Where style meets quality

NUS law faculty is gearing up to produce a generation of lawyers who are confident and possess cutting-edge knowledge to meet global challenges.

Malaysian undergraduate Tiong Hou Yuen, 21, finds participating in these competitions a valuable experience.

"You get to challenge yourself. It's okay to 'stuck' in competitions because you learn after going through spectacular failures," he says.

What he finds especially interesting is the Manfred Lachs Space Law Moot Court competition, which deals with questions such as: "If a satellite crashes into another, how do you sue?"

In competitions, students get to use their skills in front of members of the judiciary, such as the faculty's Moot Moots, which are judged by Singapore High Court judges and, this year, Singapore's Minister of Law.

Options galore

A partnership with New York University's (NYU) law programme now gives NUS law students even more choices.

Students can opt for either a NUS/NYU programme, which allows them to earn a Master of Laws (LLM) from both universities, or a NUS/NYU dual Juris Doctor [Bachelor of Laws (LLB) programme, which allows them to achieve both degrees in five years.

From July next year, students can also obtain a LLB from NUS and LLM from NYU in four years.

As Assoc Prof Tan also points out that NUS law degrees accommodate changes on the global stage.

"We offer cutting-edge subjects in response to world events such as anti-terrorism, world trade and aviation law as well as biomedical law on stem cells and human cloning which is often at odds with traditional criminal, tort, property and family law," he says.

He stresses the word "exposure", saying that students not only gain exposure by studying various subjects but also through the many international moot competitions they are encouraged to participate in — and which NUS students often win.

Malaysian students (left) Hou Yuen and How Khang find the undergraduate law programme at NUS challenging and of high quality.

Students also enjoy exposure in the form of student exchanges to 50 different universities that the faculty has an agreement with, in countries such Canada, France and Sweden.

International programmes director Assoc Prof Dr Kamaladilin Aminahahilang reveals that NUS undergraduates in the third and fourth years are a diverse lot because many go out on exchange programmes, and foreign students also come to NUS on similar exchanges.

"We send about 80 students annually to study abroad for a year, and receive about 60 to 80 students from overseas per semester," she says.

"Our students come back with added maturity, a broader outlook, knowledge of foreign places and personal contacts for work in the future."

The majority of students the masters programme are also foreigners.

A social conscience

The law faculty maintains close relations with its alumni, many of whom volunteer to teach, tutor or give feedback in classes and student moots.

"Many of these tutors hold tutorials in law firms, so students can walk around the workplace and observe for themselves," says law faculty deputy director Asst Prof Lim Lei Theng.

"Later, they consolidate everything they learn, like drafting a commercial contract and negotiating it."

Of aid and internships

With over 20 different scholarships for undergraduates, 50 for masters students and a subsidised $56,000 (RM13,003) course fee per annum with a three-year working bond in Singapore, NUS programmes are affordable without compromising on quality.

"Although I am paying for the degree, it is worth it as I am getting quality for money," says Malaysian Lim How Khang, 26, who has a masters in information technology and is now in a graduate LLB programme which will allow him to gain a law degree in three years instead of four.

According to Hou Yuen, the course is very practical in nature, from internships to assignments.

"The associate director of alumni relations coordinates the internships; you can have internships every holiday if you want," he says.

"And our course is very hands-on; we do research on real problems.

"I think the legal skills programme that teaches legal writing is the most important stuff."

This core subject was started five years ago after a curriculum review, with the aim of equipping students with analysis, writing and research skills.

"It starts off in first year with 'how do you read a case', putting cases to other and interpreting statutes.

"In the second year, students pretend to be lawyers in an appellate court, which are mock trials," says legal skills programme deputy director Asst Prof Lim Lei Theng.

"Later, they consolidate everything they learn, like drafting a commercial contract and negotiating it."