

Laidlaw Scholars Undergraduate Leadership and Research Programme

Leadership-in-Action (LiA) Project Report

ICCE (Inform, Co-create, Connect, Empower): Using UWS' STEM Festival to find Singapore's next generation of female leaders

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Why Singapore?

Singapore appears perfect from the outside; a country known for astounding social cohesion and order, political stability, social responsibility, Western and Asian flair, and wealth. That is the Singapore I expected to interact with while I carried out my Leadership in Action (LiA) project. This, however, was not the Singapore I came to know and love by the end of my LiA. In a nation I expected to be rational and progressive, I encountered regressive ideas and repressive social norms. And working in the women's non-profit space, I realized that my role in my LiA wasn't just to produce the outputs I'd planned but also to try pushing back against these ideas in a culturally sensitive manner.

Why *this* LiA project?

My LiA project, which took place from June 2nd to July 11th 2025, saw me working in with a women's empowerment charity, United Women Singapore (UWS). My duties were two-fold: to amplify UWS's digital footprint through organic content creation and assist in bringing UWS's annual STEM Festival to fruition.

As a woman studying STEM and someone deeply moved by social inequality, I knew I wanted to do women's empowerment work related to science. When I read about UWS's flagship STEM Festival (STEM Fest), I knew I wanted to be a part of the team that brought it to life. As an executive member of the Women's Student Association and President of UoFT Scientista (Women in STEM), I felt confident that I could apply the skills/lessons I learned on campus to UWS.

Learning about UWS

United Women Singapore was initially Singapore's chapter of UN Women. Singapore's regulations around funding for international charities meant UN Women Singapore was less profitable than other UN Women chapters. Thus in 2019, UN Women decided to withdraw from Singapore. Despite the loss of support from the UN, the Board of Directors felt they wanted to see the mission and work continue. It is in this background that United Women Singapore was born.

When I talked to UWS's Executive Director, Madhavi Putcha, about what the withdrawal was like, she described it as beyond chaotic. However, she asserted that the work had to go on, and that the team continued to make it work. This story demonstrated that the longevity and success in UWS's programs comes from their ability to adapt to the landscape they are working in. Madhavi emphasized, too, that this was an important part of her work when liaising with corporate partners.

UWS's work revolves around delivering programs and learning opportunities for girls, all delivered free of cost and open to all.

I was lucky enough to attend UWS's AGM in late June and meet with UWS's board of directors, whom were all heavily involved in the corporate sphere. I asked them about why they were involved with UWS when their careers were so distant from UWS's mission. They responded that their community helped keep them "sane" in a way, and reminded them of the "larger picture" in life. Unlike CSR (corporate social responsibility), their engagement was out of a will to make the world a better place in way their careers didn't allow them to.

