

Department of Electronic & Computer Engineering



Prof. Ronald LAU

Associate Professor of Business Education

Department of Information Systems, Business

Statistics & Operations Management

Residence Master (UG III)

Dean of Students' Office

Lighting the Torches of Tomorrow

A student is not a container to fill but a torch for you to light up – Albert Einstein.

This profound statement encapsulates my philosophy as a teaching staff. I believe that each student carries within them a unique flame of potential, and it is my responsibility to ignite that spark, fostering a caring and inclusive environment where they can thrive.

In my engineering course, I encourage student to view knowledge in different angles and enhancing engineering thinking. I also emphasize patience and understanding, recognizing that students (not only the SEN students), may require additional time, resources to help them build essential skills as future engineers, tailored approaches toward their course of study and ensuring that everyone feels valued and included.

My teaching philosophy centers on student-centered learning and a growth mindset, promoting knowledge transfer empowering student to learn from one another and build on shared knowledge. Lastly, I would like to thank my nominator(s)/student(s) for the SENtastic Staff award. Without my students, I would not be the teacher I am today. Each student is the UNIQUE one. I also appreciate the discussions among my colleagues. This award also goes to them.

My role of educator is not limited to the classroom. As the UG program coordinator (Operations Management) and the residence master of UG Hall III, I have many opportunities to be in contact with students who need academic advice and/or counseling support. Staying close to them has helped me understand more their learning needs and growth potential. While we tend to emphasize and celebrate academic performance and talents at the university, there are many ways for the students to define their own success. Given a chance, everyone will find a way to unleash his/her potential and excel in doing something well. Let's support and encourage each other by embracing the idea of "your success is our success" to create a mutually beneficial environment at HKUST.



Prof. Kenneth Wai-Ting LEUNG

Associate Professor of Engineering
Education, Senior Lecturer
Department of Computer Science &
Engineering

I am truly honored to receive the SENtastic Staff Award and would like to thank all the students who nominated me. Your recognition inspires me to continue fostering a caring and inclusive learning environment.

Comedians have the magical ability to capture their audience's attention with humor. I see myself as a comedian, bringing the "magic of humor" into my classrooms to create an engaging atmosphere where students feel valued and supported by adhering to the eight teaching principles: Caring, Organized, Motivating, Engaging, Dynamic, Inspiring, Approachable, and Nurturing. Among these principles, I always prioritize the principle of Caring, focusing on my students' well-being and ensuring they have a supportive environment to learn and grow, as I believe that a positive teacher-student relationship is essential for maximizing each student's learning potential.

To ensure that I can always listen to my students, I establish various study groups and maintaining open communication through social platforms like Telegram. This allows students to reach out to me anytime for academic or personal support through anonymous direct messaging. To reinforce this connection, I often remind my students in our first meet up, "By the end of the semester, we'll all be friends. Just relax and enjoy the journey!" This approach encourages a sense of community and belonging through sharing and support.

HKUST stands as a dynamic and inclusive institution, where every student is empowered to fully engage in their educational journey. Every small gesture of caring and kindness approach would certainly help us to create a community where everyone feels valued and inspired to reach their full potential. Thank you again for this recognition; it certainly fuels my passion for supporting our students.



Ms. Wan Sze NG

Assistant Manager (Residential Life)
Dean of Students' Office



Ms. Elaine Suk Yi WONG

Lecturer
Center for Language Education

In my work, I prioritize caring, kindness, and keen observation, especially when it comes to the students. When I genuinely care about them, it builds strong relationships that make it easier to face challenges together. Kindness fosters a sense of belonging, ensuring that every student feels valued and supported. Being observant helps me notice the little things that matter, allowing me to respond thoughtfully to their needs. Altogether, these principles not only make my work more fulfilling but also create a warm, welcoming environment where every student can thrive and feel empowered to succeed.

During a job interview for an instructor position at the Language Center at HKUST,

I asked the interviewer, “What am I expected to do as an instructor at the Language Center?”

He just smiled and replied: “Shine”

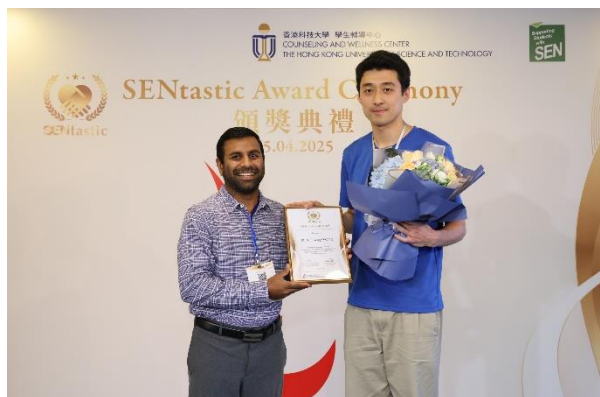
I was like, “Sorry?”

and he said: “Shine”.

At first, I was taken aback by such a brief response. However, after some time, I began to understand my role, and I found that I could shine.

So do our students. By giving them time and encouragement, every student has the potential to shine. That simple word has become a guiding principle in my teaching philosophy. With trust in our students and in ourselves, we can all achieve greatness.

Thank you for this recognition, which I share with all my students and colleagues who inspire me to shine brighter every day.



Mr. Kam Wing WONG
Instructional Assistant
Office of the Dean of Engineering

Working with SIGHT (Student Innovation for Global Health and Technology) in an environment that emphasizes student empowerment and experiential learning in designing technology innovations for global health challenges has been an incredible journey. I truly believe this award reflects the wonderful culture that our founder, Prof. Ying Chau, our Director, Dr. Malinda, and my amazing teammates—Joel, Kris, Kahlen, and Denise—have built together. I am here to represent and share that spirit!

As humans, we are all unique and different. Empathy, the first step in the Design Thinking process that SIGHT leverages for student projects, is essential for helping us understand one another's needs and pain points. This understanding enables us to communicate and care for each other naturally and effectively.

We are genuinely grateful for this recognition and appreciation from SEN for what SIGHT has accomplished and will continue to do beyond the academic scope. Thank you very much!



Prof. Angela Ruohao WU
Associate Professor
Department of Chemical & Biological Engineering
Big Data Institute; Division of Life Science

Thanks again for this wonderful award.

To be very honest, I was very honored and humbled to receive the award, because I did not feel like I was doing anything out of the ordinary. I just do what I feel is my duty as a teacher. I recognize that many students now face challenges in maintaining their mental wellbeing. Keeping these in mind, I try to be sensitive and non-judgmental in my interactions with them, and I hope to listen more than I lecture. I often feel that the mental health crisis we face today is in large part due to the one-dimensional way that we/society defines and promotes 'success' or 'excellence'. Success should not be solely defined by money, or fame. Success or excellence can also be defined as the joy of competing as a team, even if you don't win; it could be spending time with people you love, even if that means you are not using that time to 'get ahead'. We need diverse examples of what success and excellence looks like, and I like to encourage students to seek happiness and define their own success when they come seeking career advice. I truly hope everyone can find work that brings them joy; then that is true success.

Thank you for your support; see you around!