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NUS Law School Goes Clinical

NUS Law Faculty Launches Clinical Legal Education to promote hands-on learning and inculcate pro bono spirit in students

Singapore's first clinical legal education programme will be established following the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding on 6 October 2010 by the National University of Singapore Faculty of Law and the Legal Aid Bureau ("LAB") which took place at the Law School's historical campus at Bukit Timah.

The programme is a collaborative effort between the NUS Law School and the LAB, based on the shared view that Clinical Legal Education ("CLE") can bring manifold benefits to law students and to the community at large.

Clinical Legal Education provides hands-on learning

Under the CLE programme, law students in their third or fourth year can choose to do an elective course called the Law Clinic where they will work with clinical instructors on "live" files involving clients from the LAB. NUS Law School's Associate Professor Lim Lei Theng, who has been appointed an Assistant Director of the LAB, will take on cases from the LAB. Students will assist her in everything from taking statements from clients to preparing affidavits, doing research and assisting in preparation for Court. As they do so, they learn the finer points of a whole host of legal skills, including client management, interview skills, drafting and research. Students attend Court on the matters that they have assisted in, and see for themselves how their efforts pay off for the clients.

"This brings to a higher level the legal skills that NUS Law students learn from the Legal Skills Programme that forms part of the Core Curriculum of the NUS Law School," said Assoc. Prof. Lim, who is also Deputy Director of the Legal Skills Programme at NUS Law. "At the same time, students are providing an important service to the lower income group by supporting the work of the LAB."

“One of the benefits of CLE is that it facilitates the contextualisation of the law; students see how the law operates in society and this deepens their understanding of the law and legal institutions. At the same time, CLE will help to inculcate values that the law school believes is important for our graduates to have” says Law Faculty Dean, Professor Tan Cheng Han, S.C., an active legal practitioner who combines both academia and legal practice.

“Under this programme, aspiring lawyers will get to see ‘the law in action’, and also help the less privileged at the same time. I hope this inspires them to become the pro bono lawyers of the future” says Mr Tan Puay Boon, Director of the Legal Aid Bureau.

The signing ceremony for the Memorandum of Understanding will be graced by Senior Minister of State for Law, Associate Professor Ho Peng Kee, and Professor Lai Choy Heng, Vice-Provost of NUS. Also speaking at the ceremony will be two students who experienced the CLE programme first-hand in Academic Year 2009/10.

Inculcating the pro-bono spirit

The NUS Pro Bono Group, is a group of passionate law students who provide *pro bono* services in many areas, including the University Court Friends initiative, which aims to assist the public in the Family and Subordinate Courts. Other areas of work include Raising Legal Awareness Among Children (RELAC) – a legal awareness outreach programme aimed at schools, work with the Law Society’s Pro Bono Office, and research work with various organisations such as the Office of The Public Guardian and Humanitarian Organisation for Migrant Economics (HOME). Ang Jian Kai, President of the NUS Pro Bono Group says “The CLE would be good exposure for students. The first-hand experience under the CLE is more enriching and complements the learning that takes place in the classroom.”

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