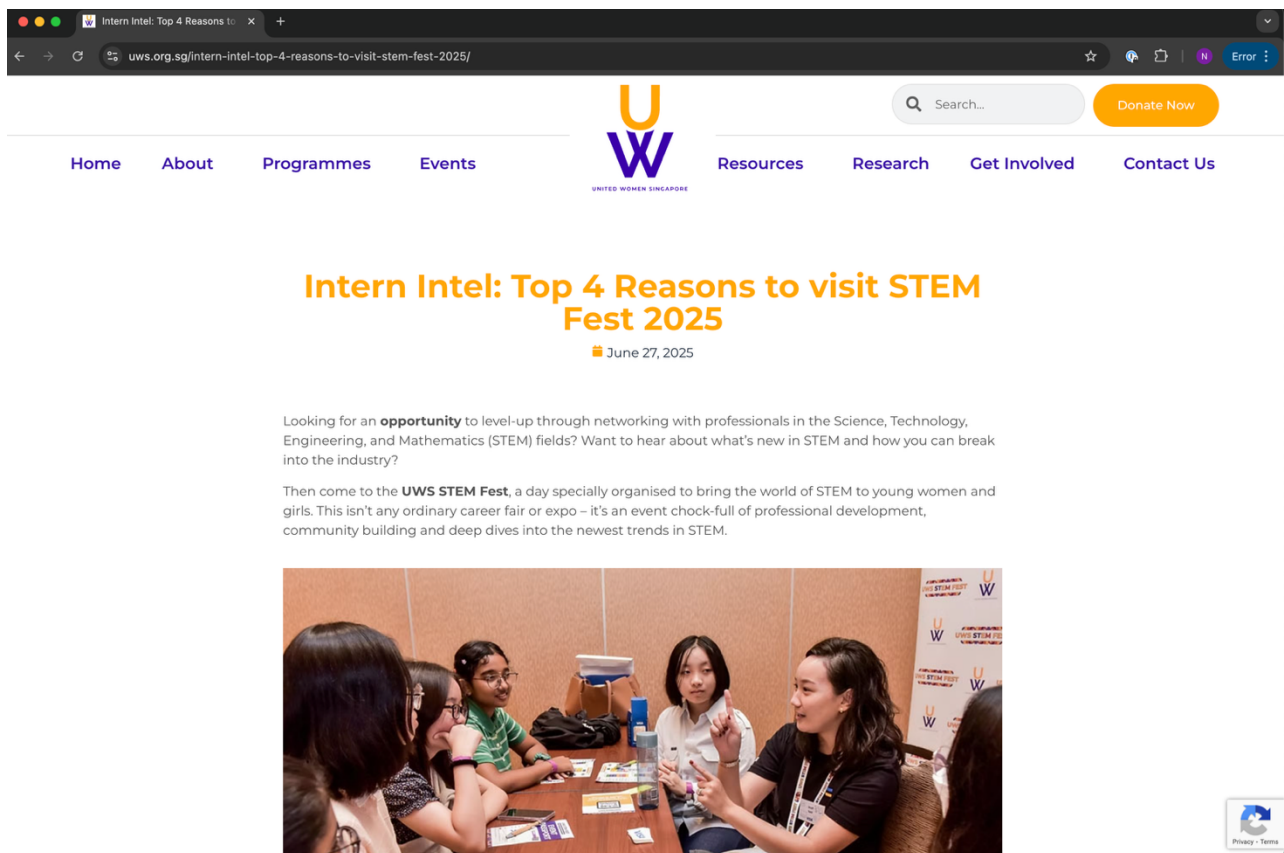
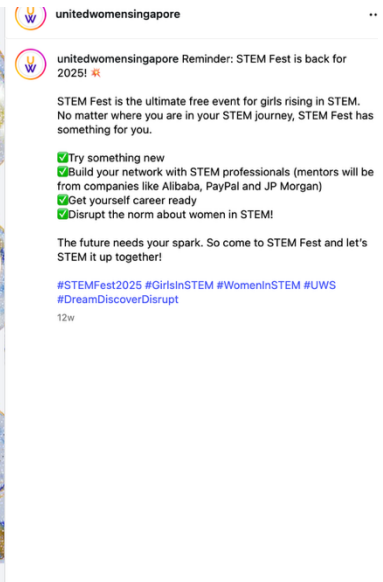
In UWS's team, I found the most compassionate and well-lived group of mentors. Coming into the non-profit space from the life sciences to social work to corporate burnout, I got to see how purpose will forever be important in human life. The fact that UWS was so adjacent to the people they were trying to support (geographically, socially and experience-wise) made every program seem so perfectly tailored to its purpose.



My work

I created blog posts and social media content for United Women on an ad-hoc basis to promote UWS' programs and STEM Fest. After creating a brandbook for STEM Fest inspired by promotion that UWS had already done, I used those elements to try and create content that engaged young people.

My proudest organic content output is my blog post promoting STEM Fest. As a blogger, I've never paid so much deliberate attention to my phrasing, words, storytelling or connotation of my words in authoring a post.



DREAM. DISCOVER. DISRUPT.

This year's theme *Dream. Discover. Disrupt.* encapsulates the journey of young women in STEM—from aspiration to action to transformation. While STEM fields have traditionally been male-dominated, the future of innovation demands diverse perspectives, bold thinkers, and fearless changemakers.

