Most people would think that the role of the Sub-Dean for students is to advise and assist students when problems or grievances arise in their academic or personal life. This is true to a large extent, as the Sub-Dean serves as an academic counselor, helps students resolve issues, directs them to other on-campus advice and support services, and acts as an advocate for students when appropriate.

Counseling students can be very challenging as very often students are faced with academic problems inextricably linked to other family, relationship or financial problems, and most of the cases do not lend themselves to easy solutions. Though counseling students can be an emotionally taxing task at times, it is also very fulfilling when I can offer concrete help to students to unload their burden. Otherwise, I hope that my empathy for them and my listening can at least help lighten their load, lift up their spirits and encourage them to face and solve their problems. At times I would need to refer more challenging cases to our University Student Counseling Center staffed by professional counselors. Sadly some students declined to seek professional help, perhaps being held back by the erroneous stereotype that one must be seriously disturbed in order to seek professional counseling. This is certainly not true and I would like to encourage students to seek all necessary help available to solve their problems and be back on their feet again. Counseling is a skill that requires training and I must admit that I have just begun on the path of learning.

Beyond counseling, which is essentially a passive role, I hope I can do more for students in my capacity as the Sub-Dean. The School is now reviewing the Student-Mentor Scheme to see how it can be improved to better serve its purpose and meet the needs of our students. We hope the Student-Mentor Scheme can go beyond counseling to mentoring of students, as what it is meant to be, to facilitate their academic, personal, and professional growth and development.

The EEE Club has been very active in organizing various sports, social and recreational activities for the undergraduates and the effort is commendable. At the same time, we should constantly review how the activities can be further improved to ensure that they appeal to our students and attract greater participation. Besides undergraduate students, I think we should also engage our large population of postgraduate students. This is important as many of them are from overseas and are new to Singapore. We can have various activities organized for them to help integrate them into our school, provide opportunities for them to mingle with local students and make them feel at home. Ultimately we hope to integrate the big family of undergraduate and postgraduate students, as well as staff, through organizing joint activities to foster a strong EEE community spirit and strengthen the bonding between the members.

There is an African proverb which says "It takes a village to raise a child". In a same way, I believe it requires the effort of everyone in the school, from the management staff, academic staff to technical and administrative staff to help create a caring and supportive environment to facilitate the learning of all students, enrich their educational experience and provide an overall high-quality student life. We hope students will have a fruitful and fulfilling life in EEE, develop a close bonding with the school and always have fond memories of their EEE days. Naturally, they will be active alumni upon graduation, and the bonding with the school can be further strengthened. As an educational institute, it is always important to remember that we are here for students, and they are the reason we are here.

In my earlier welcoming speech to all NTU freshmen, I shared with them some general principles about studying and life in NTU. I would like to conclude by also sharing these useful principles with all our EEE students.

"Like so many things in life, learning is not complicated. It simply requires hard work and determination.

Your lecturers and tutors are not there to provide you with all the answers. You must be the one to make the effort, find the answers, dig into your books, and be persistent and consistent. At the end of the day, it is your responsibility to answer the question "What have I learned today?"

To quote W. B. Yeats, "Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire". It is important to cultivate a love for learning in you and to stir up your desire for knowledge. Learning should not be a chore, but rather your personal pursuit.

Do not put your focus solely on getting the right answers. Rather the process of learning itself and discovery is more important. Knowing why your answer is incorrect is as vital as getting the correct answer.

University years are the best years of one's life. This is because University education is not all about studying. It is also the best time to develop friendship and relationships, interpersonal and management skills, and broaden your exposure. Do add colourful strokes and make the University years indeed the most beautiful years of your lives."

My best wishes to all our students for a fruitful and fulfilling time in EEE.

Assoc Prof Rusli
Sub-Dean (Students)