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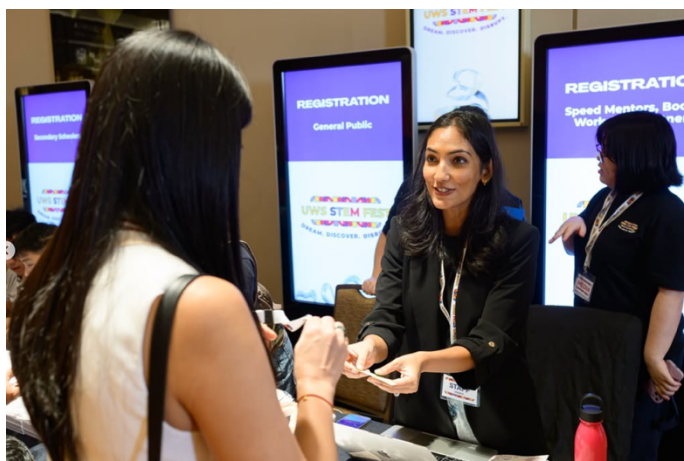
With the theme of “Dream, Discover, Disrupt” STEM Fest was intentionally designed to connect female students to STEM professionals and new fields.

EVENT SCHEDULE

| TIME | AGENDA | | |
|---------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------|
| 12:00PM | Registration | | |
| 1:00PM | Welcome Address | | |
| 1:10PM | Keynote Speech by GOH | | |
| | FOR REGISTERED STUDENTS | | FOR ALL |
| 1:45PM | Speed Mentoring | | Interactive Booths |
| 3:00PM | Tea Break | | |
| 3:30PM | STEM Workshops | Interactive Booths & Career Launchpad | |
| 4:45PM | Interactive Booths & Career Launchpad | STEM Workshops | |
| 6:30PM | Lucky Draw, Networking & Closing | | |



To the left, Guest of Honor Indraneel Rajah giving the opening address at STEM Fest. She opened her address with the words: “This is where change begins: It begins with a dream, it begins with an idea.” At the bottom left, UWS’s Vrinda Chopra telling attendees about UWS’s research findings and programs. The bottom right, a student engaging in the interactive booths.





The UWS intern team: Emma, myself, Shruthi, Ginnette, Sheryl and Ohmar.



Sharing information about UWS's programs to an attendee at STEM Fest 2025



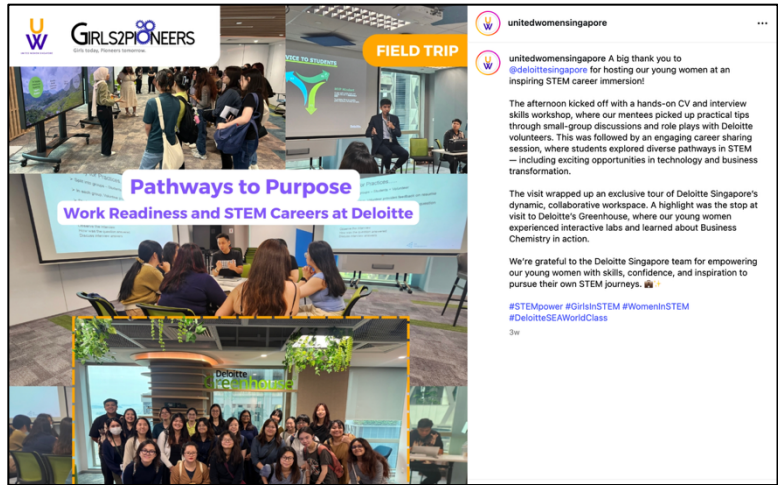
The UWS Staff team at STEM Fest



Left: Statistics from UWS's research about the disparities between female and male students that I compiled on display at STEM Fest.
 Right: The STEM Fest photo wall before attendees arrived.

Lastly, I did onsite visits to UWS's programs through their Fintech and Girls and Boys Empowered Programs. I specifically visited Singapore's Alibaba, Bloomberg, Airwallex, Deloitte offices. I also visited Singapore's ITE College Central.

This was one of the most fulfilling parts of my time in Singapore, because I got to connect with young Singaporeans going through the education system similar to me. I also got to talk to professionals in fields like computer science, software engineering and strategic collaboration who were all devoted to increasing visibility of girls in their workplaces. In total, I worked with about 100 girls and boys through my site visits.



Program participants in action at Alibaba, Bloomberg and Airwallex

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank every member of the UWS team for giving me such an enriching learning experience in a short six-week tenure. Thank you for encouraging me to be authentic, speak my mind and share my crazy ideas in team meetings. You've all showed me what genuine leadership and work looks like, and I'll carry these lessons with me in every space I enter. And thank you to Singapore for being the place where I got to grow so much. You'll forever be a place of fond memories.



National pride at Singapore's Alibaba Office in Bras Basah; my first site visit